

# Shoghi Effendi's *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh*

## A Theology of the Word

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### The Epitome of His Writings

According to anecdotal reports, Shoghi Effendi Rabbaní (1897-1957), the former head and Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, considered the four-part treatise, *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* (1934), to be the *ne plus ultra* of his writings and his last Will and Testament.<sup>1</sup> The Guardian describes "...the scope and purpose..." of this document as "...an exposition of the fundamental verities of the Faith."<sup>2</sup> The exposition consists of four sections. Sections one to three define the "station" (*maqám*) of the Bahá'í Faith's "Three Central Figures."<sup>3</sup> Part four elucidates the "political"<sup>4</sup> aspects of Bahá'í governance and supplies the ideological basis for Bahá'u'lláh's new world order as an ideal type of theocracy. Shoghi Effendi wrote that part four should be considered as a "supplement" to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament.<sup>5</sup> This paper selectively analyses mainly the first three sections of the *Dispensation*.

While the word theology is nowhere used in the text, this work cannot be classified as anything other than a theological treatise. The expression "theology of the word" used in the title refers to: (1) Shoghi Effendi's interpretations of the ontological reality and station of the two Divine Manifestations or Prophets, the Báb (1819-1850), Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892) and "the Mystery of God" (*Seirulláh*),<sup>6</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921), the authorised interpreter of their teachings and "perfect Exemplar"<sup>7</sup> of the Bahá'í teachings. (2) Other interpretations of Bahá'í sacred scripture made by the Guardian in *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh*. While the expression "theology of the word" has its counterpart in Christian theology, and was used to designate a group of neo-orthodox (i.e. Christocentric) theologians who believed in the self-sufficiency of the Christian

revelation,<sup>8</sup> it is derived textually from the *Will and Testament* of 'Abdu'l-Bahá which refers to Shoghi Effendi as follows: "He is the Interpreter (*mubáyyín*) of the Word of God."<sup>9</sup> This statement is repeated verbatim by Shoghi Effendi in the *Dispensation* when he explicates the functions of the Guardian: "He is the Interpreter of the Word of God."<sup>10</sup>

Nine themes have been selected: (1) the proactive role of the *Dispensation* in determining some of the fundamental tenets of Bahá'í theology. (2) the virtue of economy. (3) the creation of a new theological idiom. (4) the station of the Báb and the "proof" from history. (5) logical consequences and the station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. (6) Shoghi Effendi's rejection of bad hermeneutics: the so-called "mystic unity" theory of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. (7) the balance of positive and negative theology. (8) exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist statements in the *Dispensation*. (9) Shoghi Effendi's apologetic method of comparison and the "new comparativism." Due to limitations of space, I have focused on the stations of the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and analyzed some of Shoghi Effendi's theological interpretations and method. Neither the station of Bahá'u'lláh, nor the theocratic basis of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh are explored here.

## Proactive Authoritative Theology

Writer, poet, mystic, scholar and Hand of the Cause of God, Horace Hotchkiss Holly (1887-1960), editor of the Guardian's world order letters, included the *Dispensation* in the eight letter collection published as *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (1938). However, the substance of parts one to three clearly belongs to theology (theologia, Gk.+ Lat.=discourse on the divine), rather to considerations of world order *per se*. Like his other writings, with the exception of the historical work *God Passes By* (1944), *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* is epistolary. However, the *Dispensation* is no ordinary letter. It has been aptly described by Madame Rúhiyyih Rabbaní as a "weighty treatise."<sup>11</sup> Although Madame Rabbaní's comments are understandably personal and favourable, they are nonetheless incisive. They indicate that the *Dispensation* created a quantum leap in the growing intellectual and spiritual understanding of the Bahá'í community regarding its most fundamental beliefs. Her remarks establish the priority that Shoghi Effendi gave to the *Dispensation vis-à-vis* the mass of his other writings:

The weighty treatise known as *The Dispensation of*

*Bahá'u'lláh*, written in 1934, burst upon the Bahá'ís like a blinding white light. I remember when I first read it I had the most extraordinary feeling as if the whole universe had suddenly expanded around me and I was looking out into a dazzling star-filled immensity; all the frontiers of our understanding flew outwards; the glory of this Cause and the true station of its Central Figures were revealed to us and we were never the same again. One would have thought that the stunning impact of this one communication from the Guardian would kill puniness of soul forever! However Shoghi Effendi felt in his inmost heart about his other writings, I know from his remarks that he considered he had said all he had to say, in many ways, in the *Dispensation*.<sup>12</sup>

Since the *Dispensation* explicates fundamental Bahá'í beliefs, a few remarks are in order on the relevance of “Bahá'í theology” as an academic discipline. While this phrase has gained acceptance among scholars over the past twenty years,<sup>13</sup> it was once viewed with suspicion among the rank and file and even some of the learned.<sup>14</sup> The negative, stereotypical view of theology is associated with priesthood, monolithic dogmatism and a divisive sectarianism. At worst, the record of *odium theologicum* shows an ancient history of bloody wars. To cite but one example, during the schism of the learned priest Arius of Alexandria, early in the fourth century CE, when the Arian bishop, Macedonius, was returned to office in Constantinople, over three thousand people lost their lives in the fighting. More Christians were slain by fellow Christians in this one contest alone than had died during the last terrible persecution of the Roman emperor Diocletian in 311 CE. (‘Abdu'l-Bahá condemned the schism of Arius in a letter to Roy Wilhelm).<sup>15</sup>

Theology's logocentrism,<sup>16</sup> as articulated in the opening verse of the fourth Gospel—“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1)-- gave theology an absolute didactic character that has been historically misused in a political will-to-power. However, despite theology's troubled history, it is nonsensical to imagine that a world religion, as doctrinally sophisticated as the Bahá'í Faith, can define itself, and engage in interreligious dialogue, without benefit of theological analysis. *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* ensures the place of theology on the Bahá'í curriculum, whatever the nomenclature that will ultimately be used to describe the systematic approach to the knowledge of God or the form it will take.

Mathematician and philosopher of religion and science, William S. Hatcher (1935-2005), in "An Analysis of *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh*" makes this helpful observation: "Rarely, if ever, have subtle and vexatious theological questions been settled at an early stage in the history of a revealed religion."<sup>17</sup> Hatcher's reflection merits a categorical assertion: vexatious theological questions were never previously solved at an early stage in the history of a revealed religion. The issue that Shoghi Effendi clarifies throughout the first three parts of this work, namely, the stations of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá is, *mutatis mutandis*, the very question that bedevilled Christian theologians in the primitive church and fractured Christian structural and doctrinal unity for all time. The creeds that ultimately defined the Christ-nature

...underwent a long historical development that was not uncontested. They were finally elaborated in their present form after four centuries of acrimonious theological quarrelling that necessitated four [seven for the orthodox church] world councils of the church --those of Nicaea, Ephesus, Constantinople and Chalcedon--that brought in their wake bloody warfare among Christian factions. These christological controversies resulted in the fragmentation of the churches of Asia Minor from those of Greek Orthodox Constantinople, a fragmentation that has continued to this day.<sup>18</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá has alluded to the "...the complex matters of religious doctrine."<sup>19</sup> While the details of the christological controversies are not pertinent to this paper, nevertheless, an object lesson may be learned from this divisive period of early church history. Because of its close links to metaphysics, theology can prove to be speculative and abstruse. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, for example, refers to questions dealing with the origin of the universe as having no beginning and free will and determinism as being respectively "one of the most abstruse spiritual truths" and "one of the most important and abstruse of divine problems,"<sup>20</sup> although Shoghi Effendi was averse to speculation, and according to one observer, "loathes abstractions."<sup>21</sup> The Universal House of Justice has referred to the past abuses and errors of theology in an observation that cautions against the intellectual pride that would attempt to define where definition was not advisable:

In past dispensations many errors arose because the believers in God's Revelation were overanxious to encompass the Divine Message within the framework of

their limited understanding, to define doctrines where definition was beyond their power, to explain mysteries which only the wisdom and experience of a later age would make comprehensible, to argue that something was true because it appeared desirable and necessary.<sup>22</sup>

The *Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* has played a proactive role, whose significance cannot be overestimated, in vastly reducing any potential differences that could have otherwise arisen among Bahá'í scholars attempting to understand the subtle and complex questions surrounding the station and the ontological nature of the Bahá'í Faith's Three Central Figures.

### The Virtue of Economy: "Less is More"

A casual reading of the *Dispensation* misleads by its deceptive simplicity. Readers of academic theology are accustomed to dense text, copious references and complex arguments. Contemporary systematic theology, moreover, has generally abandoned exegesis and its scriptural roots, a separation that the distinguished theologian Hans Küng has called a "misery,"<sup>23</sup> whereas the *Dispensation* is noticeably text-rooted. The neat saying, attributed variously to the poet Robert Browning, the American architect Philip Johnson and the famous German minimalist architect, Mies van der Rohe, is an apt descriptor of *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh*—"Less is more."<sup>24</sup> The Guardian's economical exposition maximises the meaning with a minimum of words. William Hatcher has correctly observed:

Thus, at least as first glance, the structure of *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* appears to be extremely simple and straightforward. However, this initial impression is quickly dispelled by the power and density of Shoghi Effendi's writing, by the number and complexity of the themes treated in the course of the exposition, by the abundant citations from both Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í sources, and finally the frequent and sometimes subtle literary and historical allusions.<sup>25</sup>

Just as in physics a plenum is space filled with matter, Shoghi Effendi's theological doctrines, while they authoritatively define fundamentals, leave space for further reflection.

### The Creation of a Distinct Theological Idiom

The Guardian's theological vision is expressed in a distinct

theological idiom. Such phrases, for example, as the “Three Central Figures,” “the fundamental verities,” “station,” “the New World Order,” “Covenant,” “Center of the Covenant,” “Administrative Order” and “dispensation” have all contributed to form a common Bahá'í vocabulary. However, all these terms may be developed as technical theology. One of the major contributions of Shoghi Effendi's writings is to have created a discrete and original discourse that reflects the Bahá'í belief and value system, i.e. a *Weltanschauung* without which no independent world religion can adequately function or be recognized. The accents of Shoghi Effendi's voice are, moreover, clearly discernible in the various messages of the Universal House of Justice written since its first election on April 21, 1963. The historical retrospective, *Century of Light* (2001), written under the supervision of the Universal House of Justice, builds upon the historical observations and moral judgements of the Guardian.

## The Station of the Báb and the Proof From History

In his discussion of the “twofold station” of the Báb, that of “divinely-appointed Forerunner” and “the inaugurator of a separate religious Dispensation,”<sup>26</sup> Shoghi Effendi presents something that he calls “evidence,” evidence that is based on the remarkable historical events that took place during the nine year dispensation of the Báb (1844-1853), which witnessed the brutal repression of the Bábí community and which culminated in the Báb's martyrdom on July 9, 1850. In a novel argument, Shoghi Effendi presents this transformative history as a proof of the Báb's prophethood. In context, the Guardian's word “evidence” should be taken as an intuitive rather than a scientific proof; it falls under the rubric of what 'Abdu'l-Bahá called “spiritual proofs.”<sup>27</sup> This evidence calls upon the reader's ability to perceive a large ensemble of remarkable historical events as being generated by the Báb's prophetic powers:

The marvelous happenings that have heralded the advent of the Founder of the Bábí Dispensation, the dramatic circumstances of His own eventful life, the miraculous tragedy of His martyrdom, the magic of His influence exerted on the most eminent and powerful among His countrymen, to all of which every chapter of Nabíl's stirring narrative testifies, should in themselves be regarded as sufficient evidence of the validity of His claim to so exalted a station among the Prophets.<sup>28</sup>

Shoghi Effendi's affirmation is matter-of-fact. It is accompanied by that apocalyptic certitude that generally characterizes his doctrinal statements. Although the above passage alludes to the magical and the miraculous, it refers nonetheless to the properly historical events of a major episode in the history of the Qájár dynasty. The Guardian's view, which is based largely on Nabíl, parallels a passage from Bahá'u'lláh which also contains a "proof" from history, this one praising the Báb's companions:

If these companions, with all their marvellous testimonies and wondrous works, be false, who then is worthy to claim for himself the truth? I swear by God! Their very deeds are a sufficient testimony, and an irrefutable proof unto all the peoples of the earth, were men to ponder in their hearts the mysteries of divine Revelation."<sup>29</sup>

The Guardian's statement that the Báb's prophethood is proven by the transformative events of the history He generated is remarkable, both for what it says and does not say. It does not, for example, refer directly to the Báb's writings or to the manner in which the Báb proved Himself to be the promised Qá'im by fulfilling certain conditions or prophecies, although this point would be included within the history to which the Guardian alludes. Instead, Shoghi Effendi calls upon an entire sacred history as evidence, a dramatic pattern of events, whose first word was written by the Báb momentous declaration before an ecclesiastical court: "I am, I am, I am the Promised One."<sup>30</sup>

The sacred history to which the Guardian alludes as "evidence of the validity of His claim to so exalted a station among the Prophets" is one in which historical transformation is inextricably linked to personal transformation. In Shoghi Effendi's view, *Heilsgeschichte* is not just a sequence of events to be reified in "objective" fashion by the historian. Babí-Bahá'í history has been written, to put Winston Churchill's celebrated words to a different use, with the "...blood, toil, tears and sweat"<sup>31</sup> of a generation of Muslim heretics who had recognized the *Sáhibuz-Zamán* (Lord of the Age). This history never could have been written had not the Báb radically transformed the lives of those saints, scholars, teachers, heroes and martyrs with whom He came into direct contact.

## Logical Consequences and the Station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

The *Dispensation* is the definitive reference point for anyone who seeks to better understand the mysterious being who is the "Center of the Covenant" (*markaz-i-missagh*).<sup>32</sup> Part three of the *Dispensation* corrects some major misconceptions about the station and being of Bahá'u'lláh's eldest Son held by some western Bahá'ís in the opening three decades of the twentieth century. Shoghi Effendi's method of correcting these misunderstandings is collaterally instructive. In laying down his theological definitions, Shoghi Effendi uses a simple but trenchant logic. Such phrases as "unwarranted inference," "erroneous conception," "altogether unjustified inference" and "the inescapable inference" indicate that deductive logic is at work, an inference in which a conclusion follows necessarily from one or more given premises (Lat. *deductio*= a leading down).<sup>33</sup>

The main thrust of Shoghi Effendi's argument is stated negatively, namely, "That 'Abdu'l-Bahá is not a Manifestation of God..." To believe the contrary is an "...unwarranted inference..." which he emphatically rejects. Two scriptural statements substantiate the Guardian's rejection of the error that once misconceived 'Abdu'l-Bahá as a prophet: (1) In the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Bahá'u'lláh warns that no prophet shall appear "...ere the expiration of a full thousand years..."<sup>34</sup> This statement categorically excludes 'Abdu'l-Bahá from prophethood. (2) 'Abdu'l-Bahá's own statements confirm that His essential station is that of servant of Bahá. In a dramatically conclusive reply, 'Abdu'l-Bahá provided the most comprehensive statement on His own self-understanding:

You have written that there is a difference among the believers concerning the 'Second Coming of Christ.' Gracious God! Time and again this question hath arisen, and its answer hath emanated in a clear and irrefutable statement from the pen of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that what is meant in the prophecies by the 'Lord of Hosts' and the 'Promised Christ' is the Blessed Perfection (Bahá'u'lláh) and His holiness the Exalted One (the Báb). My name is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. My qualification is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. My reality is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. My praise is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Thralldom to the Blessed Perfection is my glorious and refulgent diadem, and servitude to all the human race my perpetual religion... No name, no title, no mention, no commendation have I, nor will ever have, except 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This is my longing. This is my greatest yearning. This is my eternal life. This is my everlasting glory.<sup>35</sup>

By disabusing the Bahá'ís of his time of any lingering misconception of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's prophethood, Shoghi Effendi makes the reader indirectly aware of the generative process inherent to deductive logic. While logic is an effective tool in verifying the true, and eliminating the false, its conclusions are only as valid as its premises. A false premise can create, moreover, a deleterious nexus of beliefs that is not only theologically incorrect but, more importantly, carries "real life" adverse consequences. (This is particularly true in the consequential world of religion). Shoghi Effendi draws the reader's attention to this very point regarding the erroneous belief that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was a Manifestation of God:

Indeed, as I have already stated, those who overestimate 'Abdu'l-Bahá's station are just as reprehensible and have done just as much harm as those who underestimate it. And this for no other reason except that by insisting upon an altogether unwarranted inference from Bahá'u'lláh's writings they are inadvertently justifying and continuously furnishing the enemy with proofs for his false accusations and misleading statements.<sup>36</sup>

While there is much evidence to suggest that the covenant-breakers<sup>37</sup> ("the enemy") in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's immediate family were driven by the basest of motives, the western believers who overestimated 'Abdu'l-Bahá's station unknowingly fuelled the persecution inflicted on 'Abdu'l-Bahá by members of His family. These covenant-breakers could point to these western believers to prove their allegation that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was claiming prophethood.

However, this was only one of two evils. Shoghi Effendi is also referring to the accusation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's half-brother, "the arch-breaker of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh,"<sup>38</sup> Muhammad-'Alí and his associates, that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had claimed Divinity. In his so-called "epistle of repentance," Bahá'u'lláh's youngest son, Badí'u'lláh (d. 1950), described the offences committed by Muhammad-'Alí. These included the interpolation of Bahá'u'lláh's sacred writings to belittle the station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and to exalt Muhammad-'Alí's.<sup>39</sup> Like the doubting apostle, St. Thomas (John 20:26-29), the youngest son was a wavering Badí'u'lláh. His brief moment of repentance was soon followed by a relapse of rebellion. (But unlike Badí'u'lláh, the sceptical Thomas, according to Christian tradition, became steadfast and died a martyr's death).<sup>40</sup>

Badí'u'lláh confessed in his letter that among these "false

accusations” was Muhammad-‘Alí’s allegation that “...the Master claims to be the embodiment of Divinity...”<sup>41</sup> This falsehood was circulated despite ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s repeated and explicit written denials of such a preposterous claim. In a tablet that stigmatizes his younger brother as “the Centre of Sedition,” and outlines some of his odious deeds, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers to Muhammad-‘Alí’s accusations: “Another day he would raise an uproar, saying that the oneness of God had been denied, since another Manifestation had been proclaimed, prior to the expiration of a thousand years.”<sup>42</sup>

Shoghi Effendi makes three other important deductions that necessarily follow from his statement that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is not a Manifestation of God. First, the Guardian corrects the false impression that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá enjoys a so-called “mystic unity” with Bahá'u'lláh. (Further to this point, see the next section). Second, the notion that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is a prophet would have had the following consequence:

It would also amount to a reversion to those irrational and superstitious beliefs which have insensibly crept, in the first century of the Christian era, into the teachings of Jesus Christ, and by crystallizing into accepted dogmas have impaired the effectiveness and obscured the purpose of the Christian Faith.<sup>43</sup>

What the Guardian seems to have in mind here is the dogma of the trinity, which was itself subject to a historical process-- this may explain the reference to “dogmas”-- with its divinization of the Son who was elevated to the Godhead. Third, to maintain such a belief would result in an unconscionable, strange reversal. It would lower the station of the Báb:

Furthermore, the inescapable inference from the belief in the identity of the Author of our Faith with Him Who is the Center of His Covenant would be to place ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in a position superior to that of the Báb, the reverse of which is the fundamental, though not as yet universally recognized, principle of this Revelation.<sup>44</sup>

It is noteworthy that Shoghi Effendi points out that this principle was “...not as yet universally recognized...” The Guardian’s statement testifies to the great sway that “...the vibrant, the magnetic personality of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá...” with its “...glory and power with which They who are the Manifestations of God are alone endowed”<sup>45</sup> still held over the hearts and minds of early North American Bahá’ís. Simply put, the Bahá’ís

generally ascribed a greater station to 'Abdu'l-Bahá than they did to the Báb.

## Rejection of Bad Hermeneutics: The “Mystic Unity” Theory

Another false notion that followed from 'Abdu'l-Bahá supposed prophethood was the so-called “mystic unity”<sup>46</sup> between Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This belief was in part based on the wrong inference drawn from a hadith quoted in the *Kitáb-i-Şqán*: “I am He, Himself, and He is I, myself.”<sup>47</sup> The phrase was truncated into English as “He is Myself” and taken out of context. According to the maxim in biblical and literary hermeneutics, “A text without a context is a pretext.”<sup>48</sup> The mystic unity theory is a reminder that holy scripture must be interpreted in context to avoid an exegetical fallacy. Shoghi Effendi wrote the following clarification:

I feel it necessary, therefore, to state without any equivocation or hesitation that neither in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* nor in the Book of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant, nor even in the Tablet of the Branch, nor in any other Tablet, whether revealed by Bahá'u'lláh or 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is there any authority whatever for the opinion that inclines to uphold the so-called “mystic unity” of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, or to establish the identity of the latter with His Father or with any preceding Manifestation...Moreover, to maintain that the assertion “He is Myself,” instead of denoting the mystic unity of God and His Manifestations, as explained in the *Kitáb-i-Şqán*, establishes the identity of Bahá'u'lláh with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, would constitute a direct violation of the oft-repeated principle of the oneness of God's Manifestations -- a principle which the Author of these same extracts is seeking by implication to emphasize.<sup>49</sup>

This statement makes it clear that the principle of mystic unity *does* legitimately apply to the relationship between God and His Manifestation or to the Manifestations with one another. The unity of the Divine Manifestations or Prophets with God, as contained in the phrase “He is Myself,” which is one of the teachings of the *Kitáb-i-Şqán*,<sup>50</sup> was misappropriated and applied to the relationship between Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Taking a statement out of context, i.e. from one context that conveys one or more of its legitimate meanings and applying it

in another, which distorts the meaning, can be evidence of one or more of the following: (1) an esoteric mind-set that strains to make a point (2) a fundamentalist mind-set that fails to make necessary distinctions where they are warranted (3) forcing an argument (4) a tendency to round-off in a non-discriminating levelling process that is liable to occur when a comprehensive concept such as “unity” is at issue.

Thornton Chase's letter to Wellesley Tudor-Pole, quoted below, substantiates point (1). It informs us that in the opening years of the twentieth century, some Bahá'ís selected scriptural code-words that they applied esoterically. However, it is understandable that Bahá'ís of Christian background would be liable to such a misconception given the magnitude of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's magnetic, divine charisma. Father-Son phraseology was for centuries, and still is, basic to Christian theology. It was an easy and natural transfer to apply the Father-Son relationship of God and Christ to Bahá'u'lláh (the Father), and 'Abdu'l-Bahá (the Son). Shoghi Effendi's correction and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's explicit denials make it clear that the “Christian Bahá'ís” regarded 'Abdu'l-Bahá as a Christ figure: “that He is not to be acclaimed as the return of Jesus Christ, the Son Who will come “in the glory of the Father”—.”<sup>51</sup>

Thornton Chase, however, was not so confused. Dr. Robert Stockman's archival research shows that the man designated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as “the first Bahá'í in America,”<sup>52</sup> complained frequently in his letters that the Bahá'ís misunderstood 'Abdu'l-Bahá's station. In a letter to Wellesley Tudor-Pole (December 1, 1911) that does not conceal his disappointment, Chase wrote:

Many of those who have named themselves Bahá'ís are of an enthusiastic and emotional nature which seeks a living object upon which to lavish the wealth of their hopes. They seek out single phrases and words, occurring in various Tablets from Abdul-Bahá, give to them their own interpretations, and then set them up as a sort of authority contrary to the evident strong and oft repeated declarations of Abdul-Bahá himself regarding his mission and station. As though that which he emphasizes were not sufficiently great, they strive to consider and proclaim him to be the Christ, the Word Incarnate, the Savior, etc., and they bitterly antagonize those who look upon Baha'ollah as the fulfiller and completer of these Offices.<sup>53</sup>

To his credit, Chase understood and upheld the distinction between the stations of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá at a time

when many American Bahá'ís were simply too awed to understand 'Abdu'l-Bahá's station according to His own self-understanding. Stockman points out that the question of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's station was "completely confusing to the American Christian mind. He did not fit into any category."<sup>54</sup> The subtleties involved in discerning how "...the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized"<sup>55</sup> were too complex for many who met 'Abdu'l-Bahá to see Him in any other light than that of a prophet.

Echoes of the old misunderstanding surfaced during my interview with prolific writer, teacher and personality, Stanwood Cobb (1881-1982), at his home at the Green Acre Bahá'í School near Eliot, Maine in the summer of 1977. Mr. Cobb who was then 96 years old, shared his impressions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá whom he had met on five different occasions: Akká (1909, 1910), Boston and Washington (1912) and Paris (1913). When I asked about his view of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in light of the passing years, the tension between orthodoxy and personal impression was clearly felt. With sudden emotion, Mr. Cobb said: "Well, if I told you what I really thought you would find it reprehensible." When I asked for a clarification, he replied: "If 'Abdu'l-Bahá had not specifically denied being a prophet, as far as I was concerned, He was. He moved with the ease of a king. He was as free as a bird and did just as he pleased." Mr. Cobb's anecdotes included such remarks as "If he wanted to visit a home in town, He just knocked on the door and walked in."<sup>56</sup>

Unlike Thornton Chase, other Bahá'ís, like the naturopath Dr. Edward Getsinger, failed to be convinced, even by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's fervent denials. Although Getsinger spent over six months in Akká in 1899, 1900 and 1901, still he clung to his own opinion. One of his letters indicated that Getsinger thought he knew better than 'Abdu'l-Bahá. For Dr. Getsinger, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's claim of pure servitude was a mere veil of humility that could not conceal His true reality--at least as the doctor divined it. In May, 1903 he wrote the Bahá'ís of North Hudson, New Jersey, making this dogmatic pronouncement: "We should never cease to impress all that the Master is whom we believe He is--The Christ of this generation to the Gentiles, and not what He in His humility chooses to claim for Himself--a servant."<sup>57</sup> Getsinger's argument was so convincing that the North Hudson Board of Council "heartily endorsed" and recorded the doctor's opinion in its minutes!<sup>58</sup> It was, consequently, with good reason that Shoghi Effendi found it

imperative to clarify the station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Ali Kuli Khan, who had spent fourteen months between 1900-1901 in Akká working as 'Abdu'l-Bahá's translator, saw the conundrum. If Bahá'u'lláh is Christ, who then is the majestic personage called 'Abdu'l-Bahá? Upon his arrival in America in 1901, he wrote: "If you want to say that all our Christian world have been waiting the Appearance of [the] Father & Christ, & that if you tell them Beha was Christ then you will have difficulty in proving to them Abdul-Beha--this is a question which you will have to write for the Master, and then He will direct you how to teach this point."<sup>59</sup>

Another factor may account for the mystic unity theory. This has to do with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's function as "Interpreter of the Word of God."<sup>60</sup> It *seems* plausible to assume that the one who was capable of interpreting infallibly the writings of Bahá'u'lláh must "know" the mind of Bahá'u'lláh and be "unified" with it. But Shoghi Effendi has made a distinction that rejects such an idea. Although the Guardian's comment applies to his own function as interpreter, his point may be applied by analogy to Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

The fact that the Guardian has been specifically endowed with such power as he may need to reveal the purport and disclose the implications of the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá does not necessarily confer upon him a station co-equal with those Whose words he is called upon to interpret. He can exercise that right and discharge this obligation and yet remain infinitely inferior to both of them in rank and different in nature.<sup>61</sup>

This quotation requires qualification. Interpretation notwithstanding, the Guardian made it clear that the gulf that separates him from 'Abdu'l-Bahá is much wider than the one that separates 'Abdu'l-Bahá from Bahá'u'lláh:

To degrade His lofty rank by identifying His station with or by regarding it as roughly equivalent to, the position of those on whom the mantle of His authority has fallen would be an act of impiety as grave as the no less heretical belief that inclines to exalt Him to a state of absolute equality with either the central Figure or Forerunner of our Faith. For wide as is the gulf that separates 'Abdu'l-Bahá from Him Who is the Source of an independent Revelation, it can never be regarded as commensurate with the greater distance that stands between Him Who is the

Center of the Covenant and His ministers who are to carry on His work, whatever be their name, their rank, their functions or their future achievements.<sup>62</sup>

## The Balance of Positive and Negative Theology

One feature of the deep structure of Shoghi Effendi's thought reveals that his interpretations are formulated by the balance of positive (affirmative) and negative (contrary) statements. This process may be viewed as a "dialectic" which I define simply as a laying down of first principles or fundamental truths. (I am not suggesting here that Shoghi Effendi consciously followed a philosophic dialectic in making his interpretations but rather that when examined they reveal this structure). Due to limitations of space, only two examples of this construction will be provided. Six other brief examples are found at the end of this section.

The "negative theology" that I attribute to Shoghi Effendi is quite different from the apophatic or negative theology in the Abrahamic religions, the *theologica apophatika* that maintains the strictest silence about the essence of divinity.<sup>63</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá encapsulates the essence of negative theology when he says: "We affirm these names and attributes, not to prove the perfections of God, but to deny that He is capable of imperfections."<sup>64</sup> Rather, Shoghi Effendi's use of the balance of positive (X is this) and negative theology (X is not this) both affirms and denies a thing in order to define its true nature. In defining the station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, there is no mediating middle other than the category of mystery itself. This lack of a middle position is typical of some, although by no means all, his theological judgements which are generally categorical. Here is just one example that rejects divine incarnation (Ar. =*hullul*), pantheism and anthropomorphism:

So crude and fantastic a theory of Divine incarnation is as removed from, and incompatible with, the essentials of Bahá'í belief as are the no less inadmissible pantheistic and anthropomorphic conceptions of God--both of which the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh emphatically repudiate and the fallacy of which they expose.<sup>65</sup>

However, we should not conclude from this one statement alone that broad, liberal or inclusivist doctrines are not found in Shoghi Effendi's interpretations. (This question is explored below in "Exclusivist, Inclusivist and Pluralist Statements in the

*Dispensation*”).

### **Example One: The Summary Statement of the Station of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá**

Shoghi Effendi’s summary statement of the station of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá interweaves both affirmations and negations. By artificially inserting [+] and [-] signs into the text, it becomes apparent that Shoghi Effendi has juxtaposed and balanced positive and negative elements in the formulation of his interpretation. Overall, they contain four negative and three positive elements. His statement is concise but packed with meaning:

[1][-]That ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is not a Manifestation of God, [+] that He gets His light, His inspiration and sustenance direct from the Fountain-head of the Bahá’í Revelation; [2][+] that He reflects even as a clear and perfect Mirror the rays of Bahá’u’lláh’s glory, [-] and does not inherently possess that indefinable yet all-pervading reality the exclusive possession of which is the hallmark of Prophethood; [3] [-]that His words are not equal in rank, [+] though they possess an equal validity with the utterances of Bahá’u’lláh; [4][-] that He is not to be acclaimed as the return of Jesus Christ, the Son Who will come “in the glory of the Father”--.<sup>66</sup>

His interpretation is followed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s self-interpretation which has been quoted above but which bears repeating:

*My name is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. My qualification is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. My reality is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. My praise is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Thralldom to the Blessed Perfection is my glorious and refulgent diadem, and servitude to all the human race my perpetual religion... No name, no title, no mention, no commendation have I, nor will ever have, except ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. This is my longing. This is my greatest yearning. This is my eternal life. This is my everlasting glory.*<sup>67</sup>

With his [positive + negative polarization], [statement + qualification], [statement + caution] construction, Shoghi Effendi considers both ends of the theological spectrum. He eliminates those excesses, either positive or negative, which produce errors. In the following statement, for example, Shoghi Effendi cautions the reader against a reduction of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s pure servitude or His being a mere interpreter of His father’s words:

From such clear and formally laid down statements, incompatible as they are with any assertion of a claim to Prophethood, we should not by any means infer that 'Abdu'l-Bahá is merely one of the servants of the Blessed Beauty, or at best one whose function is to be confined to that of an authorized interpreter of His Father's teachings. Far be it from me to entertain such a notion or to wish to instill such sentiments.<sup>68</sup>

By clearly defining end limits, Shoghi Effendi gives full weight and balance to the teachings he interprets. In this balance, he excludes both an overly exalted and demeaning view of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The same holds true for his analysis of the station of Bahá'u'lláh.

### **Example Two: Positive Bahá'í Spirituality and its Negative Counterpart in Contemporary Society**

The second example is taken from the portrait of Bahá'í community spirituality. The Guardian's illustration is found in part four which delineates the basic features of the Administrative Order. By including things spiritual in a treatment of things administrative, Shoghi Effendi seems to be following Bahá'u'lláh's method in the *Aqdas* which mixes normally disparate categories, such as legal formulations and ritual law, with the mystical language of love, beauty and refinement. As for the *Aqdas*, this blending of administrative and spiritual themes in the *Dispensation* notifies the reader that there can be no separation of spiritual from administrative principles, a point that Shoghi Effendi has made explicitly elsewhere:

To dissociate the administrative principles of the Cause from the purely spiritual and humanitarian teachings would be tantamount to a mutilation of the body of the Cause, a separation that can only result in the disintegration of its component parts, and the extinction of the Faith itself.<sup>69</sup>

### **The Positive Pole**

In the final section of the *Dispensation*, Shoghi Effendi compares and contrasts "...the process of slow and steady consolidation that characterizes the growth of its [the Bahá'í Faith's] infant strength and the devastating onrush of the forces of disintegration that are assailing the outworn institutions, both religious and secular, of present-day society!" with the

outstanding spirituality of the Bahá'í Faith's "administrators," "itinerant teachers" and others. This technique of comparison and contrast also constitutes a literary device which is the counterpart to the formulation of positive and negative theology:

The vitality which the organic institutions of this great, this ever-expanding Order so strongly exhibit; the obstacles which the high courage, the undaunted resolution of its administrators have already surmounted; the fire of an unquenchable enthusiasm that glows with undiminished fervor in the hearts of its itinerant teachers; the heights of self-sacrifice which its champion-builders are now attaining; the breadth of vision, the confident hope, the creative joy, the inward peace, the uncompromising integrity, the exemplary discipline, the unyielding unity and solidarity which its stalwart defenders manifest; the degree to which its moving Spirit has shown itself capable of assimilating the diversified elements within its pale, of cleansing them of all forms of prejudice and of fusing them with its own structure--these are evidences of a power which a disillusioned and sadly shaken society can ill afford to ignore.<sup>70</sup>

It will be readily seen from this contrast that the confident and vibrant spirituality exemplified by the Bahá'í community corresponds to the positive pole of Shoghi Effendi's analysis. The spiritual attributes that he lists above may be reduced to the following substantives: courage, resolution, enthusiasm, fervor, self-sacrifice, vision, hope, fervor, joy, integrity, discipline, unity and solidarity and freedom from prejudice.

### **The Negative Pole**

The Guardian then juxtaposes the positive spirituality shown by the Bahá'í community to the negative character traits displayed by the disillusioned and desperate citizens of a moribund world order:

Compare these splendid manifestations of the spirit animating this vibrant body of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh with the cries and agony, the follies and vanities, the bitterness and prejudices, the wickedness and divisions of an ailing and chaotic world. Witness the fear that torments its leaders and paralyzes the action of its blind and bewildered statesmen. How fierce the hatreds, how false the ambitions, how petty the pursuits, how

deep-rooted the suspicions of its peoples! How disquieting the lawlessness, the corruption, the unbelief that are eating into the vitals of a tottering civilization!<sup>71</sup>

To make this construction of the balance of positive and negative poles more explicit, two sets of contrasting spiritual attributes from the above passages are juxtaposed here:

high courage/cries and agony,  
 the exemplary discipline/the follies and vanities,  
 the unyielding unity and solidarity/ the wickedness and divisions of an ailing and chaotic world  
 the uncompromising integrity/the lawlessness, the corruption, the unbelief  
 the inward peace/the fear that torments its leaders  
 the heights of self-sacrifice/how petty the pursuits  
 undiminished fervor/the bitterness and prejudices

One should not conclude from this example that the Guardian is making unfair comparisons or is indulging in condemnation for condemnation's sake. He views the spiritual vitality of the Bahá'í community, and the deplorable moral condition of the modern world, as a necessary consequence of the transformative power of Bahá'u'lláh for those who have accepted Him, and the inevitable result for those who have rejected Him. His judgment, however, comes to a note of wisdom: he views the present state of the world as an unavoidable and necessary stage that will lead eventually to the establishment of world unity and peace:

Might not this process of steady deterioration which is insidiously invading so many departments of human activity and thought be regarded as a necessary accompaniment to the rise of this almighty Arm of Bahá'u'lláh? [the Administrative Order] Might we not look upon the momentous happenings which, in the course of the past twenty years, have so deeply agitated every continent of the earth, as ominous signs simultaneously proclaiming the agonies of a disintegrating civilization and the birth pangs of that World Order--that Ark of human salvation--that must needs arise upon its ruins?<sup>72</sup>

Other examples of this positive-negative balanced construction are found, not only throughout the *Dispensation*,

but the entire corpus of Shoghi Effendi's writings. Here are six examples from our text that for brevity's sake I will simply state without further explication:

1. That Bahá'u'lláh is the supreme Manifestation of God but He is not God.<sup>73</sup>
2. That the Bahá'í Faith is the fulfilment of the world religions but is not superior to them.
3. That the Bahá'í universal cycle which began in 1844, despite the promise of its 500,000 year duration, is not the final revelation from God.
4. That the Báb is a self-sufficient Manifestation of God, not merely an inspired precursor of Bahá'u'lláh.
5. That the Guardian is the permanent head of the Universal House of Justice but cannot legislate, except as an individual member of that body.
6. That the exalted position of the Guardian does not make him a co-sharer in the station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

### **Exclusivist, Inclusivist and Pluralist Statements in the *Dispensation***

Given the fundamental beliefs in Bahá'u'lláh as “the promise of all ages” and the Bahá'í dispensation as the culmination of a 6,000 year prophetic cycle,<sup>74</sup> on the one hand, and progressive revelation, the oneness of the prophets and the organic unity of the world's religions, on the other hand, how does Shoghi Effendi's theology fit with the influential tripartite interreligious typology of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism developed by Allan Race, John Hick, Gavin D'Costa, Dianna Eck, Paul Griffiths and others? This question was explored in papers by Dr. Seena Fazel and Dann J. May in 1997, and more recently by Grant Martin (2007), although these scholars have come to different conclusions.<sup>75</sup> Fazel argued that the Bahá'í Faith is pluralist, while Dann J. May has argued for a relativist “dynamic perspectivism,” and cautioned against oversimplifying Bahá'í inclusivism.<sup>76</sup> Grant Martin, doctoral candidate in religious studies at McGill University (2008), has argued that the Bahá'í Faith is exclusivist as much as it is inclusivist.<sup>77</sup>

It is important to note at the outset that the use of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism by Christian theologians and philosophers of religion is not univocal, nor is it univocal

as used by Bahá'í scholars Fazel, May and Martin. John Hick's reported definition of Christian inclusivism as either the Roman Catholic belief that Christ's atonement redeems all of humanity even though individuals may be unaware of him or that the incarnate Christ, the universal divine Logos, accomplishes the work of salvation in and through other salvific figures,<sup>78</sup> does not equate with Bahá'í inclusivism based on the oneness of the world's religions and progressive revelation. 'Abdu'l-Bahá described the Bahá'í Faith as "... an inclusive movement; the teachings of all religions and societies are found here...The Bahá'í message is a call to religious unity..."<sup>79</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá would seem to be pointing to some common essence of religion or *philosophia perennis*, a phrase coined by Leibniz.

In the section above, I have argued that a deep structure is latent in Shoghi Effendi's theology which formulates his interpretations by juxtaposing and balancing positive and negative propositions. The positive pole tends to be "dogmatic" or exclusive, i.e. it affirms a theological truth based on strong divine authority which defies contradiction. This authoritative statement leaves space, nonetheless, for further interpretations and correlations to be made with other points of Bahá'í belief and/or the teachings of the other world's religions. This structural polarity, it is important to note, should not be perceived as reductive, black and white thinking or a closed fundamentalism without distinctions. As we shall see, Shoghi Effendi's theology includes not only dogmatic or exclusivist, but also inclusivist and pluralist statements.

Historically, the definition of religious doctrine tends to be exclusivist because it generally follows this formula: statement X is the predicate of Y but excludes Z. This exclusivism has occurred, of course, in the development of all orthodox theologies within the Abrahamic religions in their contests with heterodox theologies. Jewish and Islamic monotheism, for example, would rigidly exclude Christian trinitarianism, although 'Abdu'l-Bahá expounded a more inclusivist interpretation of the trinity.<sup>80</sup> The renowned twentieth century essentialist-existentialist theologian Paul Tillich (1886-1965) viewed the development of Christian dogma, for example, as a "continuing narrowing down," a process that was necessary to the very identity of the Christian church. Tillich commented on this narrowing down within historical Christianity from the early days of its orthodox struggles with Gnosticism and what it viewed later as other heresies:

The whole history of Christian dogma is a continuing

narrowing down, but at the same time a *defining*. And the definition is important, because without it many elements would have undercut the whole church, would have denied its existence. The dogma, therefore, the dogmatic development, is not something merely lamentable or evil. It was the necessary form by which the church kept its very identity...<sup>81</sup>

This phenomenon is no less true of Shoghi Effendi's interpretations in the *Dispensation*. If Tillich's idea is transposed, *mutatis mutandis*, to the theological interpretations made by the Guardian, we realise that *grosso modo* a similar process is taking place. By excluding, Shoghi Effendi is defining and thereby creating a distinct Bahá'í theology. However, he is not just applying a scalpel to eliminate the excess tissue of erroneous beliefs. Although he subtracts (the negative pole), he also adds (the positive pole). For example, although the Guardian denied the credibility of the "mystic unity" theory between Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, he advocated instead the more positive "mystic intercourse" between Father and Son, a phrase that is found among a cluster of generative images that Shoghi Effendi used in the *Dispensation* to expound the mystical origins of the *Will and Testament*, images that recall, in some of their features, the birth narratives of the infant Jesus and a Christian mysticism of the divine marriage. Birthing imagery is present, for example, when we read that the *Will and Testament* resulted "from that mystic intercourse between Him Who communicated the generating influence of His divine purpose [Bahá'u'lláh] and the One Who was its vehicle and chosen recipient." ['Abdu'l-Bahá]. The mystic intercourse resulted in the birth of the Will as "the Child of the Covenant":

The Will may thus be acclaimed as the inevitable offspring resulting from that mystic intercourse between Him Who communicated the generating influence of His divine Purpose and the One Who was its vehicle and chosen recipient. Being the Child of the Covenant -- the Heir of both the Originator and the Interpreter of the Law of God -- the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá can no more be divorced from Him Who supplied the original and motivating impulse than from the One Who ultimately conceived it. Bahá'u'lláh's inscrutable purpose, we must ever bear in mind, has been so thoroughly infused into the conduct of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and their motives have been so closely wedded together, that the mere attempt to dissociate the teachings of the former from any system

which the ideal Exemplar of those same teachings has established would amount to a repudiation of one of the most sacred and basic truths of the Faith.<sup>82</sup>

Despite the exclusivist definitions that are found in the *Dispensation*, broad, inclusivist positions are also taken by Shoghi Effendi. His pronouncement on the relationship of the Bahá'í Faith to its sister world religions represents a liberal inclusivism that validates, not only the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, but the world's religions that have preceded it. His statement amounts to a *magna carta* on progressive revelation and the oneness of religion, one that invites further exploration by scholars. Here, for example, is one major statement:

Nor does the Bahá'í Revelation, claiming as it does to be the culmination of a prophetic cycle and the fulfillment of the promise of all ages, attempt, under any circumstances, to invalidate those first and everlasting principles that animate and underlie the religions that have preceded it. The God-given authority, vested in each one of them, it admits and establishes as its firmest and ultimate basis. It regards them in no other light except as different stages in the eternal history and constant evolution of one religion, Divine and indivisible, of which it itself forms but an integral part. It neither seeks to obscure their Divine origin, nor to dwarf the admitted magnitude of their colossal achievements. It can countenance no attempt that seeks to distort their features or to stultify the truths which they instill. Its teachings do not deviate a hairbreadth from the verities they enshrine, nor does the weight of its message detract one jot or one tittle from the influence they exert or the loyalty they inspire. Far from aiming at the overthrow of the spiritual foundation of the world's religious systems, its avowed, its unalterable purpose is to widen their basis, to restate their fundamentals, to reconcile their aims, to reinvigorate their life, to demonstrate their oneness, to restore the pristine purity of their teachings, to coordinate their functions and to assist in the realization of their highest aspirations. These divinely-revealed religions, as a close observer has graphically expressed it, 'are doomed not to die, but to be reborn... 'Does not the child succumb in the youth and the youth in the man; yet neither child nor youth perishes?'<sup>83</sup>

Consequently, for all his encomiums of the unique features of the Bahá'í Faith, one cannot argue that Shoghi Effendi was promoting an exclusive, religious nationalism, i.e. the

superiority of the Bahá'í Faith over the other world's religions. He was explicit on this point:

This same prophecy,<sup>84</sup> we must furthermore recognize, attests the independent character of the Bábí Dispensation and corroborates indirectly the truth that in accordance with the principle of progressive revelation every Manifestation of God must needs vouchsafe to the peoples of His day a measure of divine guidance ampler than any which a preceding and less receptive age could have received or appreciated. For this reason, *and not for any superior merit which the Bahá'í Faith may be said to inherently possess*, does this prophecy bear witness to the unrivaled power and glory with which the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh has been invested -- a Dispensation the potentialities of which we are but beginning to perceive and the full range of which we can never determine"<sup>85</sup> (italics mine).

Critiquing psychiatrist Dr. Seena Fazel, who types the Bahá'í Faith as pluralist in "Interreligious Dialogue and the Bahá'í Faith: Some Preliminary Observations,"<sup>86</sup> Grant Martin, in "Why the Bahá'í Faith is not Pluralist," has argued that Bahá'u'lláh's religion is instead a subtle synthesis of exclusivism and inclusivism.<sup>87</sup> Martin bases his argument on the views of philosophers of religion, Paul Griffiths<sup>88</sup> and John Hick,<sup>89</sup> interpreted in a Bahá'í perspective. I would agree with Martin that Bahá'í theology indicates a combination of exclusivist and inclusivist tenets regarding its relationship to the world's religions. However, in my view, it is not tenable to categorically exclude a "pluralist" dimension to the Bahá'í Faith: "...in other words, it [the Bahá'í Faith] is not pluralist."<sup>90</sup> A pluralist view could be maintained, in one of its dimensions, on the basis of progressive revelation, i.e. that the various world's religions form one organic whole even though they are revealed sequentially in historical time. Shoghi Effendi wrote: "... it [the Bahá'í Faith] 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."<sup>91</sup> In other words, a plurality of faiths is recognized by the Guardian in this statement as being indispensable and integral to the religious history of humanity.

While the preceding statement tends to align the Bahá'í Faith with pluralism, Shoghi Effendi's position is more subtle and complex. Dann J. May was correct in cautioning against an oversimplification of Bahá'í inclusivism. In bold, kerygmatic

language, the Guardian proclaimed Bahá'u'lláh as the unique salvific figure for our age:

He Who in such dramatic circumstances was made to sustain the overpowering weight of so glorious a Mission was none other than the One Whom posterity will acclaim, and Whom innumerable followers already recognize, as the Judge, the Lawgiver and Redeemer of all mankind, as the Organizer of the entire planet, as the Unifier of the children of men, as the Inaugurator of the long-awaited millennium, as the Originator of a new "Universal Cycle," as the Establisher of the Most Great Peace, as the Fountain of the Most Great Justice, as the Proclaimer of the coming of age of the entire human race, as the Creator of a new World Order, and as the Inspirer and Founder of a world civilization.<sup>92</sup>

The Guardian's exclusivism, however, cannot be equated with Christian exclusivism. He does not view the Bahá'í religion as a "once and for all" revelation of divine truth, like the narrow proponents of Christian exclusivism as defined by Hick above and further in n. 89. The Guardian's liberal interpretation of the most exclusivist statement of Bahá'u'lláh, "No man can obtain everlasting life, unless he embraceth the truth of this inestimable, this wondrous, and sublime Revelation,"<sup>93</sup> does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that individual salvation is strictly confined only to those who believe in Bahá'u'lláh. This statement has to be understood in light of other Bahá'í texts such as this one: "Religion bestoweth upon man the most precious of all gifts, offereth the cup of prosperity, imparteth eternal life, and showereth imperishable benefits upon mankind."<sup>94</sup> One of the generic gifts of religion is the imparting of "eternal life," i.e. to the followers of all religions. The Guardian advised that Bahá'u'lláh's seemingly exclusive sentence "should not be taken literally: by 'everlasting life' is meant spiritual felicity, communion with the Divine Spirit."<sup>95</sup> (This interpretation does not entirely rule out difficulties without recourse to relativism or further contextualisation). Another statement of Shoghi Effendi supports the inclusivist view:

It should also be borne in mind that, great as is the power manifested by this Revelation and however vast the range of the Dispensation its Author has inaugurated, it emphatically repudiates the claim to be regarded as the final revelation of God's will and purpose for mankind. To hold such a conception of its character and functions would be tantamount to a betrayal of its cause and a

denial of its truth. It must necessarily conflict with the fundamental principle which constitutes the bedrock of Bahá'í belief, the principle that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is orderly, continuous and progressive and not spasmodic or final. Indeed, the categorical rejection by the followers of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh of the claim to finality which any religious system inaugurated by the Prophets of the past may advance is as clear and emphatic as their own refusal to claim that same finality for the Revelation with which they stand identified.<sup>96</sup>

In other words, Shoghi Effendi's theology may be simplified along the following lines: the Bahá'í revelation corresponds to the functional imperative of our age, that of global unity, in a type of Toynbeeian "challenge-and-response" model,<sup>97</sup> rather than from any supposed triumph of the faith of Bahá'u'lláh over its sister religions. Triumphalism has been specifically rejected by the Guardian—"nor arrogant in the affirmation of its claims"--since it runs counter to the Bahá'í Faith's view of progressive revelation as a gradual unfoldment of one divine truth that has been one in its essence, while various in its manifestations, since it first appeared at the dawn of history. The Guardian wrote:

It [the Bahá'í Faith] is neither eclectic in the presentation of its truths, nor arrogant in the affirmation of its claims. Its teachings revolve around the fundamental principle that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is progressive, not final. 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.<sup>98</sup>

Viewed in this light, it becomes apparent that the Guardian's comparisons, while they are exclusivist in certain respects, are also inclusivist and relative. Dann J. May's observation seems accurate that attempts to perfectly match the Bahá'í Faith to the categories and typologies conceived by scholars remain elusive: "Indeed, the Bahá'í Faith continually frustrates [attempts at] such easy and simplistic classification."<sup>99</sup> Regarding the exclusivist-inclusivist-pluralist typology, the formula would seem to be that the Bahá'í Faith contains dimensions of all of them but none of them integrally and at one and the same time. May's argument is reasonable: perspectivism is required, one that uses the relativity of a sliding-scale, but one that does not

abolish fundamental Bahá'í beliefs. Such a task is complex and requires subtle and careful analysis.

## Shoghi Effendi's Apologetic Method of Comparison and the "New Comparativism"

It should be obvious from the above analysis that one principal feature of Shoghi Effendi's didactic method—and this is true not only for *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* but also for his epistolary generally—is to compare (similarities) and contrast (differences) of the unique features of the Bahá'í Faith with the history, teachings and organisations of the religions of past dispensations and/or the mores of contemporary society and the political realities of today's failed global civilization. This method of comparison and contrast has both theological, i.e. apologetic and literary functions. For example, in section (7), "The Balance of Positive and Negative Theology," the vibrant and confident spirituality shown by the Bahá'í community was contrasted with the deplorable lack of faith and morals that has led to universal desperation. In section (5), I observed that Shoghi Effendi defined the station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá by comparing and contrasting those points that could be either included or excluded in his theological analysis.

The Guardian's comparative method establishes clearly defined theological doctrines which are accompanied by strong value-judgments. Both doctrines and value-judgments show a favourable prejudice either to the Bahá'í Faith, or to the vital function of religion in society,<sup>100</sup> or to the indispensable role of the prophets in the history of civilization, and the unfolding sequence of the world's revealed religions, a process he calls "the principle of progressive revelation."<sup>101</sup>

As an intellectual phenomenon, comparison would appear to be intrinsic to the operations of the human mind itself by which investigators compare data "...and group or classify them (Latin: *gener, genus*=class) according to generalizations they make about the similarities, and consequently the differences, among them."<sup>102</sup> However, the phenomenon of comparison, while it is widely used in religion, has not always met with approval. Literary, i.e. popular references have for centuries been generally disapproving of comparisons. John Lydgate's 1430 (?) edition of the *Fall of Princes* stated that "[c]omparisouns doon offte gret greuauce."<sup>103</sup> Cervantes' dictum in the great Spanish classic *Don Quixote* has it that "...all comparisons are always odious (*odiosa*)."<sup>104</sup> The idea caught on with other writers, both

ancient and modern, and has appeared with little variation in the writings of the English jurist, John Fortescue, Jonathan Swift, John Lyly, Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Heywood, John Donne and George Herbert.<sup>105</sup> Shakespeare wrote an ironic variation in *Much Ado About Nothing*: “Comparisons are odorous” (act iii, sc. v).

In the academic study of religion, comparison has been so widely used since Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900), one of “the founding fathers of comparative religion,”<sup>106</sup> and Oxford’s first professor of comparative theology, laid the foundation for *Religionswissenschaft* in the late 19th century, that it has given its name to the method. While anthropologists have inconclusively debated the theories and methods involved in examining cross-cultural data, only recently has the comparative method come under some negative scrutiny in religious studies, especially in the scholarship of Jonathan Z. Smith and Luther H. Martin.<sup>107</sup>

Comparative religion originated in the encounters resulting from European exploration and colonial expansion and non-Christian cultures and civilizations between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Max Müller, who established a “scientific” methodology in religious studies, came to anticipate a “...new religion...for the whole world...firmly founded on a belief on the One God, the same in the Vedas, the same in the Old, the same in the New Testament, the same in the Korân, the same also in the hearts of those who have no longer any Vedas or Upanishads or any Sacred Books whatever between themselves and their God.”<sup>108</sup> The great scholar based his comparison of religions on common genealogy and massive philological data. The cumulative result was the monumental fifty volume *Sacred Books of the East* (1879-1910), produced under his direction, that encompassed seven religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism and Islam.

Later comparativists, such as Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890-1950) and Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), found homologous patterns of essential religiosity within the multiplicity of the world’s great religions, the religions of classical antiquity and the religions of societies without writing.<sup>109</sup> More recent comparativists, such as the celebrated dean of comparative religion, Huston Smith (1919-) and William Cantwell Smith (1916-2000), who in the opinion of John Hick (1922-) accomplished more than anyone else in the twentieth century to promote interreligious understanding based on the comparative method,<sup>110</sup> have expounded the “primordial tradition” (H. Smith) and “world theology” and “the psychic unity of

mankind” (W.C. Smith).<sup>111</sup>

The “new comparativism” proposed by Luther H. Martin and Jonathan Z. Smith critiques all previous comparative approaches for the following reasons: (1) the independent variables of religious symbols, ideas and experiences are culturally selective data and are not self-evident. They already “presume some operative theory of religion.”<sup>112</sup> (2) Scholars who emphasize either similarities or differences in religion are merely engaging in “a reflexive exercise within the religious context of the observer.”<sup>113</sup> (3) Syncretistic theories of religion based on cultural contact assume “some view of an original religiosity” which cannot be subjected to historical or anthropological research. These theories tend to be “retrojections of contemporary meanings” and are based on stereotypical assumptions.<sup>114</sup> (4) Theories of the “primordial tradition” that posit some essential unity of the world’s religions à la Max Müller, Huston Smith or W.C. Smith, and which anticipate some coming form of world religious unity, are discounted as being “commonsensical,” “propagandistic” and “serving the agenda of the comparativist.”<sup>115</sup> Even such a fundamental religious category as the “sacred” is critiqued on the basis of its being derived from the “religious traditions of the Western scholar.”<sup>116</sup>

The work of Martin and Smith that propose newer, more appropriate models of comparison is just the latest wrinkle in an ongoing methodological debate that surfaced in the 1970’s and 1980’s. Only hints of this debate can be given within these confines. Briefly, an emerging religious scientism attacked traditional theological, metaphysical and phenomenological approaches with sanitized, “scientific,” agnostic or social-scientific approaches that purport to be objective and value-free.<sup>117</sup> These more recent approaches are based on the epistemic authority of the scientific method that has continued to grow since the Enlightenment. This methodological agnosticism would purge the study of religion from any theological or metaphysical bias, or religious sentiment, including the belief in God, the One or the Absolute, which its extreme proponents, like Donald Wiebe, view as infections.<sup>118</sup> (This explains my use of the word “sanitized”).

The “naturalistic biases” of the new comparativism proposed by Martin and Smith view religion reductively as a collection of dependent variables that must conclude with “scientific generalizations” that must be based on “naturalistic theories of religion.”<sup>119</sup> The new agnostic models, which banish God, faith and revealed religion from academic analysis, are borrowed

from cognitive psychology, with its “common mental constraints,” or from “biological substructures,” or a “non-ethnocentric framework,” or trans-historical “cross-cultural constraints,” or contemporary linguistics based on the work of Saussure at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, this agnostic methodology hesitatingly admits Max Weber’s theory of “ideal types,” but advises that this typology need not include his western categories of “god,” “priests,” “prophets,” “ethics” and “salvation religions.”<sup>120</sup> The new theory of ideal types purportedly must be based on scientific rather than religious or faith-based models that would neutralize cultural categories.

Shoghi Effendi’s operative theory of religion is decidedly at the antipodes of methodological agnosticism. While he emphasized that the Bahá’í Faith was “scientific in its method,”<sup>121</sup> the Guardian’s interpretations of the Bahá’í Faith, and the origin of the perennial phenomenon of religion, hold that the great monotheistic faiths trace their ultimate genesis to supernatural divine revelation and dispensational prophethood. His religious *Weltanschauung* is definitely not compatible with this current trend in religious studies which reduces religion to a sterile humanism based on a set of dependent variables deriving from naturalistic, psychological or social scientific theories. The Guardian’s religious viewpoint, it is important to note, does include cultural adaptation of the laws and teachings of the prophets to the varying cultural, historical, social and spiritual needs of humanity in space-time, and thus includes a certain view of relativism. But while the world’s religions, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi have explained, admittedly suffer cyclical degradations in which “virtues are replaced by vices, and holiness and purity disappear”<sup>122</sup> and the “pristine purity”<sup>123</sup> of their essential message is obscured by human doctrinal accretions and errors, their genesis can in no way be explained solely on the basis of cultural or socio-biological factors—at least in Shoghi Effendi’s belief system.

However, in one definitive sense, the Guardian did take the position that “all comparisons are odious.” Although Shoghi Effendi clearly viewed the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh as belonging to the most recent species of the genus of revealed religion, and while he proposed certain commonalities between the Bahá’í Faith and the religions of past dispensations,<sup>124</sup> nonetheless, he held certain exclusive views that God’s most recent divine revelation belonged in a category by itself. His considered, but nonetheless strongly stated view, was that comparison was literally out of the question regarding the origin and

development of the Bahá'í Faith and what he viewed as fitful, momentary, ill-conceived secular movements:

How unfair, how irrelevant, to venture any comparison between the slow and gradual consolidation of the Faith proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh and those man-created movements which, having their origin in human desires and with their hopes centered on mortal dominion, must inevitably decline and perish! Springing from a finite mind, begotten of human fancy, and oftentimes the product of ill-conceived designs, such movements succeed, by reason of their novelty, their appeal to man's baser instincts and their dependence upon the resources of a sordid world, in dazzling for a time the eyes of men, only to plunge finally from the heights of their meteoric career into the darkness of oblivion, dissolved by the very forces that had assisted in their creation.<sup>125</sup>

The same is true for his view of the unique design of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh for which, he argued, no historical parallel could be found in the institutions of government, whether secular or religious. For comparisons are valid only when a basis for comparison exists:

A word should now be said regarding the theory on which this Administrative Order is based and the principle that must govern the operation of its chief institutions. It would be utterly misleading to attempt a comparison between this unique, this divinely-conceived Order and any of the diverse systems which the minds of men, at various periods of their history, have contrived for the government of human institutions. Such an attempt would in itself betray a lack of complete appreciation of the excellence of the handiwork of its great Author. How could it be otherwise when we remember that this Order constitutes the very pattern of that divine civilization which the almighty Law of Bahá'u'lláh is designed to establish upon earth? The East or in the West, offer no adequate criterion wherewith to estimate the potency of its hidden virtues or to appraise the solidity of its foundations.<sup>126</sup>

## Conclusion

*The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* (1934) is the seminal, central text in Shoghi Effendi's writings which he considered to be his last Will and Testament, i.e. the epitome of his understanding.

In defining the fundamental tenets of the stations of the Bahá'í Faith's Three Central Figures, the *Dispensation* not only created a distinctive, economical, theological idiom, but it also proactively resolved potentially divisive, complex theological questions, while leaving space for further scholarly commentary. This paper selectively examined the Guardian's definitions of the stations of the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá which he set in their proper perspective: that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was neither a mere interpreter, nor servant among servants, nor the return of Jesus Christ come "in the glory of the Father." Shoghi Effendi clarified the dual station of the Báb and corrected the misapprehension that had led some Bahá'ís to overestimate 'Abdu'l-Bahá's station in relation to the Báb.

This paper partially explicated the Guardian's method, namely, a comparative apologetics based on "dogmatic" or exclusive interpretations, i.e. doctrines laid down by the strong interpretive authority accorded him by virtue of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Will and Testament*. These interpretations do not exclude, however, relative, inclusive and pluralist statements *vis-à-vis* his understanding of progressive revelation, the oneness of religion, prophetology and the functional role of religion in the growth of civilization and the development of a sane society.

I have argued that a deep structure is inherent to Shoghi Effendi's thought that consists of the dynamic juxtaposition of positive and negative poles in the construction of his theological interpretations. The Guardian employs deductive logic as well as apodictic definitions which form the basis of his dialectic, i.e. the intuitive defining of first principles or fundamental truths.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In addition to Shoghi Effendi's comment reported by Rúhíyyih Rabbání that "he had said all he had to say, in many ways, in the *Dispensation*," Ali Nakhjavani has written that "He [Shoghi Effendi] had actually told several Hands of the Cause and pilgrims that the *Dispensation* should be considered by the friends as his Will and testament." See n. 11 and Ali Nakhjavani, "The Bahá'í Covenant," *Lights of 'Irfán: Studies in the Principal Bahá'í Beliefs*, papers presented at the Irfán Colloquia and Seminars, Book 8, ed. Iraj Ayman (Evanston, IL: Bahá'í National Center, 2007), p. 308.

<sup>2</sup> The context of Shoghi Effendi's remarks concern "the character and functions" of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice but his remarks apply more broadly to "...this general exposition of the fundamental verities of the faith." Shoghi Effendi, "The Dispensation of

Bahá'u'lláh" in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), p. 147. For brevity's sake, subsequent references to "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh" will be abbreviated to the *Dispensation*.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 131.

<sup>4</sup> The word "political" excludes its contemporary meaning of an expedient *rapport de forces* based on the adversarial systems of political parties. It refers instead to the legitimacy and establishment of institutional practices and policies deriving from the Bahá'í belief and value system. The word political has a legitimate use in Bahá'í parlance and need not be banished from the discussion because of its association with party politics.

<sup>5</sup> "Indeed Shoghi Effendi had written that his "Dispensation" was to be considered as a "supplement" to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament." Ali Nakhjavani, "The Bahá'í Covenant," *Lights of 'Irfán: Studies in the Principal Bahá'í Beliefs*, Book 8, 308. For the Guardian's original statement on the *Dispensation* as a "supplement" to the Will and Testament, see *The Light of Divine Guidance*, vol. 1, p. 65.

<sup>6</sup> Dispensation, p. 134.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 134.

<sup>8</sup> The theologians who believed in the self-sufficiency and completeness of the Christian revelation were writing in the first half of the twentieth century and included Barth, Brunner, Cullman, Aulén, Nygren and Bonhoeffer. While there were differences among them *vis-à-vis* the possibility of natural theology, the role of philosophy in theology, and the relative truth and value of the non-Christian religions, all adhered to the fundamental position of the distinctiveness of Christianity and the insufficiency of philosophy, natural theology and the non-Christian religions. While Bahá'í theology is clearly "logocentric," i.e. teaches the necessity of belief in the self-sufficiency of the Divine Word, it diverges from such restrictive views. For a succinct overview of this school, see John Macquarrie, "The Theology of the Word" in *Twentieth-Century Religious Thought. The Frontiers of Philosophy and Theology*, 1900-1960 (London: SCM Press, 1963), pp. 318-338.

<sup>9</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Will and Testament* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> *Dispensation* in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 148.

<sup>11</sup> Rúhíyyih Rabbaní, *The Priceless Pearl* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969), 213.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> It was to legitimize the whole notion of Bahá'í theology that I edited *Revisioning the Sacred: New Perspectives on a Bahá'í Theology* (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1997). In the Introduction to that volume I wrote: "While the Bahá'í sacred writings shed much light on both ancient questions and contemporary issues, there is as yet no centuries-old tradition of theological and philosophical reflection on the Bahá'í revelation upon which to draw. Indeed, there are some who still reject the validity of the whole notion of Bahá'í theology itself, however broadly and carefully one defines the concept. The work of the present generation of scholars is consequently still very much ground-breaking, and I hope this volume will help water the seed bed that is now beginning to

flourish” (xiii). The respected German scholar, Dr. Udo Schaefer, the Hasan Balyuzi lecturer for the year 2002, has done more than any one to legitimize the notion of Bahá'í theology over the past forty years, without which, as he has often remarked, no self-respecting world religion can be taken seriously. “Prolegomena to a Bahá'í Theology” in *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, March-June, 1992, pp. 25-67 was also written with this purpose in mind.

- <sup>14</sup> Among those who opposed the concept of Bahá'í theology was a very emphatic Dr. Soheil Bushrui who told me in a telephone conversation circa 1990 that it was legitimate to speak of *fiqh* but that Bahá'í theology was unacceptable because it might resemble what Christians understand by the word. Neither did B. H. (Betty) Conow, based on the file of our paper correspondence in 1994, approve of the term Bahá'í theology. She wrote a paper called “East's Side, West's Side: All Around the Ology” in which she argued that theology had outlived its usefulness and should not be revived in the Bahá'í Faith. She favoured a more philosophical approach and argued that the proper term should be “divine philosophy.” The difference struck me as purely semantic. What is divine philosophy if not philosophical theology, i.e. theology, since all theology has philosophical content, particularly in the Bahá'í Faith?
- <sup>15</sup> Jack McLean, “The Deification of Jesus,” *World Order*, vol. 14, nos. 3 & 4, Spring/Summer, 1980, p.33, n. 31. The schism of Arius was condemned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in a tablet to Roy Wilhelm, *Star of the West*, vol. 10 (June 5 1919), p. 95. However, 'Abdu'l-Bahá asserted that “The Covenant of God shall remain stable and secure.”
- <sup>16</sup> The word logocentrism was first coined by the German philosopher Ludwig Klages in the 1920's. It refers to the perception that discourse is intelligible by the presence of reason (*logos*) which lies at its center. By “logocentrism” I do not intend the postmodern use of the word, especially Derrida's deconstructionist use of it, which critiques reason in texts, i.e. logical, stable meanings, distinctions and inferences. (See *Of Grammatology*, trans. 1976). Here I use it in precisely the opposite way: to refer to a divine, universal, rational, principle which provides an explanation of the nature, origin and meaning of phenomena which is embodied in an intelligible structure or order consisting of stable meanings.
- <sup>17</sup> William S. Hatcher, “An Analysis of *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh*” in *The Vision of Shoghi Effendi: Proceedings of the Association for Bahá'í Studies Ninth Annual Conference, 1984* (Ottawa: Bahá'í Studies Publications, 1993), p. 73.
- <sup>18</sup> Jack McLean, “The Deification of Jesus,” p. 23.
- <sup>19</sup> This is Marzieh Gail's paraphrase. The Persian literally reads: “the foundations of fundamental divine questions and the complexity of the truth of religious beliefs.” 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, trans. Marzieh Gail (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), p. 26.
- <sup>20</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, collected and translated by Laura Clifford Barney (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981), pp. 180 and 248.
- <sup>21</sup> An unnamed pilgrim quoted by Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 81.

- <sup>22</sup> *Wellspring of Guidance: Messages From the Universal House of Justice 1963-1968* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969), pp. 87-88.
- <sup>23</sup> Küng wrote: "In fact, the gap between exegesis and systematic theology is the misery afflicting present day dogmatics." *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View*, trans. Peter Heinegg (New York: Doubleday, 1988), p. 194.
- <sup>24</sup> In Robert Browning's poem *Andrea del Sarto* (1855), titled after the painter by the same name (1486-1531), del Sarto addresses the painting of his dull-witted and unfaithful but beautiful wife Lucrezia whom he murdered: "Well, less is more, Lucrezia: I am judged." In an essay by Rebecca Comay called "Almost Nothing: Heidegger and Mies," regarding the phrases "Less is more" and "almost nothing" (*beinahe nichts*) often attributed to Mies, Comay writes: "To my knowledge Mies never actually wrote those words." She attributes "Less is more" to the American modern architect Philip C. Johnson. *The Presence of Mies*, ed. Detlef Mertins, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994), p. 179. This collection of essays relates, *inter alia*, Mies van der Rohe's concept of architecture to twentieth century philosophic concepts. Mies's defenders attribute the saying to van der Rohe nonetheless.
- <sup>25</sup> William S. Hatcher, "An Analysis of *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh*" in *The Vision of Shoghi Effendi*, p. 77.
- <sup>26</sup> *Dispensation in The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 123.
- <sup>27</sup> See 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Spiritual Proofs," Chapter 14 of *Some Answered Question.*, pp. 75-77. In context, the spiritual proofs referred to by 'Abdu'l-Bahá implies the ability to perceive the seasonal and historical prophetic cycles whose beneficial effects have been exerted on civilization over the ages.
- <sup>28</sup> *Dispensation in The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 124
- <sup>29</sup> *Kitáb-i-Íqán* pp. 226-27.
- <sup>30</sup> Shoghi Effendi has written of the circumstances surrounding this dramatic declaration of the Báb: "The circumstances attending the examination of the Báb, as a result of so precipitate an act, may well rank as one of the chief landmarks of His dramatic career. The avowed purpose of that convocation was to arraign the Prisoner, and deliberate on the steps to be taken for the extirpation of His so-called heresy. It instead afforded Him the supreme opportunity of His mission to assert in public, formally and without any reservation, the claims inherent in His Revelation. In the official residence, and in the presence, of the governor of Ádhirbáyján, Násiri'd-Dín Mírzá, the heir to the throne; under the presidency of Hájí Mullá Mahmúd, the Nízamu'l-'Ulamá, the Prince's tutor; before the assembled ecclesiastical dignitaries of Tabríz, the leaders of the Shaykhí community, the Shaykhu'l-Islám, and the Imám-Jum'ih, the Báb, having seated Himself in the chief place which had been reserved for the Valí-'Ahd (the heir to the throne), gave, in ringing tones, His celebrated answer to the question put to Him by the President of that assembly. "I am," He exclaimed, "I am, I am the Promised One! I am the One Whose name you have for a thousand years invoked, at Whose mention you have risen, Whose advent you have longed to witness, and the hour of Whose Revelation you have prayed God to hasten. Verily, I say, it is incumbent upon the peoples of both the East and the West to obey My word, and to pledge allegiance to My person." *God Passes By*, p. 21.

- <sup>31</sup> On May 13, 1940 Churchill said in a short, simple but stirring speech during his inaugural address to the House of Commons as the newly elected Prime Minister of Great Britain: "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat." The phrase was repeated in other war speeches. Accessed @ [www.historyplace.com/speeches/churchill.htm](http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/churchill.htm).
- <sup>32</sup> *Dispensation*, p. 136.
- <sup>33</sup> "Deduction" in the *Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (Totowa, NJ: Littlefield, Adams and Company, 1968), p. 74.
- <sup>34</sup> The above quotations are from the *Dispensation in The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp.132, 137, 132.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p. 139.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p. 137.
- <sup>37</sup> A covenant-breaker is an individual or group of individuals who, for a variety of unsavory motives, deny, disregard or disobey the legally appointed head of the Bahá'í Faith in order to create a sect in the community and gain a following. For a definition of covenant-breakers and the necessity to shun them, see Ali Nakhjavani, "The Bahá'í Covenant," *Lights of 'Irfán: Studies in the Principal Bahá'í Beliefs*, Book 8, pp. 302-03.
- <sup>38</sup> Shoghi Effendi uses this epithet to describe 'Abdu'l-Bahá' half-brother in *Bahíyyih Khánum: The Greatest Holy Leaf*, compilation by the Research Department (Haifa: World Centre Publications), p. 37. Accessed online @ [bahai-library.com/books/bahiyih.khanum/](http://bahai-library.com/books/bahiyih.khanum/)
- <sup>39</sup> Badí'u'lláh confessed that before his eyes he watched Muhammad-'Alí interpolate a tablet of Bahá'u'lláh from the pre-Akká period that condemns the misdeeds of Bahá'u'lláh's younger brother Mirzá Yahyá. Muhammad-'Alí changed the condemnatory words "My brother" (Yahyá) to "My Greatest Branch" (Abdu'l-Bahá). Muhammad-'Alí justified this action by saying that Bahá'u'lláh had given him permission to interpolate His writings for the protection of the Cause and that he needed to do this "to check His ['Abdu'l-Bahá's] influence." Badí'u'lláh quoted in Adib Taherzadeh, *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1992), p. 153.
- <sup>40</sup> St. Thomas was the apostle to southern India. Tradition says that after being condemned to death, he was led out to a hill outside the city of King Misdai, where he died "pierced through with spears by four soldiers." "St. Thomas the Apostle," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 14, 1912 accessed @ < [www.newadvent.org/cathen/14658b.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14658b.htm)>.
- <sup>41</sup> Adib Taherzadeh, *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 153. Here Badí'u'lláh is quoting the words of Muhammad-'Alí as reported in his letter of repentance.
- <sup>42</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice and translated by a committee at the Bahá'í World Center and by Marzieh Gail (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996), p. 217.
- <sup>43</sup> *Dispensation*, p. 138.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p. 138.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 97,98.
- <sup>46</sup> *Dispensation*, p. 137
- <sup>47</sup> *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 100
- <sup>48</sup> The complete quotation is "A text without a context is a pretext for a

proof text.” According to Dr. Donald A. Carson, professor of New Testament studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, and prolific author of books on the evangelical perspective of the New Testament, his father, a Canadian minister, was the original source of the quotation. The maxim was intended to avoid exegetical fallacies. Accessed @ [www.fallacyfiles.org/quotcont.html](http://www.fallacyfiles.org/quotcont.html).

<sup>49</sup> *Dispensation*, p. 137

<sup>50</sup> The actual phrase quoted by Bahá'u'lláh is a hadith of Muhammad and was translated by Shoghi Effendi to signify the unity of the prophets with God as “This is the significance of the tradition: ‘I am He, Himself, and He is I, myself.’ Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 100.

<sup>51</sup> *Dispensation*, p.139

<sup>52</sup> *God Passes By*, p. 257. Robert Stockman has informed me that this designation was originally recorded by Ahmad Sohrab in a tribute to Thornton Chase by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá when the Master arrived in San Francisco on October 4, 1912. Mr. Chase died on September 30th. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá eulogized Mr. Chase at his graveside at the Inglewood cemetery in Los Angeles on October 19, 1912 at 1:00 p.m. in which he requested that “the friends of God must visit this grave and on my behalf bring flowers and seek the sublimity of the spiritual station for him....” *Star of the West*, vol. III, no. 13, November 4, 1912, p. 14. Dr. Stockman discusses William James and Edward Dennis becoming Bahá'ís prior to Mr. Chase. Robert H. Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America. Vol. 1: Origins, 1892-1900* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985), pp. 35-36.

<sup>53</sup> Robert Stockman, *Bahá'í Faith in America, Vol. 2: Early Expansion, 1900-1912* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1995), Appendix 3.

<sup>54</sup> “That ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was neither an ordinary man nor a Manifestation of God was completely confusing to the American Christian mind. He did not fit into any category.” *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Early Expansion, 1900-1912*, Vol. 2 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1995), p. 406. Appendix 3 on the station of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

<sup>55</sup> *Dispensation*, p. 134.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in J.A. McLean, *Dimensions in Spirituality: Reflections on the Meaning of Spiritual Life and Transformation in Light of the Bahá'í Faith* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1994), p. 96.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in the North Hudson Board of Council Minute Book, entry of May 6, 1903, p. 68. From Stockman, *Bahá'í Faith in America*, Vol. 2, Appendix 3.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix 3.

<sup>59</sup> Ali Kuli Khan to Hooper Harris, July 28, 1901 in *Ibid*, Appendix 3.

<sup>60</sup> Shoghi Effendi quoted ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: “...I am the Interpreter of the Word of God; such is my interpretation.” *Dispensation*, p. 133.

<sup>61</sup> *Dispensation*, p. 151

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p.132.

<sup>63</sup> See “Via Negativa” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Mircea Eliade, editor-in-chief (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1986), vol. 15, pp. 252-54. Cataphatic theology admits the use of analogies to describe God but declares that these analogies, like the denial of definitions in negative

theology, in no way describe Him. Thus the *via negativa* admits the truth of paradoxical statements in affirmations about God. The *via negativa* is also a way of mystical union with God found in such theologians as Dionysus the Areopagite and the fifteenth century German cardinal Nicholas of Cusa. The concept is also found in the eastern religious traditions, particularly in Buddhism. See for, example, "The Zen Doctrine of No-Mind" in *Zen Buddhism*, Selected Writings of D. T. Suzuki, ed. William Barrett (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), pp. 157-226.

- <sup>64</sup> "The Divinity Can Only Be Comprehended Through The Divine Manifestations" in *Some Answered Questions*, p. 148. For an excellent overview of apophatic theology in the Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Bábí and Báha'í traditions, see Stephen N. Lambden's "The Background and Centrality of Apophatic Theology in Bábí and Báha'í Scripture" in *Revisioning the Sacred: New Perspectives on a Báha'í Theology*, volume eight in *Studies in the Bábí and Báha'í Religions*, ed. Jack McLean (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1997), pp. 37-78.
- <sup>65</sup> *Dispensation*, pp. 112-113.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.139.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.
- <sup>69</sup> *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 5
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.154-55.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.
- <sup>72</sup> *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 155.
- <sup>73</sup> Shoghi Effendi put the matter simply: "As regards your question: Bahá'u'lláh is, of course, not God and not the Creator; but through Him we can know God..." From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, June 4, 1951 in *Lights of Guidance*, no. 1553, p. 472.
- <sup>74</sup> Shoghi Effendi wrote: "The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh should indeed be regarded, if we wish to be faithful to the tremendous implications of its message, as the culmination of a cycle, the final stage in a series of successive, of preliminary and progressive revelations. These, beginning with Adam and ending with the Báb, have paved the way and anticipated with an ever-increasing emphasis the advent of that Day of Days in which He Who is the Promise of All Ages should be made manifest." *Dispensation*, p. 102.
- <sup>75</sup> As well as my own readings, the discussion of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism has been informed by Grant Martin's paper "Why the Báha'í Faith is not Pluralist." The tripartite typology has been used mainly by Christian theologians and philosophers of religion to discuss whether or not non-Christians can be saved. See Martin's "Why the Báha'í Faith is not Pluralist" in *Lights of 'Irfán: Studies in the Principal Bahá'í Beliefs*, Book 8, 2007, pp. 179-201.
- <sup>76</sup> Dann J. May, "The Báha'í Principle of Religious Unity: A Dynamic Perspectivism" in *Revisioning the Sacred: New Perspectives on a Báha'í Theology*, pp.19-20.
- <sup>77</sup> See Martin, "Why the Báha'í Faith is not Pluralist" in *Lights of 'Irfán: Studies in the Principal Bahá'í Beliefs*, Book 8, 2007, pp. 179-201.
- <sup>78</sup> For the quotation from Hick, see note 88.

- <sup>79</sup> The complete quotation reads: "The Báha'í Cause is an inclusive movement; the teachings of all religions and societies are found here...The Báha'í message is a call to religious unity and not an invitation to a new religion, not a new path to immortality. God forbid! It is the ancient path cleared of the debris of imaginations and superstitions of men, of the debris of strife and misunderstanding." Quoted by Dann J. May in "The Báha'í Principle of Religious Unity: A Dynamic Perspectivism" in Jack McLean, ed., *Revisioning the Sacred: New Perspectives on a Báha'í Theology*, volume eight in *Studies in the Bábí and Báha'í Religions* (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1997), pp. 19-20. The original source is not identified. May cites for the quotation in n. 75, Pritam Singh *God, His Mediator, and Man* (Wilmette: IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1958), p. 14.
- <sup>80</sup> See "The Trinity" in *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 113-15.
- <sup>81</sup> Paul Tillich quoted in *Ultimate Concern*, ed. D. Mackenzie Brown (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 64-65.
- <sup>82</sup> *Dispensation*, p.144.
- <sup>83</sup> *Dispensation*, p.114.
- <sup>84</sup> Shoghi Effendi is referring to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's interpretation of a Zoroastrian prophecy of the latter days which predicts the lengths of the Muhammadan, Bábí and Bahá'í dispensations as lasting ten, twenty and thirty days respectively. In His interpretation of the thirty days, referring to the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá comes up with "a period of at least five hundred thousand years," the length of the entire Bahá'í cycle. *Dispensation*, p.102. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has used a sliding-scale to determine the length of the three religious dispensations which are not, on first reading, apparent. But Shoghi Effendi has interpreted the thirty days representing 500,000 years astrologically as follows: "The thirty days in the last dispensation should not be reckoned numerically, but should be considered as symbolizing the incomparable greatness of the Bahá'í Revelation which, though not final is none-the-less thus far the fullest revelation of God to man. From a physical point of view, the thirty days represent the maximum time takes by the sun to pass through a sign of the zodiac. They thus represent a culminating point in the evolution of this star. So also from a spiritual standpoint these thirty days should be viewed as indicating the highest, though not the final stage in the spiritual evolution of mankind." From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, August 7, 1934, quoted in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, compiled by Helen Bassett Hornby (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 4th rev. edn. 1996), no. 1558.
- <sup>85</sup> *Dispensation*, pp.102-103.
- <sup>86</sup> See Seena Fazel, "Interreligious Dialogue and the Bahá'í Faith: Some Preliminary Observations," in Jack McLean, ed., *Revisioning the Sacred: New Perspectives on a Báha'í Theology*, pp. 127-152.
- <sup>87</sup> Space is lacking here to summarize Martin's arguments for Báha'í exclusivism-inclusivism. The "categories" of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism were first conceived by Allan Race in 1983. As mentioned above, the typology was also elaborated by Dianna Eck, Gavin D'Costa, Paul Griffiths and others. John Hick's "A Philosophy of Religious Pluralism" (1984) and *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (1985) and especially *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the*

*Transcendent* (1989) added weight to the discussion. See Martin, pp. 179-201.

<sup>88</sup> Paul Griffiths, Catholic philosopher of religion at the University of Illinois at Chicago, in his *Problems of Religious Diversity* (2001), has reinterpreted the categories of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism to defend exclusivism and inclusivism against pluralism. Grant Martin has adopted Griffiths' schema and has applied it to argue that the Bahá'í Faith is not pluralist. See pp. 190-199 of Martin.

<sup>89</sup> The categories of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism to analyze the relations among religions were used by John Hick in his essay "A Philosophy of Religious Pluralism" published in *The World's Religious Traditions: Essays in Honour of Wilfred Cantwell Smith* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1984). While the tripartite typology is not univocal, John Hick interprets it this way: "...that salvation is restricted to this one group, the rest of mankind being either left out of account or explicitly excluded from the sphere of salvation" (exclusivism). The inclusivist view takes two turns: (1) the Roman Catholic belief that Christ's atonement redeems all of humanity even though individuals may be unaware of him. (2) the incarnate Christ, the universal divine Logos, accomplishes the work of salvation in and through other salvific figures. Thus one can speak of "anonymous Christians" (Karl Rahner) or "the unknown Christ of Hinduism." The pluralist view is "...the view that the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centredness is taking place in different ways within the contexts of all the great religious traditions." These points from "A Philosophy of Religious Pluralism" in John Hick, ed., *Classical and Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Religion*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), pp. 421-23.

<sup>90</sup> Grant Martin, "Why the Báha'í Faith is not Pluralist," p. 189.

<sup>91</sup> *Dispensation*, p. 58.

<sup>92</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 93-94.

<sup>93</sup> *Gleanings From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983),

p. 183.

<sup>94</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice and translated by Habib Taherzadeh with the assistance of a Committee at the Bahá'í World Centre (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), 130.

<sup>95</sup> *Lights of Guidance*, no. 1599, p. 483.

<sup>96</sup> *Dispensation*, p. 115.

<sup>97</sup> The challenge-and-response motif is one of Arnold Toynbee's major theories of the growth and decline of civilizations as elaborated in his massive ten volume *A Study of History*. The challenge-and-response motif appears especially in "V. Challenge and Response" of D.C. Somervell's abridgement of volumes 1-IV, pp. 60-79. *A Study of History*, abridged by D.C. Somervell (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2 vols. 1957).

<sup>98</sup> *Dispensation*, p. 58

<sup>99</sup> Dann J. May, "The Báha'í Principle of Religious Unity: A Dynamic Perspectivism," p 20.

- <sup>100</sup> The Guardian made the following comment about the eclipse of religion: "No wonder, therefore, that when, as a result of human perversity, the light of religion is quenched in men's hearts, and the divinely appointed Robe, designed to adorn the human temple, is deliberately discarded, a deplorable decline in the fortunes of humanity immediately sets in, bringing in its wake all the evils which a wayward soul is capable of revealing." *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 186. Compare this with Bahá'u'lláh's statement: "And now concerning thy question regarding the nature of religion. Know thou that they who are truly wise have likened the world unto the human temple. As the body of man needeth a garment to clothe it, so the body of mankind must needs be adorned with the mantle of justice and wisdom." *Gleanings*, p. 285.
- <sup>101</sup> *Dispnesation*, p. 102.
- <sup>102</sup> Luther H. Martin, "Comparison," in Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon, eds., *Guide to the Study of Religion* (London and New York: Cassell, 2000), p. 45.
- <sup>103</sup> Lydgate quoted in *ibid*, p. 45. The original quotation is found in *Lydgate's Fall of Princes* (ed. circa 1430).
- <sup>104</sup> This dictum is a compression of "... you do not know that comparisons...beauty with beauty, birth with birth are always odious." Part two, chapter one (Lockhart's edition).
- <sup>105</sup> Sir John Fortescue (*de laudibus Legum Angliae*), Swift (*Drapier's Letters*), Lyly (*Euphues*), Marlowe (*Lust's Dominion*), Heywood (*A Woman Killed With Kindness*), Donne (*Elegy*), Herbert (*Jacula Prudentum*). From [bartleby.com/100/113.html](http://bartleby.com/100/113.html) & [www.answers.com/topic/comparisons-are-odious](http://www.answers.com/topic/comparisons-are-odious)
- <sup>106</sup> Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1986), p. 252.
- <sup>107</sup> See Luther H. Martin, "Comparison," pp. 45-56.
- <sup>108</sup> Max Müller, quoted in "Comparison," p. 52. Original quotation from Müller's *Biographical Essays* (1884) (New York: Scribners), pp. 80-81.
- <sup>109</sup> "Comparison," p. 52.
- <sup>110</sup> Hick wrote that W.C. Smith was responsible "...more than any other single individual, for the change which has taken place within a single generation in the way in which many of us perceive the religious life of mankind." "A Philosophy of Religious Pluralism" in John Hick, ed., *Classical and Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), p. 418.
- <sup>105</sup> "Comparison," p. 51. The timeless and spaceless primordial tradition is synonymous with the perennial philosophy (*philosophia perennis*). See Huston Smith's *Forgotten Truth: The Primordial Tradition* (1976). In *Toward a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), W.C. Smith wrote that "Those who believe in the unity of mankind, and the unity of God, should be prepared therefore to discover a unity of mankind's religious history" 4
- <sup>112</sup> Luther H. Martin, "Comparison," p. 49.
- <sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, p. 50.
- <sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, p. 51.
- <sup>115</sup> "Comparison," p. 52.
- <sup>116</sup> *Ibid*.

- <sup>117</sup> See, for example, the debate between Charles Davis and Donald Wiebe in *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* (1984). For the theological, i.e. faith inclusive view interacting with religious studies, read Charles Davis "Wherein there is no ecstasy," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, vol. 13, no. 4, 1984, pp. 393-400. See Donald Wiebe's strong rejoinder that proposed instead an "objective," "detached," "scientific," anti-theological, secular humanistic view in "The Failure of Nerve in the Academic Study of Religion" in *ibid*, pp. 401-22. Philip Boo Riley gives a good historical account of the methodological quest in "Theology and/or religious studies: A case study of *Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses*, 1971-1981" in *ibid*, pp. 423-44. For a view favorable to a self-conscious religiosity as the only adequate basis for the social scientific study of religion, see R.N. Bellah, "Christianity and Symbolic Realism," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 9, 1970.
- <sup>118</sup> See Donald Wiebe, "Modernism" in Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon, eds., *Guide to the Study of Religion* (London and New York: Cassell, 2000), pp. 351-64. Wiebe wrote earlier, and his position has not changed since, that religious studies must be committed to "...an objective, detached, scientific understanding of religion wholly uninfected by any sentiment of religiosity." "The Failure of Nerve in the Academic Study of Religion" in *op. cit.*, p. 393.
- <sup>119</sup> Luther H. Martin, "Comparison," p. 54.
- <sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, p. 53.
- <sup>121</sup> Shoghi Effendi, letter of June 1933 to the High Commissioner of Palestine. Extract from Compilation of Letters and Extracts of Writings From the Guardian Published in the Bahá'í News of the United States (December 1924 - November 1934), no. 85.
- This letter provides a cogent summary statement of the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith.
- <sup>122</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 75. The context in the talk "Spiritual Proofs" is the cyclical rise and fall of each world religion.
- <sup>123</sup> The complete sentence reads: "Far from aiming at the overthrow of the spiritual foundation of the world's religious systems, its avowed, its unalterable purpose is to widen their basis, to restate their fundamentals, to reconcile their aims, to reinvigorate their life, to demonstrate their oneness, to restore the pristine purity of their teachings, to coordinate their functions and to assist in the realization of their highest aspirations." The context is Shoghi Effendi's exposition of the station of Bahá'u'lláh which is accompanied by his usual cautionary or qualifying statement. *Dispensation*, p. 114.
- <sup>124</sup> See n. 83.
- <sup>125</sup> *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 54.
- <sup>126</sup> *Dispensation*, p. 152.