

An Overview of Bahá'í Eschatology, In a Tapestry of Four Strands

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Various notable scholarly works have been written on eschatological and apocalyptic themes in the Bahá'í Faith. Khazeh Fananapazir, for instance, offers a survey of references that aid in the understanding of Hájí Mihdí Armand's claim "that the day of Bahá'u'lláh is *Yawm Alláh* (the Day of God) and is the Day that was to come."¹ He draws on Biblical and Islamic sources to trace a line that culminates in the Bahá'í Revelation. Meanwhile, Ross Woodman adopts a distinctly mystical approach in his essays, exploring the apocalyptic nature of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, as the enactment of a spiritual marriage between the masculine and feminine aspects of Revelation and creation,² and as the birth of a new creation, emerging from the passing away of an old world.³ Writers such as J.E. Esslemont,⁴ George Townshend⁵ and John Ferraby⁶ touch upon the theme in their well-known introductions to the Bahá'í Faith, and it is found in numerous others besides these. Todd Lawson⁷ and Christopher Buck⁸ both address the subject of Revelation and Apocalypse in scriptural and hermeneutical terms in their erudite academic texts. Walied Jassat⁹ and Zaid Lundberg¹⁰ provide broad overviews of Bahá'í eschatology, the former a personal narrative drawing on diverse religious sources, and the latter focused principally on the concept of progressive revelation.

However, the majority of scholarly articles explicitly and primarily written on the subject of Bahá'í apocalypticism and eschatology assume a historical perspective. Stephen Lambden's article "Catastrophe, Armageddon and Millennium"¹¹ provides an excellent illustration of this tendency. Characteristically well researched, the piece opens with a brief survey of Biblical, Islamic and Bahá'í references to apocalyptic catastrophe, while the remainder is chiefly concerned with twentieth century fulfilments of apocalyptic prophecies and the question of how Bahá'ís might be situated in relation to the millennialist traditions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. William Collins is similarly engaged with discourses on the status and nature

¹ Khazeh Fananapazir, "The Day of God (*Yawmu'lláh*) and the Days of God (*Ayyámu'lláh*)," in *Scripture and Revelation*, ed. Moojan Momen, 217-238 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1997), 217

² Ross Woodman, "'In the Beginning Was the Word': Apocalypse and the Education of the Soul," *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 5, no. 4 (1993)

³ Ross Woodman, "The End of the World: Whatever Happened? Or Leftover Time to Kill," *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 3, no. 3 (1991)

⁴ For example, in chapter 13 of his very highly regarded and comprehensive *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2006).

⁵ As the former Canon of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin and Archdeacon of Clonfert, he lays particular emphasis on elucidating Bahá'u'lláh's fulfilment of Biblical prophecies in his book *The Promise of All Ages* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1972).

⁶ John Ferraby, *All Things Made New* (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2007)

⁷ Todd Lawson, *Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam: Qur'án, Exegesis, Messianism, and the Literary Origins of the Bábí Religion* (London: Routledge, 2011)

⁸ Christopher Buck, *Symbol and Secret: Qur'án Commentary in Bahá'u'lláh's Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1995)

⁹ Walied Jassat, *The Last Day* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2012)

¹⁰ Zaid Lundberg, *Bahá'í Apocalypticism: The Concept of Progressive Revelation* (Unpublished, 1996), http://bahai-library.com/lundberg_bahai_apocalypticism

¹¹ Stephen Lambden, "Catastrophe, Armageddon and Millennium: Some Aspects of the Bábí-Bahá'í Exegesis of Apocalyptic Symbolism," *Bahá'í Studies Review* 9 (2000): 81-99

of Bahá'í millennialism, responding to Lambden in a later article¹² and providing an excellent analysis of Bahá'í apocalyptic prophecies that herald both cataclysm and universal peace, and the reception by the Bahá'í community of such prophecies.¹³ Moojan Momen has also written extensively on the subject and his essay "Apocalyptic Thinking and Process Thinking: A Bahá'í Contribution to Religious Thought" is particularly illuminating, detailing the ways in which the Bahá'í Revelation has effected profound transformations in the religious conception of apocalypse and its relationship to social betterment.¹⁴ These pieces emerged out of a need to survey, understand and respond to certain trends that arose in the Bahá'í world in the twentieth century, in which an inclination towards speculation and interpretation was somewhat prevalent in the western community's conception of apocalypse. Perhaps these trends were remnants of earlier traditions of eschatology, particularly forms of Biblical exegesis that preoccupied with the predicting of dates for major events of divine revelation. In any case, these articles are exemplary in their historical treatment of Apocalypse.

Cognisant of such valuable and scholarly contributions to the subject of Bahá'í eschatology, the aim of this article is to offer, humbly, a broader overview of the Bahá'í conception of Apocalypse, highlighting four main threads in this highly significant theme. While the aforementioned works, particularly those noted above as being historically oriented, have focused primarily on certain facets of Bahá'í eschatology, in this essay I hope to present my topic as a rich tapestry, comprising multiple interwoven strands, which, although vastly diverse in their languages, are inextricable from one another. While the historical interpretation of eschatology is indispensable, as repeatedly evidenced in the writings of Shoghi Effendi, it can only be illuminated more brightly when viewed in the light of theological and mystical components, and vice versa. Indeed, to focus only on the historical expression of Apocalypse is to leave out an understanding of the fundamental Reality that is revealed in history, while by concentrating only on the theological and mystical we perhaps fail to perceive how such spiritual principles can be manifested in humanity.

Introduction: Apocalypse in the Bahá'í Writings

The word "apocalypse" is rarely found in the scriptural and authoritative texts of the Bahá'í Faith, but the notion it refers to runs throughout these writings, playing different roles and relating to diverse religious traditions. It plays an important part in the Bahá'í concept of "progressive revelation", which asserts that every major religion brings a new stage in humanity's progress, together constituting a single continual process of divine revelation. Every religion is seen to come from God, while differences between religions are understood to be the result of variations in the conditions of the time and place of revelation, as well as the capacity and receptivity of the society to which they were revealed. The essence of every religion is one and the same, but its expression must be revealed fittingly for each new dispensation,

¹² William P. Collins, "The Apocalyptic Upheaval Completed?" *Bahá'í Studies Review* 10 (2001): 134-144

¹³ William P. Collins, "Apocalypse and Millennium: Catastrophe, Progress, and the Lesser Peace," *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 12, no. 1-4 (2002): 1-30

¹⁴ Moojan Momen, "Apocalyptic Thinking and Process Thinking: A Bahá'í Contribution to Religious Thought," in *Lights of 'Irfán Volume 13*, ed. Iraj Ayman, 243-270 (Evanston, Ill.: 'Irfán Colloquia, 2012)

“renewed, reformed, revoiced to mankind.”¹⁵ The treatment of the apocalyptic prophecies of other religious traditions plays a crucial role in clarifying the progressive succession of one Revelation to the next. As Stephen Lambden notes, Bahá’í Scripture interprets the theme “sometimes literally, sometimes spiritually, and occasionally in both these ways”. He observes that “both the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh undertook a courageous demythologization of apocalyptic scenarios anticipated in Biblical and Islamic scripture and tradition.”¹⁶ Throughout the Bahá’í writings allusions to Apocalypse, or Revelation, perform the dual function of both instilling in the believers the urgent need to recognise and follow Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings, while also celebrating the eternal presence of God and the fulfilment of all past prophecies in the Bahá’í Revelation.

There are references in the Bahá’í writings to an “unforeseen calamity”,¹⁷ a “Catastrophe”¹⁸ and a “Day of Judgement”,¹⁹ variously referencing the Old and New Testaments, the Qur’án and hadiths, as well as the extensive traditions on this theme in Shi’ah Islam, particularly its Twelver branch. Bahá’u’lláh describes an event “which shall cause the limbs of mankind to quake”,²⁰ while Shoghi Effendi writes of an “apocalyptic upheaval”.²¹ In another passage, Bahá’u’lláh warns the reader:

There is no place of refuge for you, no asylum to which ye can flee, no one to defend or to protect you in this Day from the fury of the wrath of God and from His vehement power, unless and until ye seek the shadow of His Revelation.²²

It might be fruitful, then, to consider Bahá’u’lláh’s declaration in *The Hidden Words*: “My calamity is My providence, outwardly it is fire and vengeance, but inwardly it is light and mercy. Hasten thereunto that thou mayest become an eternal light and an immortal spirit.”²³ Indeed, throughout all the references in the Bahá’í writings to such an earth-shattering event there are also inseparable allusions to a “Divine Springtime”,²⁴ a “wondrous Day”²⁵ and a “Day of Resurrection”.²⁶ Emphasis is placed on the eternal and imperishable nature of the joy found at the heart of God’s Revelation, when one turns to it. Bahá’u’lláh proclaims:

In this Day a great festival is taking place in the Realm above; for whatsoever was promised in the sacred Scriptures hath been fulfilled. This is the Day of great rejoicing. It behooveth everyone to hasten towards the court of His nearness with

¹⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), 141

¹⁶ Lambden, “Catastrophe,” 81

¹⁷ Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words and Selected Holy Writings* (Kuala Lumpur: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1999), 57

¹⁸ Bahá’u’lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1988), 132

¹⁹ Bahá’u’lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts* (Bundoora: Bahá’í Publications Australia, 2002), 59

²⁰ Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh* (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1978), 118

²¹ Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1980), 58

²² Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, 256

²³ Bahá’u’lláh, *Hidden*, 23

²⁴ Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, 27

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 11

²⁶ Found throughout the Bahá’í writings, with a particularly noteworthy mention in Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), 92

exceeding joy, gladness, exultation and delight and to deliver himself from the fire of remoteness.²⁷

These twin forces that characterise the transformative nature of Revelation, with its profound upheaval and cataclysm, but also its ultimate and “inward” joy, peace and salvation, are expressed and clarified throughout the diverse aspects of Bahá’í eschatology. It is important to note that Apocalypse, in this complete sense, is not envisaged solely as an event that will simply befall a passive humanity, but instead every description is a call for some form of active response, both as individuals and as the human race, to realise the universally salvific character of Revelation. While its effects on creation are seen to be inevitable and inexorable it is also understood that human beings have agency to accept or deny its teachings and influence, and live in accordance with it or in defiance against it. Moreover, the human being is cast as the being in creation most profoundly stirred by the Revelation and as such is recognised as the primary instrument for the advancement and betterment of the world. In other words, Revelation manifests itself in the transformation of all created things, in a world suffused with agency. In the last sections of this paper we will examine more closely the way such choices are viewed.

Moojan Momen points out that the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh came to a populace, both in Persia and globally, who largely subscribed to the understanding that religious change and its effects upon social reality would come about through miraculous divine intervention, in which “Humans would for the most part, especially in relation to the events of the Day of Resurrection, be passive participants.”²⁸ He examines the way in which the Bábí and Bahá’í Dispensations initiated a change in religious thinking, casting humanity at the heart of a process of transformation shaped at all levels by the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh. Four distinctly definable but entirely inextricable strands can be identified within this theme, and together they weave a rich and nuanced conception of Apocalypse.

The Ever-Present Apocalypse, or “Universal Revelation”

Given the widely held conception of the Apocalypse, or the last days, as simply the end point of the universe’s linear timeline, it is necessary to recognise that in the Bahá’í teachings such a notion is viewed as incomplete. While Apocalypse is also treated in these teachings as an event in time, which we will go on to examine in the next three strands, it is first necessary to understand what such an Apocalypse would reveal (acknowledging its original meaning of ‘unveiling’) and what the event would ultimately constitute. Can these references simply relate to the physical end of the physical universe, or is there a relationship between temporality and eternity that renders their significance broader and deeper? Of particular significance in this connection is Bahá’u’lláh’s assertion that “The process of His creation hath had no beginning, and can have no end.”²⁹ Indeed, there are references throughout the Bahá’í writings to “the beginning that hath no beginning” and “the end that hath no end”.³⁰ This suggests that, while we may speak of a beginning and an end, these concepts cannot be divorced from that of God’s eternal presence.

²⁷ Bahá’u’lláh, *Epistle*, 78-79

²⁸ Momen, “Process,” 244

²⁹ Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, 61

³⁰ Found throughout the Bahá’í writings, notably in Bahá’u’lláh, *Summons*, 39

In the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, Bahá'u'lláh explores in depth the notion of Revelation as “attainment unto the Presence of God”,³¹ distinguishing and analysing three conceptions of this notion. The first of these is the notion of the “Universal Revelation”, which is the eternal presence of God, as reflected in all things. He asserts, reminding us of the need for the active purification of our spiritual senses,

were man to gaze with the eye of divine and spiritual discernment, he will readily recognize that nothing whatsoever can exist without the revelation of God, the ideal King. Consider how all created things eloquently testify to the revelation of that inner Light within them.³²

In this sense the Apocalypse, as the uncovering of God's presence, is eternally present at the heart of all things. In his analysis of the notion of the “Day of God”, Khazeh Fananapazir cites *Cruden's Complete Concordance to the Old and New Testaments*, which suggests that such a “Day” might be considered to exist “from all eternity, in which there is no succession, no yesterday, no tomorrow but it is all one continued day or moment without change or flux; or it may refer to the manifestation of Christ's eternal sonship in time.”³³

Implicit in this sense of Revelation, therefore, is also one of concealment from those who look to created things without seeking the infinite presence of God reflected in them. This might be compared to the fragmented and darkened view of reality described by St Paul in 1 Corinthians, which nevertheless always holds the possibility of clarity: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.” (ESV, 1 Corinthians 13:12) Therefore, references in the Bahá'í writings to the effacement of all created things – such as Bahá'u'lláh's proclamation of the Day of God, “Lo, the entire creation hath passed away!” – can perhaps be understood to mean the passing away of the dross that covers the reflection of God in the mirror of creation. As the passage goes on to describe, “Nothing remaineth except My Face, the Ever-Abiding, the Resplendent, the All-Glorious.”³⁴

However, the removal of this dross (a process much discussed in the Bahá'í writings) is dependent upon the purification of one's own relationship with God. As such, while Bahá'u'lláh Himself recognises and announces the eternal presence of God in all things as the Day of God, such a reality passes the rest of humanity by, to varying degrees. As the Báb writes in the *Persian Bayán*,

The Day of Resurrection is a day on which the sun riseth and setteth like unto any other day. How oft hath the Day of Resurrection dawned, and the people of the land where it occurred did not learn of the event.³⁵

And in another passage from the same book:

The revelation of the Divine Reality hath everlastingly been identical with its concealment and its concealment identical with its revelation. That which is intended by ‘Revelation of God’ is the Tree of divine Truth that betokeneth none

³¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 89

³² *Ibid.*, 90

³³ Alexander Cruden, *Cruden's Complete Concordance to the Old and New Testaments* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1769), 91, as quoted in Fananapazir, “Day”, 219

³⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 29

³⁵ The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), 78

but Him, and it is this divine Tree that hath raised and will raise up Messengers, and hath revealed and will ever reveal Scriptures.³⁶

Revealed in all things, God is, then, “the most manifest of the manifest and the most hidden of the hidden”³⁷ – the fundamental Reality we cannot perceive, recognise or align ourselves with if we fail to acknowledge the signs of God and instead look to the finitude of worldly things.

The Messengers as Apocalypse, or the “Secondary Revelation of God”

This ties us inextricably to the second strand, which Bahá’u’lláh names the “Secondary Revelation of God”,³⁸ and which corresponds to the revelation of God through the figures referred to in the Bahá’í writings as “Manifestations of God”; a designation that includes all the divine Originators of the major world religions. Paraphrasing ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi writes, “at the time of the Manifestation the veils are very thin, so to speak.”³⁹ Each Manifestation of God possesses the same nature that reveals the presence of God, precisely because their relationship with Him is so mysteriously intertwined. Considering, as we saw in the previous strand, that all created things reflect God, we may view the Manifestations as the complete reflection of God’s light in creation. Bahá’u’lláh writes:

Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes. Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self.⁴⁰

The Manifestations of God are, therefore, the perfectly clean mirrors “that truly and faithfully reflect the light of God.”⁴¹ As such, the “Universal Revelation” of the first strand is in some sense incomplete without this second strand.

Between the clarifications of these two notions of Revelation in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, Bahá’u’lláh writes of a concept referred to as the “Specific Revelation of God”, meaning access, as a human being, to “the innermost Essence” of God.⁴² He describes this as impossible to anyone but God, with the explanation that the Manifestations of God are the points in creation that are cleansed of all the dross of the world and are thus enabled to reflect all of God’s names and attributes, which are engraved on the human heart, but are not themselves human beings who have somehow accessed or become God’s Essence. Shoghi Effendi clarifies the nature of the Manifestations of God, emphasising that “the complete incarnation of the names and attributes of God in so exalted a Person should, under no circumstances, be misconceived or misinterpreted”, distinguishing between God’s revelation through these figures in creation and the “eternal Essence of Essences”, which is God in “His infinite, His

³⁶ Ibid., 112

³⁷ Bahá’u’lláh, *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá’u’lláh* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1987), 248

³⁸ Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 91

³⁹ Helen Bassett Hornby, *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í Reference File* (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 2012), 481

⁴⁰ Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, 65

⁴¹ Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 91

⁴² Ibid.

unknowable, His incorruptible and all-embracing Reality”.⁴³ Later in the same text he quotes a striking passage from Bahá’u’lláh:

When I contemplate, O my God, the relationship that bindeth me to Thee, [...] I am moved to proclaim to all created things ‘verily I am God!’; and when I consider my own self, lo, I find it coarser than clay!⁴⁴

Therefore, given the inaccessibility of God’s Essence for humanity, it is through the Manifestations of God that we “attain unto the Divine Presence”. Bahá’u’lláh states: “The knowledge of Him, Who is the Origin of all things, and attainment unto Him, are impossible save through knowledge of, and attainment unto, these luminous Beings who proceed from the Sun of Truth.”⁴⁵ The Bahá’í teachings speak of an “Eternal Covenant” between God and humanity in which God promises to send Manifestations throughout all eternity. This second strand of Bahá’í eschatology refers to the appearance of these Figures. In the *Persian Bayán* the Báb states that the “Day of Resurrection” is the phase lasting “from the time of the appearance of Him Who is the Tree of divine Reality, at whatever period and under whatever name, until the moment of His disappearance”.⁴⁶ Michael Sours has suggested that, in light of statements made in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, this period should be viewed as that lasting from the time of a Manifestation’s proclamation of His message, to the time of the next Manifestation’s proclamation.⁴⁷

The Apocalypse of a New Dispensation

While in the first two strands mention of calamity has been mostly attenuated and implicit, with the grace of attaining God’s presence and the mercy of God’s promise to eternally send guidance through Manifestations accentuated, it is in the last two that the eternal becomes more explicitly interwoven with the temporal and we see the effects in history of such events. These effects are both integrative, when humanity moves with the forces released by the coming of a Manifestation, whether consciously or otherwise, and disintegrative, when humanity denies itself God’s guidance and grace – but it should be borne in mind that all these events are *inwardly* “light and mercy”.

The third strand relates to the key concept of “progressive revelation”. Rather than merely a cyclical repetition of God’s message to humanity, this process is the impetus that drives humanity’s progress as an “ever-advancing civilization”.⁴⁸ In this sense, the coming of each new Manifestation of God marks the Day of Judgement and the Day of Resurrection for the preceding dispensation. In a letter to the Sherif of Mecca, who failed to respond to the Báb’s summons to accept the new Revelation, the Báb admonishes him that although he has worshipped God his whole life he has now failed to recognise the Manifestation of God: “Thus hath Thy Lord put thee to proof in the Day of Resurrection.”⁴⁹ In the *Persian Bayán* the Báb puts forward this conception of Apocalypse clearly and concisely, stating that each Manifestation of God calls the believers of the past dispensation to recognise the essence of God’s eternal Revelation

⁴³ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1991), 112

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 113

⁴⁵ Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 91

⁴⁶ The Báb, *Selections*, 106-107

⁴⁷ Michael Sours, *The Station and Claims of Bahá’u’lláh* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1997), 116-117

⁴⁸ Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, 214

⁴⁹ The Báb, *Selections*, 29

in its renewed expression. He refers to Jesus Christ, for example, “Who rewarded by His Word everyone who believed in Moses, and punished by His Word everyone who did not believe; inasmuch as God’s Testimony for that Day was that which He had solemnly affirmed in the Gospel.”⁵⁰

Mírzá Abú’l-Faḍl expounds on this theme in one brief passage,⁵¹ asserting that the terms “Return” and “Resurrection” refer to the time in which God’s message to humanity is renewed through the coming of a new Manifestation. He emphasises the common spiritual essence of God’s Messengers, narrating the time prophesied in each Dispensation “when all that had transpired would be played out once more, retracing each footstep.” He goes on to describe how “The prepared souls would be awaiting the appearance of Manifestations of God and watching for the reappearance of a primal reality.” This suggests the need for a certain spiritual perceptivity that is able to see the “primal reality” of the past Messengers of God in the new Manifestation, despite changes of time, place and appearance, and, perhaps most importantly, despite an overwhelming lack of acceptance from the vast majority of society. He further expresses how in this way “exalted souls would be raised from the tombs of their bodies” at the time of the coming of the Manifestation. This account, then, denotes the dual requirements of preparation and recognition if one is to attain to that Day of Resurrection foretold in all Holy Scriptures and never withheld from humanity. As Bahá’u’lláh emphatically states, “Whoso hath been re-born in this Day, shall never die; whoso remaineth dead, shall never live.”⁵² Thus, in this strand there is not only the glory of “attaining unto the Divine Presence” through the Manifestations of God in general, but also the challenge of recognising and accepting the new chapter of God’s continual Revelation and not becoming attached to the “outward forms” of religion – its laws, ceremonies and dogmas.

While both the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh are recognised as Manifestations of God, the roles each play are understood to be different from one another. The Báb is recognised as the Herald of the Bahá’í Revelation and as the Qá’im (He Who arises) or Mihdí (One Who is guided) of Islam. However, it should be emphasised that “the greatness of the Báb consists primarily, not in His being the divinely-appointed Forerunner of so transcendent a Revelation,” but rather in His station of “independent Prophethood”, as the “inaugurator of a separate religious Dispensation”.⁵³ This Dispensation lasted only nine years before “the burden of the promised Cause of God was cast amidst the gloom and agony of the Síyáh-Chál of Tīhrán”,⁵⁴ where Bahá’u’lláh was imprisoned and received His Revelation. Bahá’u’lláh, meanwhile, is recognised as “the Promised One of all ages”, a station clarified by Shoghi Effendi as fulfilling the eschatological prophecies of all past religions. He writes:

To Israel He was neither more nor less than the incarnation of the ‘Everlasting Father,’ the ‘Lord of Hosts’ come down ‘with ten thousands of saints’; to Christendom Christ returned ‘in the glory of the Father,’ to Shí’ah Islám the return of the Imám Ḥusayn; to Sunní Islám the descent of the ‘Spirit of God’ (Jesus Christ); to the Zoroastrians the promised Sháh-Bahrám; to the Hindus the reincarnation of Krishna; to the Buddhists the fifth Buddha.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Ibid., 107

⁵¹ Mírzá Abú’l-Faḍl Gulpáygání, *Letters and Essays, 1886-1913* (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1985), 9

⁵² Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, 213

⁵³ Shoghi Effendi, *Order*, 123

⁵⁴ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1979), 92

⁵⁵ Ibid., 94

He goes on to expand on each of these claims with references from the writings of each tradition.⁵⁶

In Bahá'u'lláh's *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* – addressed to a shaykh who, along with his father, was notorious for his merciless persecution of Bahá'ís – a long paragraph is spent in an imagined dialogue with individuals who question the advent of the Apocalypse. Questions are raised such as, “Hath the Catastrophe come to pass?”; “Is the Resurrection come?”; “When were the heavens cleft asunder?” and Bahá'u'lláh answers in the affirmative to every one, announcing that those who did not recognise such an event remained heedless because while it passed they “lay in the graves of waywardness and error” and in the “cradle of idle fancies”.⁵⁷ In *Some Answered Questions* ‘Abdu'l-Bahá interprets the three woes of the Book of Revelation to be Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, “for in that day woe is upon the heedless and the sinners, and the ignorant.”⁵⁸

A corollary to the notion of progressive revelation from one Manifestation of God to the next is the concept of “universal cycles”. In the Bahá'í writings the Báb is described as signalling “the termination of the ‘Prophetic Cycle’ and the inception of the ‘Cycle of Fulfilment,’”⁵⁹ thus marking a similar point in time to that mentioned above. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá states, “We are in the cycle which began with Adam and whose universal Manifestation is Bahá'u'lláh.”⁶⁰

The Historical Apocalypse

Finally we come to the fourth strand, which relates to recorded historical events such as wars and revolutions, as well as technological, scientific and social changes and advances. Throughout the Bahá'í writings these are understood as effects and signs of the presence of the Manifestations of God and the profoundly transformative forces of their revelations. To take two examples from the writings of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá:

All things are now made new. Arts and industries have been reborn, there are new discoveries in science, and there are new inventions; even the details of human affairs, such as dress and personal effects – even weapons – all these have likewise been renewed. The laws and procedures of every government have been revised.⁶¹

And in another passage: “When the holy, divine Manifestations or Prophets appear in the world, a cycle of radiance, an age of mercy dawns. Everything is renewed.”⁶² As such, this strand is tightly bound with the divine nature of the previous three, despite relating to events that might be located as much on a secular timeline as a religious one.

Bearing in mind the two aspects of Bahá'í eschatology discussed throughout this article – the catastrophic and the salvific – it might be useful to consider a theme greatly explored by Shoghi Effendi. At various points in his writings, in which the “mixed literary, historical, and theological threads of the text are woven into one

⁵⁶ Ibid., 94-97

⁵⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle*, 131-134

⁵⁸ ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2014), 64

⁵⁹ Shoghi Effendi, *God*, 57

⁶⁰ ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Questions*, 183

⁶¹ ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, 253

⁶² Ibid., 278

apocalyptic language”,⁶³ he examines the processes of integration and disintegration, describing them as

aspects of a greater Plan, one and indivisible, whose Source is God, whose author is Bahá'u'lláh, the theater of whose operations is the entire planet, and whose ultimate objectives are the unity of the human race and the peace of all mankind.⁶⁴

In this conception of history, the “vibrating influence”⁶⁵ of the twin revelations of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh has stirred all created things to respond to the divine call for universal oneness. On the one hand, the integrative force of universal love, peace and equality contributes to the steady establishment of a new civilisation founded on the Bahá'í laws, ordinances and teachings of humanity's essential oneness. It “unfolds a System which may well serve as a pattern for that world polity towards which a strangely-disordered world is continually advancing”. On the other hand, the disintegrative force characterised by prejudice, war and injustice has heightened its corrosive effects on a crumbling and outmoded world order, hastening its collapse; this force, “as its disintegrating influence deepens, tends to tear down, with increasing violence, the antiquated barriers that seek to block humanity's progress towards its destined goal.” While one process “stands associated with the nascent Faith of Bahá'u'lláh”, working steadfastly to cultivate a new system in full cognisance of the present state of humanity and the message delivered to it by God for this age, the other “should be identified with a civilization that has refused to answer to the expectation of a new age, and is consequently falling into chaos and decline” – it both results from and dismantles a system that has failed to acknowledge its own demise or recognise its salvation.⁶⁶

Far from viewing these twin forces as existing in a simplistic binary opposition, one battling to overcome the other, both are seen as inexorably leading to the same ultimate establishment of world unity and peace – the first progressing consciously towards this goal, the other leading towards it through its own continual undoing. There is a profound hope to be found in such a concept: the catastrophes we see erupting the world over are simply the “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.”⁶⁷ This has profound implications for the activities of the Bahá'í community and its engagement with broader society. The Universal House of Justice has continually emphasised that “To enter into the quixotic tournament of demolishing one by one the evils in the world is, to a Bahá'í, a vain waste of time and effort.” Rather, “Their whole energy is directed towards the building of the good, a good which has such a positive strength that in the face of it the multitude of evils – which are in essence negative – will fade away and be no more.”⁶⁸

Bahá'ís recognise direct references in the writings of both ‘Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi to the First and Second World Wars, in which these events are

⁶³ Jack McLean, *A Celestial Burning: A Selective Study of the Writings of Shoghi Effendi* (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2012), 140

⁶⁴ Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2006), 109

⁶⁵ The Báb, *Selections*, 195 and Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), 85

⁶⁶ All quotations from Shoghi Effendi, *Order*, 170

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 155

⁶⁸ The Universal House of Justice, *To the National Spiritual Assembly of Italy, 19 November 1974*

identified with the cataclysmic prophecies of the past.⁶⁹ In October 1912 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke at Stanford University: “We are on the eve of the battle of Armageddon, referred to in the sixteenth chapter of Revelation. The time is two years hence, when only a spark will set aflame the whole of Europe.”⁷⁰ From 1927 to 1939 Shoghi Effendi made several allusions that Bahá’ís understand to have been referring to the Second World War, writing of “another deadly encounter”⁷¹ and stating, “The rumblings that must precede the eruption of those forces that must cause ‘the limbs of humanity to quake’ can already be heard. ‘The time of the end,’ ‘the latter years,’ as foretold in the Scriptures, are at long last upon us.”⁷² In later texts he goes on to make it clear that he does not consider these two cataclysmic events to have marked the completion of the apocalyptic processes of “calamity” and “disintegration”. For instance, in a letter to an individual dated 8 January 1949 he writes that

it seems apparent that the great failure to respond to Bahá’u’lláh’s instructions, appeals and warnings issued in the 19th century, has now sent the world along a path, or released forces, which must culminate in a still more violent upheaval and agony. The thing is out of hand, so to speak, and it is too late to avert catastrophic trials.⁷³

However, inseparable from these conceptions of the Apocalypse is the prophecy of universal peace and unity, which will emerge through the effects associated with the events mentioned above. Bahá’u’lláh described two major phases in the establishment of this coming age of harmony, referring to the first as the “Lesser Peace” and the second as the “Most Great Peace” (we might note here Moojan Momen’s argument that in the Bahá’í writings they are treated as “intertwined and evolving together”⁷⁴ rather than necessarily sequential to one another). The Lesser Peace is defined as a secular and political peace, brought about largely by the coming together of world leaders in order to “convene an all-inclusive assembly, which either they themselves or their ministers will attend, and to enforce whatever measures are required to establish unity and concord amongst men.”⁷⁵ The Most Great Peace, on the other hand, entails “the spiritualization of the world and the fusion of all its races, creeds, classes and nations”⁷⁶ in a World Commonwealth that accepts Bahá’u’lláh’s station, laws and teachings, and takes as its watchwords the principles of “unity in diversity” and the “Oneness of Mankind – the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh revolve”.⁷⁷

William Collins identifies several periods about which apocalyptic predictions have been made within the Bahá’í community in the twentieth century, particularly in the West. He emphasises, however, that neither the Bahá’í writings nor the Bahá’í

⁶⁹ It is also noteworthy that on page 53 (paragraph 90) of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* Bahá’u’lláh writes portentously, “O banks of the Rhine! We have seen you covered with gore, inasmuch as the swords of retribution were drawn against you; and you shall have another turn. And We hear the lamentations of Berlin, though she be today in conspicuous glory.”

⁷⁰ Corinne True in *The North Shore Review*, 26 September 1914, as quoted in J.E. Esslemont, *Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era* (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 2006), 267

⁷¹ Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974), 145

⁷² Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1947), 13

⁷³ Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny: The Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith to the Bahá’í Community of the British Isles* (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1981), 454

⁷⁴ Momen, “Process,” 245

⁷⁵ Bahá’u’lláh, *Epistle*, 30-31

⁷⁶ Shoghi Effendi, *Order*, 162

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 42-43

Administration support the assertions made in such instances.⁷⁸ A Syrian Bahá'í named Ibrahim Kheiralla, who came from a Christian background and moved to the United States in 1892, made the first of these predictions. Citing the prophesy in the Book of Daniel concerning 1,335 days, Kheiralla claimed that the year 1917, which is the year 1335 in the Islamic calendar, would mark the establishment of universal peace, following a period of war and calamity. 'Abdu'l-Bahá made clear that such an event would not be ushered in at that particular point, but did make reference to Daniel's prophecy, with indications in authenticated manuscripts to its fulfilment in both 1957 and 1963. However, as Shoghi Effendi clarifies, there is no suggestion in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words that either of these years would coincide with the dawn of universal peace: "in the Bahá'í teachings themselves there is nothing to indicate that any definite degree of world peace will be established by 1957, nor by 1963".⁷⁹ Rather, in these years the most significant events witnessed in the Bahá'í calendar were the passing of Shoghi Effendi and the establishment of the Universal House of Justice respectively. A more overarching expectation within the Bahá'í community spanned the whole of the twentieth century, with a particular focus on the year 2000. This belief was influenced considerably by a letter written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in which seven principles integral to the foundation of world unity are enunciated, with each one referred to as a "candle". 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes the fifth candle as "the unity of nations – a unity which in this century will be securely established, causing all the peoples of the world to regard themselves as citizens of one common fatherland."⁸⁰ Highlighting this and other similar statements made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, a significant number of Bahá'ís in the West adhered to the view that the Lesser Peace would be entirely in place by the end of the twentieth century.

Aside from Shoghi Effendi's own attempts to discourage such inclinations toward the setting of specific dates, the Universal House of Justice also released several statements on these matters, emphasising that Bahá'ís should see the establishment of the Lesser Peace and in turn the Most Great Peace as a process rather than a set of events miraculously birthed by cataclysms and catastrophes. In a letter dated 29 July 1974 the Universal House of Justice cites Shoghi Effendi:

All we know is that the Lesser and the Most Great Peace will come – their exact dates we do not know. The same is true as regards the possibility of a future war; we cannot state dogmatically it will or will not take place – all we know is that mankind must suffer and be punished sufficiently to make it turn to God.

They go on to advise, "It is apparent that the disintegration of the old order is accelerating, but the friends should not permit this inevitable process to deter them from giving their undivided attention to the tasks lying immediately before them."⁸¹ A 19 April 2001 letter to an individual believer addressed issues raised concerning "the timing for the occurrence of the Lesser Peace, in light of your impression that the Bahá'í Writings anticipate its coming before the conclusion of the twentieth century".⁸²

⁷⁸ Collins, "Apocalypse"

⁷⁹ Shoghi Effendi, as quoted in J.E. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1946), ix

⁸⁰ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), 32

⁸¹ The Universal House of Justice, *To the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, 29 July 1974*

⁸² The Universal House of Justice, *Attainment of the Unity of Nations and the Lesser Peace, 19 April 2001*

In the letter “an orientation to process” is encouraged, while drawing attention to the understanding that the

emergence of the unity of nations [...] the evidence of which accumulates with each passing day, stands in sharp contrast to the nationalistic tenor of the nineteenth century, and is an evidence of the spirit of a new age moving in the hearts of humankind. Viewed from this perspective, there can be no doubt that the promise of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has been fulfilled, and the unity of nations securely established in the century now concluded.

Included in the letter is a memorandum from the Research Department at the Bahá’í World Centre, titled *Attainment of the Unity of Nations and the Lesser Peace*, which collates numerous passages and statements from the Bahá’í writings that point to both significant events and the need for a conception of the establishment of universal peace as an unfolding process to which Bahá’ís must contribute following the principles and guidance of the Bahá’í teachings.

In dispelling the gloom of speculation and fear regarding the calamities foreseen in the Bahá’í writings, a 1 July 1984 message from the International Teaching Centre to the Continental Board of Counsellors in the Americas is equally illuminating. In the document, titled *Pilgrims’ Notes and the “Calamity”*, the International Teaching Centre collates excerpts from numerous letters of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, clarifying firstly the non-authoritative status of pilgrims’ notes and secondly the lack of grounding for speculations on, and the detrimental nature of preoccupations with, any impending cataclysmic upheavals. Finally, the letter draws from authoritative sources elucidating the way in which Bahá’ís should respond to any such events. With an attitude free of fear and uncertainty, the Bahá’í community is urged to seek an understanding of the integrative and disintegrative forces depicted by Shoghi Effendi and work steadfastly to contribute to the effects of the former by imbuing our communities and the world at large with the spirit of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation. The letter can perhaps be summarised by two excerpts quoted in the document and drawn from two separate letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi. He urges the Bahá’ís, when observing the conditions of the world, “Let us be reminded of our duty by the misery we see around us, and arise for the prosecution of our noble duty.”⁸³ He provides the assurance, “What they are doing will release forces which will combat the terrible disintegration of society which we witness today in every field, political, economic or otherwise.”⁸⁴

Conclusion: The Process of Revelation

In order to gain a fuller understanding of the Bahá’í conception of Apocalypse, or Revelation – to use a less loaded synonym – its relationship with time and history and, most crucially, the role of humanity as its recipients, it is necessary to take into consideration its various nuanced facets, which I have attempted to classify and outline in this paper. As Shoghi Effendi elegantly notes, “One might liken Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings to a sphere; there are points poles apart, and in between the thoughts and

⁸³ Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *To the American National Spiritual Assembly, 24 November 1931*, as quoted in International Teaching Centre, *Pilgrims’ Notes and the “Calamity”*, 1 July 1984

⁸⁴ Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *To an Individual Believer, 5 July 1947*, as quoted in International Teaching Centre, *“Calamity”*

doctrines that unite them.”⁸⁵ In the first strand presented in this paper we saw the notion of Revelation as the eternal, unchanging heart of creation, while in the last strand we saw Revelation embodied in the swelling and stirring contours of history, evidenced in the upheavals and tectonic shifts through which humanity passes century upon century in its previously unimagined discoveries, advances and catastrophes. Between these poles we found the episodic arrival of the Manifestations of God, viewed on the one hand as the fulfilment of God’s part of His Eternal Covenant with humanity – the unceasing return to the world, at periodic points in history, of one and the same primal reality; and on the other hand as the divine Inaugurators of distinct and unprecedented epochs in the ever-progressing life of humanity.

Perhaps at the core of these notions, uniting their apparently disparate coordinates, is an acknowledgement of the human being’s mysterious relationship with his Creator. Made in the image and likeness of God, imbued with the potential of reflecting all His divine names and attributes, the nature of the human spirit “inclines it towards transcendence, a reaching towards an invisible realm, towards the ultimate reality, that unknowable Essence of essences called God.”⁸⁶ Situated as we are between the material and the spiritual, our innate purpose has ever been and will continue to be, on the one hand, to know God and to worship Him, and on the other to “carry forward an ever-advancing civilisation”. Each aspect depends upon the other, as we strive to manifest the eternal attributes of God – attributes such as love, justice and unity – in the transient world of creation. Bahá’u’lláh exhorts us, “Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.”⁸⁷

The Bahá’í writings teach us that such an education originates in the Revelation brought to humanity by the Manifestations of God, the “universal Educators”. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us, “the universal Educator must be at once a material, a human, and a spiritual educator, and, soaring above the world of nature, must be possessed of another power, so that He may assume the station of a divine teacher.”⁸⁸ He must be capable of delivering teachings, perfectly suited to the needs of the age, that shed new light into the realms of physical health and wellbeing, human civilisation and advancement, and, fundamentally, the development of spiritual qualities that mirror forth the attributes of God. These Educators are the Manifestations of God. Bahá’u’lláh asserts,

[God] hath ordained that in every age and dispensation a pure and stainless Soul be made manifest in the kingdoms of earth and heaven. Unto this subtle, this mysterious and ethereal Being He hath assigned a twofold nature; the physical, pertaining to the world of matter, and the spiritual, which is born of the substance of God Himself. He hath, moreover, conferred upon Him a double station. The first station, which is related to His innermost reality, representeth Him as One Whose voice is the voice of God Himself. [...] The second station is the human station[.]⁸⁹

⁸⁵ From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 5 July 1947, included in a memorandum titled *Science and Religion* sent by the Research Department of the Bahá’í World Centre to the Universal House of Justice, 13 August 1997

⁸⁶ The Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace* (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1985), 3

⁸⁷ Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, 260

⁸⁸ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Questions*, 12

⁸⁹ Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, 66

The earthly lives of these Manifestations initiate immeasurably profound transformations in the life of humanity and provide in each dispensation a repository of divine wisdom and guidance in the form of the written Word of God. Bahá'u'lláh proclaims, "It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action."⁹⁰

'Abdu'l-Bahá furthermore declares, "The Kingdom of peace, salvation, uprightness and reconciliation is founded in the Invisible World, and it will by degrees become manifest and apparent through the power of the Word of God!"⁹¹ In this sentence alone we can identify the first strand, in the eternal nature of the "Invisible World", and the fourth strand, in the temporal and progressive process implied in the "degrees" by which humanity will attain to "peace, salvation, uprightness and reconciliation". Meanwhile the second and third strands, representing the shared eternal nature of every Manifestation of God, as well as their progressive appearances, are evoked in the mention of "the power of the Word of God", without which the invisible potentialities God has imbued in creation could not be brought forth into the physical world. Bahá'u'lláh affirms that God has ordained, as a token of His mercy and bounty, that this infinitely transformative power be released and brought to bear through a participatory and active process, rather than simply by means of a divine cataclysm meted out upon a passive humanity:

If it be Our pleasure We shall render the Cause victorious through the power of a single word from Our presence. [...] Should it be God's intention, there would appear out of the forests of celestial might the lion of indomitable strength whose roaring is like unto the peals of thunder reverberating in the mountains. However, since Our loving providence surpasseth all things, We have ordained that complete victory should be achieved through speech and utterance, that Our servants throughout the earth may thereby become the recipients of divine good.⁹²

It is well beyond the scope of this paper to detail the diverse and myriad ways in which the international Bahá'í community has responded to Bahá'u'lláh's call to unity and harmony since its light first dawned, but it must suffice to cite the Universal House of Justice in observing with hope that "amidst the disintegration, a new kind of collective life is taking shape which gives practical expression to all that is heavenly in human beings."⁹³ This is not merely the collective life of an insular religious community, but a widening pattern of collective life emerging in neighbourhoods, villages, cities and nations from an "exploration of reality that gives rise to a shared understanding of the exigencies of this period in human history and the means for addressing them."⁹⁴ While initiated by the Bahá'í community, this pattern evolves grounded in the understanding that within every human soul, regardless of background or professed faith, is an innate need for spiritual growth and education, without which the disintegrative forces of our lower nature become dominant and manifest their destructive influence in society. Guided by the messages of the Universal House of Justice, Bahá'ís the world over are extending invitations to souls of all walks of life to contribute to a process of spiritual and material betterment that includes programs of

⁹⁰ Ibid., 260

⁹¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas* (Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1909), 553-554

⁹² Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988) 197-198

⁹³ The Universal House of Justice, *To the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridván 2015*

⁹⁴ The Universal House of Justice, *To the Conference of the Continental Board of Counsellors, 28 December 2010*

moral and spiritual education for children, youth and adults, devotional meetings in which believers of any faith may gather in worship, as well as social action and engagement in public discourses. The Universal House of Justice made clear in 2010,

every human being and every group of individuals, irrespective of whether they are counted among His followers, can take inspiration from His teachings, benefiting from whatever gems of wisdom and knowledge will aid them in addressing the challenges they face. Indeed, the civilization that beckons humanity will not be attained through the efforts of the Bahá'í community alone. Numerous groups and organizations, animated by the spirit of world solidarity that is an indirect manifestation of Bahá'u'lláh's conception of the principle of the oneness of humankind, will contribute to the civilization destined to emerge out of the welter and chaos of present-day society.⁹⁵

As Collins points out,

The Universal House of Justice therefore does not spiritualize all references to catastrophe, relegate them to the past, or dismiss them. It treats the more apocalyptic statements as part of a coherent description of spiritual processes that inevitably involve pain and joy, suffering and triumph, effort and reward. The Universal House of Justice does not ignore the potential physical fulfilment of specific warnings, but it avoids an undue emphasis on catastrophe and carefully eschews specific date predictions.⁹⁶

Such a conception of Apocalypse is reflected throughout the Bahá'í writings; it is not to be understood only in intangible spiritual terms, nor is it to be understood only in crudely material terms. It encompasses both monumental events and gradual processes, both calamity and ultimate salvation. Perhaps most importantly, throughout all strands of the Bahá'í teachings on eschatology a call is proclaimed – sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit – to recognise and move in alignment with the integrative forces that characterise the maturation of humanity, evidenced in the increasing awareness of its oneness. There is always an active component to the numerous and diverse references. They are never merely the announcement of an event, but rather all constitute a call to action in service to humanity.

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⁹⁵ The Universal House of Justice, *To the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridván 2010*

⁹⁶ Collins, "Apocalypse," 16

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