

## CHOICE WINE:

### The Kitáb-i Aqdas and the Development of Baha'i Law

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#### Preface

First, I should begin by confessing that I speak neither Persian nor Arabic, and so this paper is not intended as a scholarly analysis of the Kitáb-i Aqdas or its laws, which I am certainly not qualified to undertake. Rather, I am proposing a "theory of the Kitáb-i Aqdas," so to speak — a tentative conceptual framework within which we can understand the Most Holy Book and the role that it is intended to play in the Baha'i religion.

In particular, I wish to investigate the attitude which the Book takes toward Baha'i law by looking at the historical development of the text itself, as well as a few of the central laws which were promulgated by that text. My intention is to demonstrate that the Kitáb-i Aqdas was not intended to establish a new law code (*shari'a*) similar to the one known to nineteenth-century Muslim jurisprudence, but rather to discard that approach to law in favor of a more organic promulgation of ethical principles.<sup>1</sup>

#### Choice Wine

Near the beginning of the Kitáb-i Aqdas, Baha'u'llah issues this warning:

*Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere  
code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the  
choice Wine with the fingers of might and power.  
To this beareth witness that which the Pen of  
Revelation hath revealed. Meditate upon this, O  
men of insight! (K5)*

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<sup>1</sup> The ideas presented in this paper were influenced by recent discussions on Talisman, an internet discussion group on Baha'i scholarship which is organized by John Walbridge out of Indiana University (at the internet address: Talisman@indiana.edu).

The metaphor that he chooses here is extremely instructive. Baha'u'llah's reference to a "mere code of laws" is most certainly an allusion to the *shari'a*, the holy law of Islam which is the basis of orthodox faith and practice. With astonishing brevity, Baha'u'llah appears to dismiss this ancient and hoary tradition out of hand. Instead, he explains, he has unsealed the "choice Wine."

Wine is, of course, forbidden in Islam as it is in the Baha'i Faith. In Islam it is a symbol of violation of God's law and, through Sufi usage, also a symbol of mystical communion with God — spiritual intoxication — before which the law is at best irrelevant. That such a statement should preface Baha'u'llah's own Book of Laws is indeed astonishing. But, it appears to me to presage his attitude toward law throughout the book.

Nonetheless, it seems to me that very often Baha'is — and especially Baha'is from Muslim societies — have very naturally understood the Kitab-i Aqdas to be a simple update of the Muslim code of laws, modernized and sanitized for contemporary consumption. In this view, we have a Baha'i *shari'a* which is to last for a thousand years. I believe that is a mistaken assumption which cannot withstand careful inquiry, and which could not withstand the challenges of modernity — and now post-modernity.

### **The Revelation of the Kitab-i Aqdas**

Almost nothing has been written in English about the manner in which the Kitab-i Aqdas was produced by Baha'u'llah. However, it is suggested by internal evidence and the little that is known of the history of the book's revelation that the Kitab-i Aqdas consists of an initial Tablet of laws which was supplemented over time with verses written in response to questions put to Baha'u'llah over a period of three or four years.

Ekbal has noted that Fadil-i Mazandarani's scholarship suggests that Baha'u'llah had begun to reveal some parts of the Kitab-i Aqdas from the first years of his arrival in 'Akka (1868), or perhaps even during his last year in Edirne.<sup>2</sup> It would appear that, after the initial composition, the Aqdas was increased in response to letters and petitions from the believers which put questions to Baha'u'llah which required answers. In verse 98 of the Aqdas, he explains:

*Various petitions have come before Our throne from the believers, concerning the laws of God, the Lord of the seen and the unseen, the Lord of all worlds. We have, in*

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<sup>2</sup> Ekbal, "Kitab-i-Aqdas: Redating is Beginnings," unpublished paper.

*consequence, revealed this Holy Tablet and arrayed it with the mantle of His Law that haply the people may keep the commandments of their Lord. Similar requests had been made of Us over several pervious years, but We had, in Our wisdom, withheld Our Pen until, in recent days, letters arrived from a number of the friends, and We have therefore responded, through the power of truth, with that which shall quicken the hearts of men.*<sup>3</sup>

Walbridge<sup>4</sup> has suggested that the initial passages of the Kitab-i Aqdas come to an end around verse 17, which begins: *"These are the ordinances of God that have been set down in the Books and Tablets by His Most Exalted Pen."*<sup>5</sup> And while that verse does present a natural break in the text, it appears to me that the book remains integrated and coherent, at least as a compilation of laws, until Baha'u'llah completes his apostrophes to various lands and peoples around verse 96. After that, the discussion becomes quite choppy and random, and appears to consist of answers to various questions, revealed in no particular order.

Of course, both of these positions remain mere speculation. The history of the revelation of the Kitab-i Aqdas has yet to be written. But, it is virtually certain that it could easily be written by consulting the original text of the book and the documents which are associated with it. Naturally, this would have to be done in the original language and by inspection of the documents at the Baha'i World Center in Haifa.<sup>6</sup>

By 1873, the text of the Aqdas was substantially complete and copies were circulated in Iran. However, the last verse of the modern text, verse 190 (the second prohibition on the use of opium<sup>7</sup>), was not revealed along with the rest of the book. Indeed, this last verse was not added to the text until 1890, when Mirza Muhammad-'Ali arranged for the first printing of the Kitab-i Aqdas in Bombay. Earlier (hand-copied) versions of the Aqdas which had circulated in Iran did not include this final verse.<sup>8</sup>

Beyond this addition of a final verse, however, the Aqdas continued to be amended and supplemented by Baha'u'llah in the Questions and Answers, which is virtually an integral part of the Most Holy Book itself. Indeed, a reading of Baha'u'llah's answers (without the

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<sup>3</sup> Baha'u'llah, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992) K98, pp. 55-56. It seems to me to be significant that at this point in the book, Baha'u'llah is still referring to the composition as a "Tablet."

<sup>4</sup> John Walbridge, personal communication via Talisman (e-mail Baha'i discussion group).

<sup>5</sup> Again, the designation "Books and Tablets" would seem to indicate a composition that has not yet been formed into a specific Book of Laws.

<sup>6</sup> As I understand, Mark Hellaby has prepared such a history for the Universal House of Justice. If it is available for the information of Baha'i scholars, it would be most useful to obtain a copy.

<sup>7</sup> Opium is explicitly forbidden twice in our current text of the Kitab-i Aqdas, at K155 and K190.

<sup>8</sup> Juan Cole has informed me that he has in his possession a photocopy of an 1884 ms. of the Aqdas, which is in the British Library. It does not have the final verse forbidding opium in it.

questions) gives the same feel as a reading of the latter parts of the Aqdas itself. It seems to be that the Holy Book itself was compiled in the same method as were the Questions and Answers, except that in the text of the Aqdas, we are not given the questions!

It seems to me, that in Muslim context, with those involved being familiar with the Qur'an and the manner of its revelation, this development of the Aqdas would have seemed perfectly normal. After all, the Qur'an is not a continuous narrative, exhibits no organization, and was simply revealed by the Prophet as the occasion demanded. For Baha'u'llah, and for the early believers, it probably seemed appropriate that the Mother Book of the Baha'i revelation would also be revealed in short pieces over years, and that it would develop as a compilation of holy verses.

In any case, Baha'u'llah continued to expand and supplement the Kitab-i Aqdas after 1873, not only with the Questions and Answers, but with the revelation of other Tablets and supplementary texts bearing on Baha'i law. In his Tablet of Splendors (*Ishráqát*), for example, the eighth Ishráq is explicitly made a part of the Aqdas:

*This passage, now written by the Pen of Glory, is accounted as part of the Most Holy Book . . .*<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, according to Shoghi Effendi, Baha'u'llah continued to elaborate, to elucidate, and to supplement the provisions of the Most Holy Book "until the last days of His earthly life."<sup>10</sup> It would seem that, according to the Guardian, the Aqdas was never regarded by Baha'u'llah as fixed or complete.

Beyond this, of course, the laws of the Kitab-i Aqdas have continued to develop in an organic manner through the application and interpretation of 'Abdu'l-Baha, and later, of Shoghi Effendi. Baha'i laws continues to be modified and expanded through the present-day legislation of the Universal House of Justice.

## **The Uncreated Qur'an vs. the Dynamic Aqdas**

It is a fundamental tenet of (at least Sunni) Islam that the Qur'an is "uncreated." That is, the doctrine insists that the Holy Book was not created by God, but has existed from all eternity (in Arabic) as a fixed and unchanging guide for human behavior. As such, the laws of

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<sup>9</sup> Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1978) p. 128. Indeed, on the basis of this passage, it seems to be that one might reasonably argue that the eighth Ishráq might simply be added to the text of the Aqdas itself as verses 191-193.

<sup>10</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1944) p. 216.

the Qur'an are regarded as a rigid blueprint for human life. As a consequence, an elaborate and detailed system of Muslim law has developed which purports to provide a guide to human behavior in every possible situation.

On the contrary, it is the thesis of this paper that Baha'u'llah did not intend his Holy Book to be understood in this manner. Indeed, the laws of the Aqdas developed and changed even in Baha'u'llah's lifetime, and certainly afterward. Rather, it is my contention that Baha'u'llah intended by the revelation of the Aqdas to offer the "choice wine" of upright and ethical conduct embodied in general principles and examples of beneficial law. That Baha'u'llah himself regarded these laws as flexible can be demonstrated.

### **The Obligatory Prayer (*salát*)**

There is no law more basic to religion, in Islam or in the Baha'i Faith, than the law of prayer. It is the first law commanded in the Aqdas and was clearly fundamental to Baha'u'llah's notions of religion.

In verse 6, Baha'u'llah says:

*We have enjoined obligatory prayer upon you, with nine rak'ahs, to be offered at noon and in the morning and the evening unto God, the Revealer of Verses. We have relieved you of the greater number,<sup>11</sup> as a command in the Book of God.<sup>12</sup>*

Yet, within five years of the revelation of this verse, Baha'u'llah had revealed three different obligatory prayers, the ones which Baha'is use today. The reasons for the abandonment of the original nine-rak'ah prayer are not clear.

In the Questions and Answers, Baha'u'llah says: "*Some years ago a number of the ordinances of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas including that Obligatory Prayer [the original one] were, for reasons of wisdom, recorded separately and sent away together with other sacred writings, for the purposes of preservation and protection. Later these three Obligatory Prayers [the present ones] were revealed.*"

The notes to the Aqdas indicate that the nine-rak'ah prayer "was not released to the believers in [Baha'u'llah's] lifetime, having been superseded by the three Obligatory Prayers now in use. Shortly after the Ascension of Baha'u'llah, the text of this prayer, along with a

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<sup>11</sup> That is, five times a day, as is obligatory in Islam.

<sup>12</sup> Baha'u'llah, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, K6. The note attached to this verse (Note #4) in the current English edition of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* explains that "the Obligatory Prayer originally enjoined by Bahá'u'lláh upon His followers consisted of nine rak'ahs. The precise nature of this prayer and the specific instructions for its recitation are unknown, as the prayer has been lost." (p. 167)

number of other Tablets, was stolen by Muhammad-'Ali, the Arch-breaker of His Covenant."<sup>13</sup> However, this scenario seems highly unlikely, at least with regard to the theft of the text, in light of Baha'u'llah's statement that the text had been "sent away" for safekeeping and was not in his possession in 'Akka. Therefore, while Muhammad-'Ali's theft of a large number of Baha'u'llah's original Tablets is well known, it seems probable that the text of the Obligatory Prayer was not among them.<sup>14</sup>

Nor does the unavailability of the Tablet explain why Baha'u'llah did not simply reveal the text of the prayer again. On a number of occasions he did, in fact, re-reveal some passages of his revelation without recourse to the original Tablets concerned. We might presume that he could have done so with the original obligatory prayer, as well.

One is left with the impression, given these facts, that Baha'u'llah did not find it important that the original prayer be adhered to — even though it had been enjoined in the Most Holy Book. Three other Obligatory Prayers were revealed a few years later, and the believers were left free to choose among them to satisfy the general principle of *salát*, daily obligatory prayer.<sup>15</sup> Question 63 of the Questions and Answers reflects the confusion over this matter that must have been common among Baha'is after the revelation of the "Tablet of Obligatory Prayers."<sup>16</sup>

Further discussion of this matter must, no doubt, await further research. But, it is striking that even in this first and most basic of laws in the *Kitab-i Aqdas* there has been radical development and transformation. The text of the Holy Book here appears to possess a fluidity and provisional quality which is unexpected, especially in view of Muslim ideas about the Qur'an.

## **Inheritance Laws**

A similar fluidity is found in the development of the Baha'i inheritance laws through time. Here again, it would appear that the most radical change in the intent of the law has been accomplished by the time Baha'u'llah's Questions and Answers are revealed.

First, it should be noted that the laws of inheritance in Islam present a fixed listing of heirs to the deceased who are allotted a certain percentage of property based on gender and relationship. There is no area of discretion here. The estate is divided by Muslim clerics in

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<sup>13</sup> Note #9, p. 169.

<sup>14</sup> It is, of course, possible that the Tablets which had been "sent away" had been sent back to Baha'u'llah by the time of his ascension, but there is no indication of this.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Questions and Answers, Q65, p. 126

<sup>16</sup> Baha'u'llah, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Q63, p. 125.

accord with the provisions of the law. The only question to be raised is whether or not all of the estate has been accounted for, and whether or not the judge (*qadi*) has been honest.

At first glance, the laws of the *Kitab-i Aqdas* would seem to present the Baha'is with a similar system. The need for such laws of inheritance, as an alternative to Muslim law or Babi law, must have been urgent for the Baha'is of Iran. Baha'u'llah indicates that he found it necessary to reveal laws in this regard as early as the Adrianople period, when the Baha'i community had barely begun to exist.<sup>17</sup> Baha'u'llah reveals laws which modify the categories of inheritance revealed by the Bab and found in the Persian Bayan.

At this point, we simply have a modified Muslim system of inheritance which offers little or no discretion to the living to divide their possessions among their heirs. This understanding is clearly reflected in Question 69 of the Questions and Answers which inquires of Baha'u'llah whether a person has any right to will a part of his estate to charity. The question reads:

*May a person, in drawing up his will, assign some portion of his property — beyond that which is devoted to payment of Huqúqu'llah and the settlement of debts — to works of charity, or is he entitled to do no more than allocate a certain sum to cover funeral and burial expenses, so that the rest of his estate will be distributed in the manner fixed by God among the designated categories of heirs?<sup>18</sup>*

To which Baha'u'llah gives the following astounding reply:

A person hath full jurisdiction over his property. If he is able to discharge the Huqúqu'lláh, and is free of debt, then all that is recorded in his will, and any declaration or avowal it containeth, shall be acceptable. God, verily, hath permitted him to deal with that which He hath bestowed upon him in whatever manner he may desire.<sup>19</sup>

This answer, of course, has the effect of abrogating the entire law of inheritance which is elaborated in some detail in the *Aqdas* and the Questions and answers. At most, the detailed exposition of heirs is left as a residual category to be applied only in cases of intestacy. But,

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<sup>17</sup> Baha'u'llah, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Q100, p. 136-37.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, Q69, p. 127.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

coupled with the command that every believer is obliged to write a will found at verse 109 of the Most Holy Book, even this residual category should, in the future, disappear entirely.<sup>20</sup>

Again, one is left with the impression that the real issue here is one of a just distribution of property, and not a fixed set of categories. Indeed, the further development of the law, as interpreted by Shoghi Effendi, seems to point in that direction. But, a full exploration of that development is beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>21</sup> But again, there is the most radical development and transformation of the original law here. The unexpected fluidity of the law is instructive.

## **The Law of Monogamy**

The law of the Kitáb-i Aqdas which permits marriage to two wives (simultaneously) has likewise undergone development, in a trajectory which has resulted in the requirement of monogamy which is binding upon all believers. Again we find the same unexpected fluidity of the laws of the Aqdas which a rigid and literalist approach cannot explain.

Permission for polygyny is explicitly given in the Kitáb-i Aqdas, though Baha'u'llah follows this provision of the law with a clear admonition to monogamy:

*God hath prescribed matrimony unto you. Beware that ye take not unto yourselves more wives than two. Whoso contenteth himself with a single partner from among the maidservants of God, both he and she shall live in tranquillity.*<sup>22</sup>

At the time that the Kitáb-i Aqdas was revealed, this particular text was taken at face value — as permission for marriage to two wives, with strong advice in favor of monogamy. In fact, early Baha'i men — both those resident in the Holy Land and those in Iran — not uncommonly took second wives during Baha'u'llah's lifetime and afterwards.

In the notes to the current English edition of the Kitáb-i Aqdas, the editors are at pains to explain the historic development of this law. Note 86 reads as follows:

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<sup>20</sup> For a further elucidation of this argument, see Seena Fazel, "The Inheritance Laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas." unpublished paper delivered at the Fourth Arjmand Conference on Scripture, Nijmegen, Netherlands, 1994; a version of this paper appears as a Sounding in *The Bahá'í Studies Review*, vol. 4 (1994) no. 1. See also Anthony Lee's response to Linda and John Walbridge's "Bahá'í Laws and the Status of Men" (in *World Order*, vol. 19 [1984-85] no. 1 & 2, pp. 25-36) found in *dialogue*, vol. 2 (1987) no. 1, pp. 32-34.

<sup>21</sup> There are two letters in particular in which the Guardian has indicated that 1) the inheritance laws of the Aqdas should not be taken as a guide for writing one's personal will, at least in the case of non-Baha'i relatives (who otherwise would be disinherited), and 2) that these same laws point in the general direction of a wide distribution of an estate to various heirs. (Shoghi Effendi, *The Dawn of a New Day* [New Delhi: Baha'i Publishing Trust, n.d. (1970)] p. 77; and . . . )

<sup>22</sup> Baha'u'llah, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, K63, p. 41.

While the text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas appears to permit bigamy, Bahá'u'lláh counsels that tranquillity and contentment derive from monogamy. In another Tablet, He underlines the importance of the individual's acting in such a way as to "*bring comfort to himself and to his partner*". 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the authorized Interpreter of the Bahá'í Writings, states that in the text of the Aqdas monogamy is in effect enjoined. He elaborates this theme in a number of Tablets, including the following:

*Know thou that polygamy is not permitted under the law of God, for contentment with one wife hath been clearly stipulated. Taking a second wife is made dependent upon equity and justice being upheld between the two wives, under all conditions. However, observance of justice and equity towards two wives is utterly impossible. The fact that bigamy has been made dependent upon an impossible condition is clear proof of its absolute prohibition. Therefore it is not permissible for a man to have more than one wife.*<sup>23</sup>

However, although this is a passage which reflects the current Baha'i position on the matter, there are other statements from 'Abdu'l-Baha which also bear on monogamy and in which the question is much more ambiguous. For example:

*You asked about polygamy. According to the text (nass) of the Divine Book the right of having two wives is lawful and legal (ja'iz). This was never (abadan) prohibited, but it is legitimate and allowed (halal wa mubah). You should therefore not be unhappy, but take justice into your consideration so that you may be as just as possible. What has been said was that since justice is very difficult [to achieve], therefore tranquillity [calls for] one wife. But in your case, you should not be unhappy.*<sup>24</sup>

Now in this case, the Tablet appears to have been sent from 'Abdu'l-Baha to a Baha'i man who was already married to two women, which we have noted was not uncommon. Therefore, this provision may refer to a special case. It is still a provision of Baha'i law that a man may remain married to more than one wife if he contracts the marriages in ignorance of

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<sup>23</sup> In Baha'u'llah, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, note 89, pp. 205-206.

<sup>24</sup> From *Amr va Khalq* 4:173. I am grateful to Sen McGlinn for providing me (via Talisman) with the quotations from 'Abdu'l-Baha found in *Amr va Khalq* which follow. These are provisional translations which, as I understand, were made by Dr. Kamran Ekbal.

the law, or before becoming a believer. However, 'Abdu'l-Baha appears to take the position here that bigamy is "lawful and legal."

Another statement from 'Abdu'l-Baha which needs to be examined is the following:

*Concerning bigamy [the number of wives], this has been promulgated, and no one must abrogate it (masusast nasikhi nadarad). 'Abdu'l-Baha has not abrogated this law. These are false accusations and lies (muftariyat-i rufaqaat) [spread by] the friends [i.e., Covenant-breakers?]. What I have said is that He [Baha'u'llah] has made bigamy bound on a precondition. As long as someone does not attain certitude regarding the capability to practice justice and his heart is not at rest that he can practice justice, he should not be intent upon a second marriage. But if he should be sure and attain certitude that he would practice justice on all levels [and conditions] (dar jami'-i maratib), then a second marriage is lawful. Just as has been the case in the Holy Land (Ardi-i Maqsud): the Baha'i friends wished to marry a second wife, accepting this precondition, and this Servant [i.e., 'Abdu'l-Baha] never refrained [from giving permission], but insisted that justice should be considered, and justice actually means here self-restraint (daraji-i imtina'). But they said that they will practice justice and wished to marry a second wife. Such false accusations [concerning 'Abdu'l-Baha's prohibition of bigamy] are the slanderous whisperings (zamzami) of those who wish to spread doubts [in people's hearts]. And to what degree they already succeed in making matters ambiguous! [Our] purpose was to state that bigamy without justice is not lawful and that justice is very difficult [to achieve].<sup>25</sup>*

What makes all of these quotations from 'Abdu'l-Baha so difficult to interpret at this stage is that we have no information concerning the dates they were written or the circumstances which they address. Certainly more research is called for. But I would suggest that 'Abdu'l-Baha gradually moved from a position that bigamy was permitted by Baha'i law to a position that it was not, since it had been conditioned on justice — which is an impossible condition.

The curious thing about 'Abdu'l-Baha's argument here is that justice is not mentioned as a condition for polygyny in the Aqdas itself. Even the advice for monogamy is justified as a means to tranquillity, not to justice. It is actually in the Qur'an that we find marriage to more than one wife conditioned on justice:

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<sup>25</sup> *Amr va Khalq* 4:175-76.

*And if ye fear that ye will not deal fairly by the orphans, marry of the women, who seem good to you, two or three or four; and if ye fear that ye cannot do justice [to so many] then one [only] . . .*<sup>26</sup>

In one Tablet, 'Abdu'l-Baha explicitly makes the connection between the quranic requirement of justice and the law of monogamy:

*In the Qur'an the word has been revealed "and if ye fear that ye cannot do justice [to so many] then one [only] . . .", indicating that in the presence of God the acceptable judgment is monogamy.*<sup>27</sup>

The context of this issue as it arose in the Baha'i community during 'Abdu'l-Baha's ministry is, of course, Islamic reformism. Precisely the argument that 'Abdu'l-Baha was making was also being made by Muslim modernists at the same time, and in the same place. In 1900, Qasim Amin published *The Liberation of Women (Tahrir al-Mar'ah)* in Cairo, which caused an enormous stir. Essentially, Amin and his circle of modernists argued that the verse in the Qur'an which permitted up to four wives had been made dependent on the husband doing justice to multiple wives. Since this was impossible (especially in the twentieth century), the law of the Qur'an actually require monogamy, at least in a modern context.<sup>28</sup>

'Abdu'l-Baha's argument with regard to the Kitab-i Aqdas having conditioned bigamy on an impossible condition is, in form and in content, indistinguishable from the Muslim modernist argument and probably dates from around the same time. It appears that the beloved Master borrowed this controversial Islamic modernist argument to interpret the law of the Baha'u'llah in such a way as to enjoin monogamy on all believers. Even so, he insisted (perhaps only at first) that marriage to two wives was lawful.

Yet, decades later the Guardian of the Faith would write that the Aqdas "prescribes monogamy." The Baha'i law of marriage had progressed from permitting two wives, while recommending only one, to a position forbidding polygamy.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Qur'an 4:3

<sup>27</sup> *Amr va Khalq* 174f.

<sup>28</sup> I am grateful to Juan Cole for this information.

<sup>29</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1944) p. 214. Actually, it appears that the Guardian's position on this question was more complicated than that. It is reported that he explained to the Baha'is in Iran that bigamy was against the administrative regulations of the Faith, not a violation of divine law. But, a full exploration of this matter is beyond the scope of this paper.

Again, we have a substantial change in one of the most fundamental laws of the Baha'i revelation. Again we face an unexpected flexibility and development in the law itself, one that is incompatible with a rigid, literalist approach to the text.

## **Conclusions**

Perhaps it is too early to draw any conclusions from the preliminary information that is gathered in this very tentative paper. However, that will not stop me from trying, of course.

It would appear to me that any conceptualization of the Kitab-i Aqdas which would see the book as establishing a fixed and elaborate set of laws and requirements is misplaced. Even in the most central issues that the book addresses — prayer, inheritance, and marriage — there has been a radical development in Baha'i law. While the Aqdas provided an initial framework in which these matters could be address, Baha'u'llah during his own lifetime modified and abrogated provisions of the text over time. This process continued through the interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi, and is certainly still under way through the on-going legislation of the Universal House of Justice.

Nor do I believe that it is possible that such a process can ever have an end. Since Baha'u'llah has not revealed a "mere code of laws," but has rather revealed a "Choice Wine" intended for the intoxication of humanity. Perhaps this "Wine" can be understood as the ethical and moral principles that will guide humankind through the next hundreds of years, and not as a rigid and unchanging set of laws that regulate the details of human life.