

# Propositions on a More Comprehensive Theology

Jack McLean

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## Abstract

"Propositions on a More Comprehensive Theology"<sup>1</sup> points to the wider implications of theology for science and creativity, religious language, Bahá'í Kerygma and apologetics, the existential dimension, the relativity of religious truth, ethics and scholarship, method and mysticism. These propositions present theology as having the potential for formulating a unifying vision or synopsis between the various branches of learning and the creative arts. As such "Propositions for a More Comprehensive Theology" seek to diversify the scope of theology and free up the sacred study from that limited understanding which would view it as a monolith having few implications for other branches of the arts and sciences, or as a restricted specialty relegated to one corner of the curriculum. Theology is a geometry of thought that measures both the sacred space of divine questions and the concrete issues of the human condition. The implications for a more comprehensive theology are elucidated through a series of thirteen propositions and sub-propositions. These are: (1) Theology as a Comprehensive Science (2) The Theologian, Literacy and Creativity (3) Theology and Beauty (4) Theological Language (5) Bahá'í Kerygma (6) Responsible Apologetics (7) The Method of Correlation (8) Theology and the Existential Moment (9) The Relativity of Religious Truth (10) Ethics and Scholarship (11) Method in Religion and Science (12) Method in Bahá'í History (13) Mysticism.

## Introduction

"Prolegomena to a Bahá'í Theology"<sup>2</sup> asserted that it is indeed valid to speak of a "Bahá'í theology" in a qualified sense, and that it makes sense to do so both in light of internal logic and in the context of interreligious dialogue. That paper distinguished two types of Bahá'í theology, *source theology/revelation theology* and *derivative theology* or commentary ("Prolegomena" 36).<sup>3</sup> The following thirteen propositions belong to the second category are being put forward in order to more clearly define the outlines of a derivative theology which seeks to be comprehensive. These propositions represent axioms located on diverse points of the theological spectrum. For the sake of brevity they are being presented in terse propositional form. I define "proposition" as an encapsulated statement proposed for consideration, or a deliberated judgement. "Comprehensive" is meant to convey the idea that Bahá'í theology should aim to interact with all areas of the curriculum and allude to all forms of knowledge which are susceptible of contributing to an increase of divine knowledge.

All propositions follow from the cornerstone 1.[a]. The common thread that ties all the

propositions together is perspectival. The general method followed in this paper is basically that of Aristotelian natural philosophy and adopted by classical philosophy: proceeding by rational inquiry, offering definitions, advancing a few hypotheses, making observations, presenting judgements, and concluding.

The thirteen propositions elaborated here are not presented in the spirit of a codified list, but rather as dynamic principles. I recognize that there are other equally valid principles in the Bahá'í Faith, but limitations of space do not permit a wider examination.

#### Proposition 1: **Theology as a Comprehensive Science**<sup>4</sup>

[a] The cornerstone of all propositions is Bahá'u'lláh's statement: "The source of all learning is the knowledge of God, exalted be His glory, and this cannot be attained save through the knowledge of His Divine Manifestation" ("Asl-i-Kullu'l-Khayr" in *Tablets* 156).

[b] It follows that theology<sup>5</sup> seeks to illuminate both divine and human science, disciplines that employ methodical investigation. Accordingly, theology would be the most comprehensive of sciences. Its domain includes All-Being. Theology not only consists of the statements revealed through the authority of divine revelation, but also builds on commonsensical observations, and/or those theories verified by experience.

[c] Following from Proposition 1.[b], "science" (*scientia*=knowledge) has the double-meaning of both the principles of the exact sciences and, in `Abdu'l-Bahá's words, "discovering the verities of the universe, the means by which man finds a pathway to God" (*Promulgation of Universal Peace* 49).<sup>6</sup>

[d] The most outstanding characteristic of Bahá'í theology is theophanology or manifestation theology<sup>7</sup> which excludes a theology of the divine essence which by definition is unknowable.

[e] Theology is a geometry of thought that measures all it surveys.

[f] In *De l'esprit géométrique (On the Geometrical Spirit)* Pascal makes several cogent observations about geometry that could be applied to a rationalistic method of theology. Pascal's essay consists of a definition theory of the proof method of geometry whereby once certain propositions are granted, others logically inter-related must necessarily follow. Pascal underscores, however, that those propositions which are first in the series and from which others derive must be granted, self-evident or axiomatic. He calls these axioms "definitions of names" (*The Geometrical Spirit* 429) and "a name divested of every other meaning" (*Geometrical* 430), and "the arbitrary application of names to things which are clearly designated by terms perfectly known..." (*Geometrical* [p.]). According to Pascal, these names need no proof for they are self-evident.

[g] Although Pascal argues that clear definitions are necessary from which irrefutable proofs can be logically drawn, it is ludicrous to define everything. Paradoxically, Pascal also states: "...the lack of definition is a perfection rather than a defect, since it does not come from their obscurity [of things],

but on the contrary from their extreme obviousness..."(*Geometrical* 435).<sup>8</sup>

[h] The unknowability of the Divine Essence would be consequently a geometric definition of a name.

[i] To differentiate sacred study from other forms of knowledge, Aquinas distinguished between philosophy as "deriving from notions of creatures" and theology "not derived from creatures, but immediately inspired by the divine light" (*An Aquinas Reader* 411-12).<sup>9</sup> Aquinas made two significant conclusions about the science of "the divine light" which he called "the doctrine of theology" (*Aquinas* 411) and its relationship to the other sciences:

One is that this science commands all the other sciences as the ruling science. The other is that this science uses for its service all the other sciences, as though its vassals, as is the case with all arts ordered to one another where the end of one is under the end of the another. Thus the end of preparing of powders [pharmacy], which is the making of medicines, is ordered to the end of the medical art itself, which is health. Hence the doctor commands the one who prepares the powders [the pharmacist] and uses the powders he prepares for his end. In the same way, since the end of the whole of philosophy is beneath the end of theology, and ordered to this end, theology should command all the other sciences and use those things that are transmitted in them (*Aquinas* 411-12).

[j] For Aquinas this end was "the contemplation of God" (*Aquinas* 411).

[k] I take Aquinas' phrase "theology should command all the other sciences" to mean to take a leading role, rather than a return to a pre-Copernican theological age. A modern theology would find itself integrated with the truths of the twentieth century arts, sciences and humanities.

[l] Aristotle seemed to have the same view of a "single science" in mind when he described the philosopher's task as: "Next, it is the philosopher's task to be able to view things in a total way." (*Metaphysics*, Book Gamma 64) and "Now, to sum up, there is a single science that must view systematically being as being and whatever belongs to it as being" (*Metaphysics* 66). P. Merlan writes that ancient readers up to the time of Plotinus took Aristotle's being *qua* being as a definition of God, for in their view "...only of God can it be said that He is, whereas everything else is not only being but becoming" (*The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, 52). This systematic view of being by a single science that embraces all sciences figures among the tasks of Bahá'í theology.

[m] In *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, `Abdu'l-Bahá makes "learning and the cultural attainments of the mind" to be "The first attribute of perfection..."(*Secret* 35).<sup>10</sup> This condition is made dependent upon a mastery of a very wide spread of several branches of learning such as: (i) theology — "a thorough knowledge of those complex and transcendental realities pertaining to God." (ii) *Shariah* — "the fundamental truths of Qur'anic political and religious law"... (iii) comparative religion — "the contents of the sacred Scriptures of other faiths"... (iv) what would be called today anthropology, sociology, political science or international relations — "the laws and principles, the customs, conditions, and manners and the material and moral virtues characterising

the statecraft of other nations"... (v) religious and exact science — "the entire field of divine and natural science"... (vi) history — "the historical records of bygone governments and peoples". To keep the curriculum at pace with the latest developments, `Abdu'l-Bahá also says: "He should...be well versed in all the useful branches of learning of the day". I envision a comprehensive theology serving as a synopsis to unify the curriculum as `Abdu'l-Bahá has outlined it.

[n] `Abdu'l-Bahá's view of learning would require a new philosophy of education and a thorough revision of the curriculum which he also advocates (*Secret* 105-6). To further this end, rather than seeing itself as an independent and autonomous discipline, Bahá'í theology should seek to establish interconnections with the other schools of science and encompass the study of arts, sciences and humanities.

[o] The Bahá'í perspective of such a synoptical theology seems to answer the description of *synopsis* which Plato understood as a comprehensive view of the various branches of knowledge and their relationships, relationships that he envisioned would be elucidated as a function of Dialectic (*Dialektos*, <dia, between + legó, speak = discussion) for the education of the philosopher. Dialectic was exercised at the highest section of Plato's Line, was critical of assumptions, related to first principles and tried to grasp the essence of things. Its ultimate aim was the investigation into the pre-existent Forms or Ideas, culminating in the idea of the Good. <sup>11</sup>

[p] Comprehensive theology should be dialectical theology, one that aims to resolve apparent contradictions into a higher synthesis of truth. Dialectic accepts the language of paradox and negation as being necessary for the emergence of truth since denial provides truth with an opportunity to assert its claims.

[q] Bahá'í theology seeks to develop a foundational theology of the world's revealed religions, one of the most daunting tasks facing global theologians today. Although the Bahá'í Faith views the world's religions as one organic whole, in its elaboration of this whole, it cannot escape its own particularity.

[r] Although a line is usually drawn between participant and observer, whether it is thick or thin depends largely on outlook. Dialogue theologian Leonard Swidler writes: "Such multiple "belonging" [to religions] may not be possible for most religious persons, for most religious thinkers, or for those ideologically committed, but some experience of another's religion or ideology `from within' is possible for all of us" (Swidler, *After the Absolute. The Dialogical Future of Religious Reflection* 52). Put another way, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the religion under study, the observer should be prepared, as far as possible, to assume the point of view of the participant. This view was first formulated by the phenomenologist, W. Brede Kristensen, in *The Meaning of Religion*, who stated that observers are duty bound to accept the evaluations of believers in their assessment of any religion: "Let us not forget that there is no other religious reality than the faith of the believers. If we want to make the acquaintance with true religion, we are exclusively thrown on the pronouncements of the believers." (Kristensen, *Meaning* 13).

[s] Whereas Kristensen's statement may help to ensure an authentic understanding of the religion under study, it should be borne in mind that both the individual and community understanding of

the Bahá'í Faith is in constant evolution, since it is influenced by a variety of factors both cultural and personal. The reality of the Bahá'í Faith is to be found in the Bahá'í sacred writings.<sup>12</sup>

## Proposition 2: **The Theologian, Literacy and Creativity**

[a] Martin E. Marty states that the theologian may be an interpreter, story-teller, pastor, professional exegete, or counselor. "The theologian....exists to interpret the world and the life of a people in the light of a transcendent reference — in this case, of *theos*" (Marty, "From the Centripetal to the Centrifugal in Culture and Religion" 5).<sup>13</sup> The theological thread runs through consequently a variety of literary genres and textual forms and is not restricted merely to technical theology.

[b] Theological discourse preceded the theological treatise. Although theology may be expressed in either spoken or written form, its oral expression makes the domain of theology open to all, even to those who are ill or barely literate.

[c] Bahá'u'lláh writes that an understanding of the Word of God depends upon "purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit" (*Kitáb-i-Iqán* 211). [Persian] Since these qualities are possessed by both the literate and the illiterate, it does not follow that book learning is necessary for the exercise of theological discourse. Theology, like all Bahá'í scholarship, is not reserved only for the select few: "Bahá'í scholarship is an endeavour accessible to all members of the Bahá'í community, without exception...including those who may lack formal education, and those who dwell in remote areas, villages and islands" (*Bahá'í Scholarship* 3).

[d] More formalised expressions or systems of theology would presuppose higher levels of literacy.

[e] Original scholarship is a form of creativity since it creates a new language of discourse.

[f] Creativity makes for a lesser sacrifice of self. Through creativity the self is "*lost* in thought" or artistic creation. This loss, submerging or absorption of the ego by the creative process brings about the submission of the ego to allow unseen forces to mould consciousness and steer the artist to new patterns of thought and expression.

[g] The lesser sacrifice of self is brought about in creativity by inspiration.

[h] There is a great need to sound out the connections between theology and the creative arts. A theological perspective of creativity can be found in the contemplation of the many creative acts of God which the artist imitates by producing a multitude of forms and expressions that preserve and perpetuate the sense of the true, the beautiful and the eternal. Speaking loosely, creativity is the emergence of something out of nothing.<sup>14</sup> Creativity shares with religion the work of the liberation of the spirit while it indwells the body, one of the meanings of salvation. In the creative arts, there lie unsuspected powers of joy and liberation to inspire spirituality, and to release those instinctive spiritual forces generated at the beginning of "dream time"<sup>15</sup> forces that constitute in part humanity's common archetypal sacred memory.

[i] The creative arts express the human need for joy and celebration which are likewise vital functions of religion. Bahá'u'lláh's exhorts us to "rejoice in the gladness of thine heart" and to experience "the joy of reunion". He also says: "O SON OF SPIRIT! With the joyful tidings of light I hail thee: rejoice!"<sup>16</sup> Such divine celebration is one of the meanings of spiritual liberation.

### Proposition 3: **Theology and Beauty**

[a] There are clear aesthetic dimensions to the work of theology through an analysis of those elements comprising a religion of beauty with its harmonies of truth, proportion and perfection. Such elements of beauty are suggested in the following quotation of `Abdu'l-Bahá:

It is natural for the heart and spirit to take pleasure and enjoyment in all things that show forth symmetry, harmony, and perfection. For instance: a beautiful house, a well designed garden, a symmetrical line, a graceful motion, a well written book, pleasing garments — in fact, all things that have in themselves grace and beauty are pleasing to the heart and spirit — ....("Music" 2:78).<sup>17</sup>

[b] Further, there is an aesthetic dimension to the spiritual realities of holiness and blessedness. `Abdu'l-Bahá speaks of "the beauty of holiness" (*Star of the West*, 9:8, 1 August 1918)<sup>18</sup>, a beauty that was modelled to a supreme degree in the example of his own life. Bahá'u'lláh has united blessedness with beauty as indicated in one of his divine titles *Jamál-i-Mubáarak*, the Blessed Beauty. Such a "beauty of holiness" is entirely consistent with the prophet David's psalm in which he sings: "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Heb.= *Hadrat Kadósh*). (Psalm 29:2)<sup>19</sup>

[c] Aristotle also held that beauty is implicit in knowledge. Alexi Losev and Aza Takho-Godi interpret Aristotle's teaching on beauty and knowledge in this way:

In a word, all knowledge is beautiful according to Aristotle. All philosophy is true beauty, to which one must always give oneself up completely, endlessly, patiently, diligently, serenely, trusting in the possibility of achieving truth and beauty...(Aristotle 96).

Losev and Takho-Godi further cite Aristotle's concept of the Good in the *Metaphysics* (12:7) as the source of everything that from the beginning is complete, beautiful and perfect. Aristotle says:

Those who suppose, as the Pythagoreans and Speusippus do, that supreme beauty and goodness are not present in the beginning, because the beginnings both of plants and animals are *causes*, but beauty and completeness are in the effects of these, are wrong in their opinion. For the seed comes from other individuals which are prior and complete, and the first thing is not seed but the complete being (Cited in *Aristotle* 96).

[d] God in the Bahá'í Faith, as for the God in Aristotle's cosmological scheme,<sup>20</sup> the *Primum Mobilum* (Prime Mover), is the object of all desire, and exerts an attractive force on all the spheres which gravitate toward Him. The Báb prays: "O God, my God, my Beloved, my heart's Desire"

(*Bahá'í Prayers* [p.]). The sublimest form of eros, the supreme attractive force, is the love of the soul for God, generated in response to God's love for the soul, its Creator. This divine eros is intrinsic to the religion of beauty.

#### Proposition 4: **Theological Language**

[a] Theological language is expressed by both the cognitive (true/false) and non-cognitive statement<sup>21</sup> and includes such expressions as the moral imperative, the narrative account, the existential moment, the emotive élan, the vision quest,<sup>22</sup> and the psychological truth. It [theological language] therefore lends itself both to rational and logical exposition and the subtleties of intuitive knowledge and expression.

[b] The language of theology should not be reduced to one static monotone. There is a variety of vocabularies and dialects that make up theological discourse.<sup>23</sup> This variety lends a certain flexibility of expression to Bahá'í theology. Creative writing is also well suited to the expression of a metaphysic of meaning and to spiritual experience, both in any oblique or overt theological purpose it may have, as well as in any psychological sense.<sup>24</sup> Even though theologians and philosophers may speak in different accents and dialects, it would further mutual understanding if the speakers of each dialect were at least familiar with the others' language. Subjectively, one may prefer some accents to others, but objectively one cannot say that one accent is better than another. Consequently, no one language more correctly defines Bahá'í theology.

[c] The radical constraints on language to adequately express conceptual thought are explicitly acknowledged by Bahá'u'lláh when he says:

How great the multitude of truths which the garment of words can never contain! How vast the number of such verities as no expression can adequately describe, whose significance can never be unfolded, and to which not even the remotest allusions can be made! (*Gleanings From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* 176).

[d] Proposition 4.[c] notwithstanding, theologians reject the assertions of linguistic logicians and positivists that metaphysical statements are meaningless.<sup>25</sup>

[e] The writings of theologians and philosophers are susceptible, however, of falling into the labyrinth of those sciences "which begin with words and end with words" (Bahá'u'lláh, "The third Tajallí" in *Tablets* 52).<sup>26</sup> Consequently, theological reflection should retain as its goal clarification or resolution of questions, rather than sterile or obscure analysis. Theology in its relationship to spiritual life should, moreover, inspire, inform or elucidate the dynamics involved in the acquisition of spirituality.<sup>27</sup> To configure the lived experience of the believer should figure among the principal aims of theology.<sup>28</sup>

[f] While a knowledge of source languages is indispensable for the translation and commentary of Bahá'í sacred scripture, and a definite advantage in the study of Bahá'í theology, citing text at source does not *in* and *per se* ensure a resolution of the hermeneutical dilemma.<sup>29</sup> Textual study tends to be

very focused and concrete, but the Word of God is highly allusive. Exposition makes these allusions explicit. Exposition, however, does not depend solely on lexicographical ability.

[g] G. Widengren<sup>30</sup> wrote in this respect: "Philology alone does not make a student a historian of religion, any more than a historian of law, medicine, or economics" ("Stand und Aufgaben der iranischen Religionsgeschichte", *Numen* 1, 1954-5, 17). Exegetical and all syntactical approaches should be integrated with some larger overall network of meaning.

[h] I hypothesize that there is a silent grammar of theology built into the syntax of language when it expresses the unity of God, the plurality of the divine names, and the relationship between Being (Existence) and Essence (Substance). This tacit grammar of theology hidden in speech suggests that Essence and Existence are both co-dependent and co-eternal. This silent grammar of theology can be decoded by reflecting on the meaning of the divine names.

[i] Some have envisioned that the future of theological discourse lies in a growing fusion between theological language and literary critical theory and such genres of creative writing as drama, sacred narrative, poetry and historical fiction. P. Joseph Cahill points to a closer collaboration of literary criticism and theology:

In conjunction with the basic research required to study the history of religions, literary criticism offers meaningful structures which can disclose the literary and religious universes of all men. If there is to be a large systematic theology in the future, it will have to be congruent with the data disclosed by the critical operation of literary criticism. And the task of the theological interpreter is to insure that his vision of the theological world be at least as broad as the literary universe. ("Literary Criticism, Religious Literature, and Theology", *Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses*, 12:1, 61).

Such a view is fully congruent with the Bahá'í outlook which advocates a close partnership for the literary and dramatic arts and theological discourse.<sup>31</sup> In this closer collaboration, both myth and symbol, the two most effective vehicles for moving the psychological depths, and existential spiritual experience will play central roles as devices to further such a unitive vision of literary and spiritual truth.

[j] Propositional theological language should take into account both religious experience and the *textuality* of sacred texts rather than basing itself strictly on the fixed intellectual construct ("I am all the Prophets: The Poetics of Pluralism in Bahá'í Texts", (*Poetics Today* 14:3, Fall 1993, 447-476).<sup>32</sup>

[k] The Bahá'í vision of the arts aims at a restatement of poetry as a premier literary *genre*. Wordsworth reports Aristotle that poetry is the most philosophical of writing (Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*).<sup>33</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá is reported to have said that "Poetry is much more effective and complete than prose. It stirs more deeply, for it is of finer composition" ("Music", *The Compilation of Compilations*, 2:78).<sup>34</sup> The Báb, the Prophet-Herald of Bahá'u'lláh, during his nine month imprisonment (1848) in the mountain fortress of Máh-Kú in Adhírbáyján, quoted to his first disciple Mullá Husayn, a well-known Islamic tradition: "Treasures lie hidden beneath the throne of God; the key to those treasures is the tongue of poets." (*Nabil's Narrative. The Dawn-Breakers* 258-9)

[I] The art and science of rhetoric as an integral part of theological language awaits further study by Bahá'í scholars.<sup>35</sup>

Proposition 5: **Bahá'í Kerygma**<sup>36</sup>

[a] The root of Bahá'í *kerygma* lies in the historical divine-human encounter of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh with God. These twin Manifestations of God have inaugurated a "...new cycle of human power" (*Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, 19),<sup>37</sup> and fulfil the divine promise of the Coming One given at the inception of the Adamic cycle. With the proclamation of their divine revelations comes the assurance of the saving grace of one universal prophetic faith in "a world come of age".<sup>38</sup>

[b] The quintessential *kerygma* word is the apocalyptic proclamation of the Báb: "I am, I am, I am the Promised One!" (*God Passes By* 21).<sup>39</sup>

[c] The Bahá'í *kerygma* event (BKE) of 1844 invites all men and women to a decision of faith whereby we are called to die to self and the world and to live again in the Word of God.

[d] The break-through of a divine revelation into space-time establishes its own timetable and fixes its own agenda based on the requirements of the age. Bahá'í *kerygma* proclaims that this transformational process is now upon us.

[e] The BKE aims at nothing less than a new creation which Tillich wrote was *the* ultimate concern:

The New Creation — this is our ultimate concern; this should be our infinite passion — the infinite passion of every human being. This matters; this alone matters ultimately. In comparison with it everything else, even religion or non-religion, even Christianity or non-Christianity, matters very little — and ultimately nothing (*The New Being* 19).<sup>40</sup>

[f] The BKE necessarily seeks to vindicate both truth and transcendence and is causally linked to *apologia* with its proclamation of prophethood, for the voice of divine transcendence and truth is ever met with disdain, doubt and denial.

Proposition 6: **Responsible Apologetics**<sup>41</sup>

[a] Apology is not merely the defence of faith. It is also an attempt to rationally justify the meaning of faith to a world dominated by materialism, meaninglessness, and secularism. It is both the justification and on-going interpretation of faith to an unbelieving world.

[b] Old style apologetics took the form of monologue. Bahá'í apologetics assumes that the dialogue partner possesses valid understandings of divine truth.

[c] Historically, apologetics is usually at its peak during the formative age of a religion, an age in which the Bahá'í Faith currently finds itself. It was the "apologetic impulse" (Krieger, *The New*

*Universalism. Foundations for a Global Theology* 17)<sup>42</sup> that first drove Christian theology, and made it a vital enterprise. This "apologetic impulse" should also continue to be a driving force for Bahá'í theology today.

[d] *Apologia* is not restricted to religion alone, but is implicit in socio-political systems and worldviews, either secular or theistic.

[e] The etymological roots of "responsible" are found in the Latin *respondere* meaning to answer. The responsible Bahá'í philosopher or theologian is consequently one who is engaged in answering. The corollary is that responsible apologetics is also an apologetics that questions.

[f] "Responsible" means: (1) not autocratic (2) capable of rational conduct (3) respectable (4) of good credit or position or repute (5) involving responsibility, as that of an office. Such definitions have their origins mainly in concepts of statecraft or political office and by analogy point to the theologian as a responsible member of the community.

[g] Apologetics should exclude dogmatism, empty rhetoric, or sterile ideology, the politics of an idea without the dynamics of faith. `Abdu'l-Bahá, moreover, deprecates "fanaticism and unreasoning religious zeal" and quotes the quranic maxim arising from Moses' and Aaron's historic interview with Pharaoh: "Speak ye to him with gentle speech" (Qur'án 20:46) and "Debate with them in the kindest manner" (Qur'án 16:126) (*Secret* 53).

[h] Responsible apologetics is committed apologetics. Karl Barth's statement is particularly meaningful to Bahá'ís.: "The word and the work of the believer cannot possibly remain a neutral, uncommitted work and word. Where there is faith, God's *doxa, gloria*, His brightness is necessarily made known on earth" (*Dogmatics in Outline* 30).

[i] Apologetical approaches to the study of religion and the non-normative, non-confessional science of religion (*Religionswissenschaft*) are currently at odds in the academy. Bahá'í scholarship, however, bridges this gap in the light of its teaching on the complementarity of science and religion by requiring that any apologetic approaches to the Bahá'í Faith make good use of the techniques and findings of the scientific study of religion.

[j] Apologetics requires, moreover, the presence of philosophy in order to sharpen its critical sense and to deter it from dogmatism.

[k] In today's global village, apologetical theology needs another ally: the comparative study of religions or global theology whose potential `Abdu'l-Bahá saw at the beginning of this century as a means of eliminating prejudice and fostering unity. During a talk at Eighth Street Temple in Washington, D.C., November 8, 1912 `Abdu'l-Bahá said:

Praise be to God! You are living in a land of freedom. You are blessed with men of learning, men who are well versed in the comparative study of religions. You realize the need of unity and know the great harm which comes from prejudice and superstition...This [prejudice]

must be abandoned, and the way to do it is to investigate the reality which underlies all the religions (*The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 410).

[l] An apologetic approach to Bahá'í theology is not to be based upon a coercive confessionality, for Bahá'u'lláh says:

In this Day, We can neither approve the conduct of the fearful that seeketh to dissemble his faith, nor sanction the behavior of the avowed believer that clamorously asserteth his allegiance to this Cause. Both should observe the dictates of wisdom, and strive diligently to serve the best interests of the Faith (*Gleanings* 343).

[m] In light of `Abdu'l-Bahá's prophecy of widespread and severe opposition to the Bahá'í Faith,<sup>43</sup> Bahá'í teaching will need advocates for its defence.

[n] The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* contains, moreover, some provisions that fly in the face of conventional wisdom and popular morality. These provisions will require rational justification in the face of those critics who will reject the divine standards advocated by Bahá'u'lláh.<sup>44</sup>

[o] Bahá'u'lláh was the first apologist for his faith. `Abdu'l-Bahá has moreover exhorted the Bahá'ís to unveil to the world the greatness of Bahá'u'lláh and his preeminence in spiritual history:

Further, speak of the greatness of Bahá'u'lláh, of the events that took place in Persia and Turkey, of the astonishing influence that He exerted, of the contents of the Epistles which he addressed to all the sovereigns, and of their fulfilment (*Selections From the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá* 308).<sup>45</sup>

Proclaiming Bahá'u'lláh's greatness is not undertaken as a will to power, or to promote spiritual exclusivity, but rather because it is fitting to begin to appreciate Bahá'u'lláh as one of the great spiritual geniuses of history.

[p] Robert Parry has rightly pointed out there is an existential dimension to the enterprise of apologetics, an existential dimension that seeks responsibility:

Apologetics comprises the seeking to bring to expression the encounter with the Word of God, the Bahá'í revelation. It is a continuing process undergone by responsible members of a believing community and should not be a representing in static, authoritarian form, an ideological framework which would be unresponsive not only to human experience as it stands but also to fresh experiences as they arise. Thus the apologetic enterprise emphasizes the continuity with the human situation not its discontinuity. Only then can a dialogical relationship be established — -anything else would be shouting. Apologetics is not shouting, neither is it passive listening to the criteria of the `world'. It is responsible engagement. Responsible, because it strikes at clarity and is undergone in responsibility and honesty by responsible believers; engagement because it is not afraid. What is continuous with the Word — -the Bahá'í Revelation, i.e. a world conditioned by the

possibility of being addressed cannot be a fearful prospect. Bahá'í scholarship working from within a Bahá'í horizon must be a continuing act of correlation. It must participate in the activity of correlating questions implicit in the human situation (the 'World') with 'answers' given in the Bahá'í revelation ("Phenomenology, Methodological Agnosticism and Apologetics" 19).

#### Proposition 7: **The Method of Correlation**

[a] In proposition 6.[p] Parry is echoing the method of correlation found in both Shoghi Effendi and Paul Tillich. Tillich's monumental three volume work, the *Systematic Theology* (1951-1963),<sup>46</sup> is based upon a method of correlation, one that is basically apologetic. Tillich writes: "Apologetic theology is 'answering theology.' It answers the questions implied in the 'situation' in the power of the eternal message and with the means provided by the situation whose question it answers" (*Systematic Theology* 6). In *A History of Christian Thought* Tillich also writes: "This is the apologetic form of theology which I use in my own systematic theology, that is, the correlation between question and answer." (26-27).<sup>47</sup> Such a method of question and answer is also employed in the Bahá'í sacred writings, in such texts as Bahá'u'lláh's *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*<sup>48</sup> and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Some Answered Questions*.

[b] Shoghi Effendi also advocated a method of correlation in order to relate the Bahá'í Faith "to modern aspects of philosophy and science" and "to correlate" the Bahá'í Faith with "all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today" and with the various branches of the university curriculum:

It is hoped that all the Bahá'í students will follow the noble example you have set before them and will, henceforth, be led to investigate and analyze the principles of the Faith and *to correlate* them with the modern aspects of philosophy and science. Every intelligent and thoughtful young Bahá'í should always approach the Cause in this way, for therein lies the very essence of the principle of independent investigation of truth (cited by the Universal House of Justice in a letter to an individual 19 October, 1993). [emphasis not in Shoghi Effendi].

In another communication through his secretary, Shoghi Effendi also used the key methodological word "correlate":

Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Bahá'ís (who asked his advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be au courant with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today. and so that they could *correlate* these to the Bahá'í teachings. (The Universal House of Justice, letter of 19 October, 1993)[emphasis not in Shoghi Effendi].

[c] Correlation is a method of both dialogue and scholarship whereby we interact with individuals and other systems of thought. As such correlation assumes that there is an element or elements of commonality in the things being compared, without there being total identification in all respects. In this sense, correlation respects particularity.

[d] Correlation clarifies truth statements, and as a function of dialectic leads to the emergence of new truths.

[e] Further, correlation connects a sequence of interrelated events or thoughts in a progressive theology that links the intellectual and spiritual life of antiquity with modern thought. In this respect, correlation can be viewed as bridge between the ancient and modern worlds.

[f] Sandra Hutchison sees in Shoghi Effendi's method of correlation a certain pragmatism that invites us "to contemplate the relationship between the academic disciplines we are pursuing and the social principles enunciated in the Bahá'í writings" ("Interchange", *The Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*, [date]). Hutchison sees, moreover, in the method of correlation a "bridge" that might link the Bahá'í perspective with other contemporary issues or projects.

[g] Further, Hutchison foresees in Shoghi Effendi's method of correlation the possibilities for practical problem-solving, a new theoretical framework, holistic methodologies and the advancement of interdisciplinary studies. With Shoghi Effendi's call for the practice of a "more profound and coordinated Bahá'í scholarship" (letter to an individual 3 July 1949), Hutchison sees the possibility not only for "solutions to specific modern problems..." but also for providing "the basis upon which a new theoretical framework for understanding our chosen subjects can be established.", and "their implications with respect to interdisciplinary studies as well as to the development of holistic methodologies within each discipline..." ("Interchange", same).

[h] Shoghi Effendi's statement that the Bahá'í teachings are to be taken as "a great balanced whole" (letter to an individual 19 March 1946), is a validation of holism and invites us to consider that the method of correlation can serve to provide linkages between poles in the intellectual sphere. For, without these linkages or correlations, thinkers in the various disciplines might remain at the antipoles, and diverse disciplines might remain entrenched in worldviews that would make dialogue with other modes or systems of thought problematic.

[i] Correlation as a method of question and answer in the search for truth presents two models, open and closed.

(1)  $T = OQ$  (open). The truth remains an open question. The question is unanswered. (2)  $T = Q + A$  (closed). The truth is revealed by the question and answer.

[j] Theoretical questions may be answered satisfactorily, existential questions, not. Existential questions which derive from life experiences are dilemmas that must be lived through and their answers continually sought.

[k] As for answers, the Buddha is reported to have said in the *Anguttara-nikáya*, that answers should be given in the following manner: (1) Directly (2) By analysis of the question (3) By counter-questions. But the fourth answer is no answer, for it sets the question aside. (Walpola Rahula, *What The Buddha Taught* 64).

[1] The method of question and answer is not only academic and theoretical, but also real, transformative and practical. It is basic to all teaching and learning, profoundly influences the evolution of science, and has major consequences in courts of law. Indeed, question and answer can lead to revolutionary societal changes. The poor man in the third world asks himself, "Why don't I have shoes while they live in such luxury?" and the rest, as they say, is history.

#### Proposition 8: **Theology and The Existential Moment**

[a] In addition to analyzing questions or presenting interpretations or data, Bahá'í theology should not fail to address the human condition. This lived experience often breaks into consciousness as the "existential moment". By existential moment I mean the subjective experiences that rise up to confront the individual in: (i) a moment of profound meaning which significantly raises consciousness or alters perspective (ii) a situation of spiritual crisis or test (iii) a moment of spiritual transformation.

[b] The contrarities and the experiences of loss, suffering and eventual death which the individual unavoidably faces in the world, offer the possibility of investing the *Lebensituation* (the life situation/the human condition) with meaning by embracing the realm of spiritual values or the truths of the Word of God.

[c] Reinhold Niebuhr has written that the "...essential homelessness of the human spirit is the ground of all religion..." (*The Nature and Destiny of Man* [p.]) This state of homelessness has a positive value when it causes the restless heart and the searching mind to seek God. Without God, it leads to disillusionment.

[d] The patterns of existential experience do not lie only in the individual's experiences of the "real world", in the day to day round of the quotidian. They can also be found in the Word of God and in the archetypal experiences of sacred history, and in the deeds and events in the lives of the Prophets of God. The life experiences of the Prophets do not explain theoretical questions. They provide models that tutor the believer in right-mindedness and right action in the face of suffering or adversity, furnishing at the same time a wealth of meaning that illuminates individual experience. The existential moment provides the individual with an opportunity to articulate the personal meaning bound up in *le vécu* (the lived experience) and to construct a spiritual *Lebensphilosophie* (philosophy of life).

#### Proposition 9: **The Relativity of Religious Truth**

[a] The Absolute cannot be relativised either by thought or discourse.

[b] We should not fall into the trap of absolutising relativity. Relativity as a concept is itself relative. The worldview of post modernism attempts to abolish the notion of some ultimate system of truth and value through a radical view of relativity. The dangers, however, of this anti-systematic splitting up of the intellectual universe into such diverse micro-worlds of subjectivity are twofold: First, such radical subjectivity effectively weakens the community of intra-subjective thought and

the commonality of language and weakens the viability of any universal value system. Second, such acute subjectivity undermines the concept of relativity itself, and forces it into continual retreat. Relativity becomes meaningful only in relation to and through the Absolute. If there are no ultimate truths, no Absolute Mind or irreducible absolute convictions, what remains is a series of disconnected relativities wherein every statement can become a true or false statement, or a statement devoid of signifying force.

[c] Religious relativity acts as a bulwark against the one-way interpretation of dogmatism. It implies that religious truth, although fundamentally one, is progressive, dynamic, infinite, and ever-changing.<sup>49</sup> Relativity is open to various interpretations of metaphysical and theological questions which would on the surface appear to be incompatible. Relativity is thus an ally of a more inclusive view of reality, one that allows for a diversity of approaches and methodologies, but which does not destroy systematisation and the notion of absolute truth, and which does not fall into the trap of radical subjectivity. The relativity of religious truth also has strong implications for establishing a large measure of complementarity between science and religion, one of the most meaningful and potentially fruitful questions in our time.<sup>50</sup>

[d] Notwithstanding 9.[b] one does perceive the Absolute (God) or irreducible truth statements in a relative way. This statement can have two meanings: (1) One's *Sitz im Leben* (life setting) changes one's understanding of the Absolute. Tomorrow's understanding will be different from today's. (2) To say that one perceives Absolute Mind or Absolute Truth in a relative way becomes functional and meaningful especially in dialogue. In dialogue, one enters into the paradox of relativity during which one's own absolute convictions become temporarily suspended and relativised in order to listen to the truth of the speaking-other. Through this temporary suspension of the doctrinal,<sup>51</sup> one becomes alert to the possibility of the emergence of commonly held shared truths.

[e] The "temporary suspension of the doctrinal" does not indicate an incidental betrayal of our most profound beliefs. It allows us to function "as if" our deepest religious convictions are momentarily inactive. This "as if" fosters an openness on our part and a receptivity to the truth of the speaking-other thus helping to ensure that the speaking-other feels as if her views have been sincerely and conscientiously received.

[f] Although the relativity of religious truth may lead to *rapprochement* with those whose belief system may differ from one's own, one can question the practice of a methodology of total *epoché* (suspension of judgement) (Gk.=*suspension*)<sup>52</sup> where the Bahá'í writings make unambiguous doctrinal statements. *Epoché* can be used effectively, however, when approaching the study of any phenomenon in order not to create *undue* bias of the subject, for bias of some kind is intrinsic to any theology, philosophy or science.

[g] Further to 9.[b], "Relativity becomes meaningful only in relation to and through the Absolute", one of the meanings of the eternal absolute is the immutable spiritual law as taught by `Abdu'l-Bahá.

The spiritual aspect of religion is the greater, the more important of the two, [of the spiritual and the practical] and this is the same for all time, it never changes! It is the same

yesterday, today, and for ever! `As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be (*Paris Talks* 142-3).

[h] In Bahá'í thought God is the Absolute. The domain of the absolute includes moreover the unity of the prophets. Bahá'u'lláh reveals that the unity of the prophets is "absolute" (*Gleanings* 78). One can, of course, say that one's understanding of this absolute unity is relative, or relative to Bahá'u'lláh's, but this absolute and independent objective existence of prophetic unity is in no way compromised by one's relative understanding of it. Bahá'u'lláh also states that in the mystical state, the "true seeker" through the application of ardent search, spiritual discipline and passion "will perceive within every atom a door that leadeth to the stations of absolute certitude" (*Kitáb-i-Iqán* 196). While in this condition one may "touch the Absolute",<sup>53</sup> but one does not in any sense become the Absolute. During the mystical encounter with the divine attributes of creation, the relativities of consciousness momentarily cease to exist.

[i] On the absolute side of the relative/absolute dyad, Udo Schaefer sees in divine truth an absolute character:

Divine truth on the other hand is absolute. One can accept it or reject it, but once accepted, it is no longer at our disposal (*steht sie nicht mehr zur Disposition*). Such truth is authoritative, above criticism, and not subject to rational justification (*keiner Hinterfragung fähig*). One has no right to whittle it down or simply unhinge it by relativism. (*Heilsgeschichte und Paradigmenwechsel, Zwei Beiträge zur Bahá'í-Theologie*, 59).<sup>54</sup>

[j] Schaefer contrasts the absolute nature of religious convictions with the method of philosophy which by contrast can be selective and eclectic. He maintains that there is no contradiction with Shoghi Effendi's statement that "religious truth is not absolute but relative" (*World Order* 115) since the religious relativity of which Shoghi Effendi writes refers to dispensational divine revelation, suited to a particular phase of social evolution, and to the human capacity to conceive divine truth at that phase, which nonetheless makes its claims on human consciousness in an absolute way. (Schaefer 59-60).

#### Proposition 10: **Ethics and Scholarship**<sup>55</sup>

[a] The Bahá'í Faith gives more weight to ethical theism than it does to propositional theology.

[b] `Abdu'l-Bahá has defined ethics as "the fundamental aspect of the religion of God" (*Promulgation* 403).<sup>56</sup> Ethics finds its true origins in the workings of the Primal Will [source language].<sup>57</sup> An understanding of and response to the Primal Will takes place through both reason and obedience, that is, in finding a rational justification for the law and in submitting the human will to the divine imperative. Although, as `Abdu'l-Bahá points out, reason plays a strong role in the justification of ethical principles,<sup>58</sup> the ultimate justification for ethical behaviour lies in the authority of the divine imperative expressed as "God doeth whatsoever He willeth".<sup>59</sup> Reason, however, is characterised by an ambiguity that is not characteristic of the Divine Will.

[c] The Primal Will seeks to influence the human soul to be predisposed to act in a befitting way, and this predisposition on the part of the individual seeks to repeat itself in forms of behaviour that become societal custom. Ethics is also governed by questions of emotions or personal taste (liking or not liking). It is moreover clear from a reading of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*<sup>60</sup> that divine love also plays a vital role as a motivating force in the exercise of ethical behaviour. The result is that Bahá'u'lláh's ethics reflect both strong moral imperatives and a mystical spirituality of divine love.

[d] Belief in a Primal Will stems from an anthropological analogy of the Divinity, namely, a personal or voluntaristic one that sees God as the All-Powerful Personal Being who guides by divine imperative in order to form ethical conduct. This would clearly align the Bahá'í concept of the Primal Will with the Abrahamic faiths and with Hinduism, since Buddhism and Taoism do not normally ground their ethical codes in a divinely revealed will. We can find, however, a common ground between the Bahá'í Faith and the eastern religions in terms of practical morality, in the disciplined pursuit of self-mastery which results collectively in more stable, productive and harmonious social relationships, and individually in a greater measure of tranquillity. Like the eastern religions, the Bahá'í Faith would also hold that the individual who is immoral can be neither truly wise nor detached, liberated or whole.

[e] The modes of Bahá'u'lláh's utterance are very diverse and allow for a multiplicity of interpretations. The Bahá'í theologian is thus free to create a wide-range of discourse.

[f] Bahá'u'lláh says in "The First Tajallí":

True belief in God and recognition of Him cannot be complete save by acceptance of that which He hath revealed and by observance of whatsoever hath been decreed by Him and set down in the Book by the Pen of Glory. They that immerse themselves in the ocean of His utterances should at all time have the utmost regard for the divinely-revealed ordinances and prohibitions ("Tajallíyát" in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 50).

The earlier translation of this text instead of "by observance" renders [Arabic verb] by the more active verbal noun "by *practising* all that He hath commanded..."(*Bahá'í World Faith* 188) (emphasis mine). The earlier translation more faithfully conveys the meaning implicit in Bahá'u'lláh's statement that divine knowledge is linked to *praxis* (practical knowledge), that is, the practice of good deeds. Knowledge is linked to *praxis* in a relationship of mutual dependence or symbiosis. Bahá'u'lláh's epistemology consists of a an interaction of *praxis* and sound theoretical knowledge. Consequently, the ideal theologian would be likewise the true believer.

[g] Following Proposition 4.[b]. above, religious studies could well benefit from a "judicious cooperation"<sup>61</sup> between the historians, sociologists and scriptural exegetes on the one hand, and the philosophers, comparative religionists and theologians on the other hand. The work of historians and scriptural commentators, valuable in its own right, benefits the work of philosophers and theologians who are able to provide larger interpretations of the sacred texts and historical episodes, and correlate these to a broad horizon of religious phenomena and philosophies. Scriptural commentators likewise benefit from the wider application by philosophers and theologians of textual studies. Comparative religionist H.D. Lewis recognized a generation ago the need for

scholars of religion to engage in cooperative learning:

This is an area of study where the close cooperation of many scholars seems to be pre-eminently required. Even when we seem to be dealing with severely factual issues or with scientific questions, our understanding of how certain practices appeared in respect of their ultimate meaning and significance to those who observed them, can be of the utmost importance; and that is an area where the philosopher has much to contribute. If the linguistic expert complains that the philosopher intrudes upon a domain where he is lacking the necessary tools, the philosopher can make the corresponding claim about the technical expert. In any case, no one can have the same expert mastery in all important fields of linguistic study. One expert must learn from another and rely on the most authoritative opinion available in fields where human frailty and limitations of time preclude his being an expert himself. Judicious cooperation seems to be the appropriate policy, and in some respects the insights of the philosopher appear to be essential prerequisites for the soundest understanding of the features of the various cultures of the world (Lewis, *The Study of Religion* 137).

[h] The scholar is called upon to observe a judicious balance between his/her understanding of the truth and the integrity of the Bahá'í teachings. `Abdu'l-Bahá has written: "...no soul must either publicly or privately utter one word against or in contradiction to the general Teachings..." (*Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, 3:433-434).<sup>62</sup> Shoghi Effendi has also written: "To discard the authority of the revealed Words is heretic....", but he also says in the same context, "and to suppress completely individual interpretation of those Words is also bad. We should try to strike a happy medium between these two extremes" (*Principles of Bahá'í Administration* 25). These directives help ensure the "unity of doctrine" (The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance* 53) that is so vital in preserving the unity of the Bahá'í Faith, while allowing for at the same time a certain freedom of interpretation.

[i] These directives also have important applications for Bahá'ís engaging in interreligious dialogue. Leonard Swidler, who echoes the views of Panikkar and others, writes that the authentic partner in dialogue has to remain "true to the vital core of his or her own religious tradition" (*After the Absolute. The Dialogical Future of Religious Reflection* 46) in order to witness sincerely to the other, just as the other must remain authentic to his/her tradition in order to witness sincerely to us. Swidler referring to "the golden rule" of interreligious dialogue advocated by Raimundo Panikkar and Wilfred Cantwell Smith, states that "the side interpreted must be able to recognize itself in the interpretation" (Swidler 44). Swidler's *Fifth Rule* of the "Ground Rules for Interreligious and Interideological Dialogue" states further: "Thus it is mandatory that each dialogue partner defines what it can mean to be an authentic member of that tradition." (Swidler 44)

[j] Shoghi Effendi has defined in part the "true believer" as one who maintains "close association with the spirit as well as the form of the present-day Bahá'í administration throughout the world..."(*Principles of Bahá'í Administration* 5). This definition applies also [and perhaps especially] to the scholar who, because of the solitary and demanding nature the work, may see him/herself apart from the community, or disassociated from the Bahá'í administration.

[k] In the same vein, H. Richard Niebuhr focused on the social or community aspect of "the responsible self". For Niebuhr, the responsible self is "an accountable self, called upon by its companions to answer for its responses to nature" (*The Responsible Self. An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* 81-2).<sup>63</sup> Niebuhr's triadic theory of responsibility involves the notions of: (i) response (ii) interpretation (iii) accountability or social solidarity. (*Responsible Self*, 61-5). Drawing on Josiah Royce's ideas of loyalty to a cause and community, Niebuhr writes:

Now in devotion to a cause — be it a nation or science or a religion or some simple duty — he finds himself associated with other loyalists to the same cause. The bond of loyalty is then a double bond, on the one hand to the companions, on the other to the cause. So the soldier's loyalty is an affair of faithfulness to his fellow soldiers, and to the cause, never to one of them alone (Niebuhr 83).

[l] By analogy, one could say consequently that the Bahá'í scholar's loyalty is to Bahá'u'lláh, the Bahá'í Cause and the community, not to oneself alone.

[m] The Bahá'í scholar should not be viewed consequently as an exceptionally solitary individual who is without ideological bounds, but rather as a member of the community who has entered into a covenantal relationship and who occupies a unique position of trust in the faithful transmission of the Bahá'í teachings.

#### Proposition 11: **Method in Religion and Science**

[a] Whereas the scientific method proceeds in part by a process of the controlled experiment which inspires confidence because of its predictability, or by a process of logical symbolic demonstration (mathematics), its incessant questioning, constant revision, and doubt recognize no transcendent sacred authority for the determination of truth. Belief in prophetic faith requires, however, an assent to divine authority and proposes that belief in God as a personal Being surpass every weight of value.

[b] Divine teaching holds out timeless truths, and grants repose to the soul in the certitude of God's love and salvation.

[c] The propositions of theology should be subject to scientific inquiry, that is, being critical of assumptions, advancing hypotheses, verifying results, pursuing research in an open and free spirit while cautiously offering conclusions.

[d] A significant benefit of science to religion is the banishment of puerile, superstitious, and fanatical modes of thought and feeling from religion's intellectual and emotional life.

[e] The results of scientific inquiry lead to the plausibility of the God hypothesis as the supreme intelligent force behind the universe. Religion confirms the hypothesis and makes explicit the acts of God within nature, history, and the human soul.

[f] The Bahá'í Faith is proclaimed to be "scientific in its method" (Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* xi).<sup>64</sup> The meaning of the phrase "scientific method" as applied to the Bahá'í Faith is deemed to be "soft" rather than "hard". Bahá'í theology would best profit from the application of scientific method when the phrase is interpreted broadly to mean that the study of questions should be conscious, thorough, and orderly, and that statements show evidence of critical thinking, and be empirically, intuitively or logically verifiable.

[g] As Einstein has pointed out, the scientific method is lame without appropriate goals. Ways and means are ineffective when not defined in terms of ends. Einstein wrote:

Whatever this tool [scientific method] in the hand of man will produce, depends entirely upon the nature of the goals alive in this mankind. Once these goals exist, the scientific method furnished means to realize them (*Ideas and Opinions* 328).

[h] A too rigid application of the scientific method to religion, as an overly facile solution to the now waning conflict between religion and science, would fundamentally deform the nature both of God and religion through reductionism. Namely, it would reduce the concept of God to the Absolute Idea and religion to the cognitive question.

[i] Excessive deduction limits Bahá'í theology. If pursued excessively deduction leads to antinomies and denies experience, reducing theology to a narrow form of ratiocination. Bahá'í theology must also include the description of phenomena, and where description is lacking, theology will suffer from an overly rational fabric. Description is the method both of history and the account of mystical experience.

[j] Science cannot provide worldview. The proponents of scientism mistake the part for the whole by attributing a world view to science. Science does not deal with the cosmos<sup>65</sup> in a unified way, for the "cosmos" must take into account both the human being as spiritual self and questions of value. Huston Smith writes:

It happens though, that a scientific world view is impossible. I do not mean that we are a long way from having such a view: I mean that we will never have one — -it is impossible in principle, a contradiction in terms. For "world" implies whole and science deals with part, an identifiable part of the whole that can be shown to be part only — -most of this paper will be devoted to this showing. Again, it is crucial to see that this is not a temporary limitation but one that is built into science's very nature. To hope for a world view from science is like hoping that increasingly detailed maps of Illinois will eventually produce the ultimate map of the United States (Huston Smith, *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind* 109).

[k] Nevertheless, the mystical writings of founders of the new physics<sup>66</sup> contain insights that are vital to the complementarity of the principles of twentieth century science with fundamental metaphysics. (See sub-propositions [n].-[q]. below.

[l] One of the driving forces of the scientific quest, according to Einstein, is mystical feeling:

His [the scientist's] religious feeling takes the form of a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law, which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection. This feeling is the guiding principle of his life and work, in so far as he succeeds in keeping himself from the shackles of selfish desire. It is beyond question closely akin to that which has possessed the religious geniuses of all ages (Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions* 50).

[m] Einstein's view is complemented by Tillich's that rationalism is the daughter of mysticism:

Rationalism and mysticism do not stand in contradiction to each other, as is so often thought. Both in Greek and modern culture rationalism is the daughter of mysticism. Rationalism developed out of the mystical experience of the 'inner light' or the 'inner truth' in every human being. Reason emerged within us out of mystical experience, namely, the experience of the divine presence within us (*History of Christian Thought*, [p.]).

[n] The religious outlook of the founders of the new physics might best be described as a mystical monism of the Mind or Spirit.<sup>67</sup> Sir Arthur Eddington writes for example: Similarly, I assert that the nature of all reality is spiritual, not material, nor a dualism of matter and spirit...[complete] (*Quantum Questions* 180).<sup>68</sup>

[o] Sir Arthur Eddington (*The Nature of The Physical World, Science and the Unseen World*) and Erwin Schrödinger (*What is Life, Mind and Matter*) became the leading philosophical scientists of the New Physics that emerged between 1900-1930. The main tenet of a group of philosophical scientists in the 1930s ("The Cambridge Club") that included Sir Arthur Eddington, Sir James Jeans, Bertrand Russell<sup>69</sup> and Alfred North Whitehead was that "The stuff of the world is mind stuff" (Eddington, *The Nature of the Physical World* [p.]). In other words, science is not only empirically tested matter, but depends also on the perceptions of the mind itself: "Mind is the first and most direct thing in our experience; all else is remote inference." (Eddington, *Science and the Unseen World* [p.]). The fact that the mind has some central role in the perceptions of science establishes clear links between science and a philosophical understanding of mind as a major component of an ideal or spiritual self.

[p] Erwin Schrödinger who developed the theory of wave mechanics also posited that there is only one Self or Mind in the universe. This one mind theory is very close to the absolute idealist's one Absolute Spirit (Mind) and the idealist claim that reality is based in the mind. Schrödinger writes:

The overall number of minds is just one. I venture to call it indestructible since it has a peculiar time-table, namely mind is always *now*. There is really no before and after mind...I also grant, should anyone wish to state it, that I am now talking religion, not science — -a religion, however, not opposed to science, but supported by what disinterested scientific research has brought to the fore (*Mind and Matter*, [p.]).<sup>70</sup>

Schrödinger points to here an eternal quality of mind always existing in the "now".

[q] What the religionist and the scientist have in common consequently is a belief in the Reality of Spirit that has organised the symbolical forms that the mind constructs out of its experience of the universe, and their common love for truth and the mystery of being.

[r] Science can best benefit religion, and religion best benefit science, when these two powerful forces recognize the integrity of the other's epistemology, and when each seeks to find methods and forms of experience that complement their common search for, and love of, truth.

Proposition 12: **Method in Bahá'í History**<sup>71</sup>

[a] Several present day Bahá'í scholars have rightly advocated that scholars of the Bahá'í Faith pursue academic scholarship based on the Western tradition of critical analysis of primary source materials.

[b] The key word in this statement is "critical". One can readily concur with a criticism that looks for new facts, or seeks to reinterpret events in a new light, a method in short that is open to correction and revision. In the context of Bahá'í scholarship, however, one may concur with that sense of "critical" that points to thorough-going research of documents, thought-provoking insight and in-depth analysis in a spirit of open inquiry.

[c] The word "critical", however, is a double-edged sword and requires closer definition. In the hands of some scholars, western critical methodology has been used to overthrow the concept of divine revelation itself and the veracity of scripture which are the very foundations of religion. Consequently, the word "critical" would have to exclude, in Robert Parry's phrase, "methodological agnosticism." ("Phenomenology, Methodological Agnosticism and Apologetics" 18).

[d] "Critical" may also refer to reductionist methods that explain Bábí-Bahá'í teachings simply and strictly in terms of their historical, religious, cultural, or intellectual antecedents, without taking into account divine intervention, revelation or transcendence.

[e] The Universal House of Justice has notified Bahá'í scholars of certain limitations of modern academic methods that practice a purported objectivity and intellectual neutrality. It is a questionable move, however, for Bahá'í scholars to import this method uncritically and *holus bolus* into Bahá'í studies. The Universal House of Justice has referred moreover to "a methodological bias" and "discordant tone" in the work of certain scholars who "in attempting to achieve what they understand to be academic objectivity" end up by placing themselves in a situation of conflict of interest: "In other words, we are presented in such articles with the spectacle of Bahá'ís trying to write as if they were non-Bahá'ís" (The Universal House of Justice, letter of 4 October 1994 to a National Spiritual Assembly). This irony is underscored in such "critical" and "objective" studies by the marked presence of the secular perspectives of both humanism and materialism (same).

[f] Humanism denies any divine intervention into human history, which is one of the foundations of Bahá'í belief, and materialism reduces such realities as religious ideals, values, meanings, virtues, divine intention and spiritual states of consciousness to mere names without force, or subjective

human tags that are basically disguises of sensate human consciousness. Both views work to the detriment of transcendent and immanentist views of God and history.

[g] In its more radical sense, "critical" may refer to inimical or hostile treatments of the Bahá'í Faith that attempt to discredit or overturn Bahá'í teaching.

[h] Deriving from its view of the harmony of religion and science, a Bahá'í methodology of sacred history should be built upon the tacit or explicit assumptions of the truth of revelation and considerations of spiritual value, as well as the conclusions of reason, research and purported statements of fact (Research Department of the Universal House of Justice to First Bahá'í Studies Seminar on Ethics and Methodology).<sup>72</sup>

[i] Shoghi Effendi's vision of history was clearly providential, that is the "working out of a divine purpose" (Harold H. Titus "The Philosophy of History" 460), a view shared by the early Hebrews, Christians and Muslims. Consequently, any methodology of sacred history that attempts to divorce theological truths and value judgements from a purely "objective"<sup>73</sup> factuality, would necessarily diminish or distort the subject matter.

[j] Bahá'í history becomes meaningful when it becomes related to our own experience and when we are able to sympathetically identify with the events of Bahá'í history by becoming part of them. This sympathetic identification is mediated by analogy, by our ability to relate past events to what we, individually or collectively, are experiencing in the present.<sup>74</sup>

[k] All Bahá'í history is not in this sense just historiography. When the events of Bahá'í history are applied to the theological, existential, moral or psychological dimensions, they also have profound meaning. The history of Bahá'u'lláh's exile (1853-1892), for example, may be studied or written for its pure historicity, as the most accurate and complete reconstruction of events the historian is able to redact. Beyond strict historiography, however, there is a theological meaning and purpose to the exile; namely, its significance in the present and future expansion and development of the Bahá'í Faith. `Abdu'l-Bahá has indicated that Bahá'u'lláh's exile has already had an enormous effect in the wider spread and development of the Bahá'í Faith, and will continue to do so in the future.<sup>75</sup> The exile also demonstrated that Bahá'u'lláh was not only able to repeatedly withstand the stratagems of his enemies to annihilate both him and his religion, but also that he was able to utilize his banishment as an instrument for the wider proclamation of his newly revealed faith.<sup>76</sup>

[l] There are likewise at least three existential, moral or psychological meanings in the exile of Bahá'u'lláh, *viz.* in Bahá'í history: (i) the theme of victory in defeat. Future developments are not always determined by the restricted view of present circumstances. (ii) an instructive pedagogy of adversity in the development of spirituality (iii) a logotherapy that will assist the individual to find meaning in suffering and to develop coping mechanisms. For Bahá'u'lláh's exile may become meaningful or inspirational for those who can identify with him and find meaning and healing in the midst of adversity, *angst*, deprivation or loneliness. One can infer from these few applications that Bahá'í history may interact with psychology in a meaningful dynamic.

[m] Consequently, there should be no antagonism between critical-objective and engaged-

apologetic methods of Bahá'í scholars. These methods should be employed inclusively.

[n] The method of correlation treated in Proposition 7.[a-1] above also suggests a connective causality between events in a series. Within sacred history, however, not every historical event in the series is explicable merely in terms of a humanistic or even religio-cultural logic if it is devoid of transcendence. The events of history in the Bahá'í view are also determined by divine intervention through periodic, orderly and cyclical visitations accomplished through the divine mission of the prophets and Divine Manifestations, the founders of the world's great religions, civilizations and cultures. This view does not exclude at the same time the immanentist or "steady state" view of God's eternal presence within history.

### Proposition 13: **Mysticism**

[a] Shoghi Effendi states that *The Seven Valleys* "describes the seven stages which the soul of the seeker must needs traverse ere it can attain the object of its existence" (*God Passes By* 140) (emphasis mine). Scholars could enrich the fabric of theology by validating the Bahá'í perspective on mysticism,<sup>77</sup> that longing to attain the presence of God.

[b] Some may have concluded that when Bahá'u'lláh wrote *The Seven Valleys (Haft Vádi)* and *The Four Valleys (Cháhár Vádi)*<sup>78</sup> he was describing unattainable spiritual experiences to which it is virtually impossible to relate. Although the macro-mystical world of the soul depicted by Bahá'u'lláh may well lie beyond the spiritual psychology of the norm, it is not so in every case. One is apt to forget that within the universe Bahá'u'lláh describes, there are numerous micro spiritual worlds and states with which the reader is already familiar or has already experienced. Otherwise, an understanding of these mystical writings would lie entirely beyond the imagination of the reader. Fádil-i-Mázindarání has moreover enumerated mystical writings as one of the nine styles or categories of writings eluded to by Bahá'u'lláh in his *Suriy-i-Haykal* (Surih of the Temple), a tablet revealed in Akká (Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh* 1:42-43).

[c] For, who has not experienced both the joy and the pain that Bahá'u'lláh describes in The Valley of Love and The Valley of Contentment: "The steed of this Valley is pain; and if there be no pain this journey will never end" (*The Seven Valleys* 8) and "From sorrow he turneth to bliss, from anguish to joy" (*Valleys* 29). These alternating human emotions are universal. There are, moreover, other universal elements in Bahá'u'lláh's sacred narrative of the journey of the soul. These include the search itself, the tests and difficulties along the way, and the final happy reunification with the beloved at journey's end.

[d] It would be consequently self-defeating for the seeker to regard the universe of the valleys as unattainable, ideal transformative spiritual experiences miraculously reserved for the few. In the preamble to *The Seven Valleys* Bahá'u'lláh not only affirms, but seems to expect, that the ultimate Sufi goal of self-evanescence (*faná*) and seeing God in everything can ultimately be won: "...to the end...that every man thereby win his way to the summit of realities, until none shall contemplate anything whatsoever but that he shall see God therein (*Valleys*, 1-2).<sup>79</sup>

[e] It would seem consequently that Bahá'u'lláh, in writing *The Seven Valleys* and *The Four Valleys*,

was not communicating a purely private experience, but was describing the states that the spiritualised soul could attain, or at the very least, strive for in the search to become one with the Creator.<sup>80</sup>

[f] Further, the fact that Shoghi Effendi included this work in his first canonical list of Bahá'í writings to be translated into English indicates that the mystical genre is to be regarded as a categorical imperative of the language of revelation.

[g] Critics dismiss mysticism either as a pseudo form of knowledge, or an intensely personal and erratic mode of subjective experience inaccessible to intellectual scrutiny. The first objection has already been debunked by Max Weber:

The unique character of mystical knowledge consists in the fact that, although it becomes more incommunicable the more strongly it is characterized by idiosyncratic content, it is nevertheless, recognized as knowledge. For mystical knowledge is not new knowledge of any facts or doctrines, but rather the perception of an overall meaning in the world. This usage of "knowledge" is intended wherever the terms occurs in the numerous formulations of mystics; it denotes a practical form of knowledge. Such gnosis is basically a "possession" of something from which there may be derived a new practical orientation to the world, and under certain circumstances even new and communicable items of knowledge. But even these items will constitute knowledge of values and non-values within the world (*The Sociology of Religion* 169-70).<sup>81</sup>

[h] The second objection, that the world of mysticism is a closed and private world collapses in the light of two factors: (i) the universality of divine love (ii) the efficacy of prayer and meditation as two of the most profound forms of mystical feeling and discovery. As an expression of divine grace, mysticism reveals a universal and democratic face in one of its predominant modes as the experience of divine love. If one considers that the experience and the practice of divine love is an elemental form of mysticism, then all who experience and practice the love of God are mystics, degrees of love notwithstanding.

[i] This last statement is not mere truism, for its implications are not as obvious as one might first suppose. Mysticism as the practice of divine love puts the mystical quest on a potentially universal footing, and opens a gate by which all who practice this universal reality may enter.

[j] Love is an ineffable mystery, and the sense of mystery is one of the driving forces of religion. In the Bahá'í view, divine love is the *sine qua non* of finding God:

O My Brother! Until thou enter the Egypt of love, thou shalt never come to the Joseph of the Beauty of the Friend; and until, like Jacob, thou forsake thine outward eyes, thou shalt never open the eye of thine inward being; and until thou burn with the fire of love, thou shalt never commune with the Lover of Longing (*The Seven Valleys* 9).

[k] There is, moreover, the closest of connections between mysticism and religious faith for "The

core of religious faith", Shoghi Effendi tells us, "is that mystic feeling which unites man with God." He states further that this "mystic feeling" is a "state of spiritual communion" that "can be brought about and maintained by means of meditation and prayer".[reference]

[l] Allied to prayer is meditation which by nature is profoundly mystical for it seeks to bring hidden mysteries into the divine light of consciousness and understanding.

[m] There are in addition to mysticism, moreover, other forms of experience that are also unusual or rare, such as those of the poet, the artist, the scientist and the philosopher. These experiences likewise are not accessible to everyone, but this does not make the work of their practitioners any less valuable, or less subject to inquiry.

[n] Further, mysticism can only become part of the public domain when such experiences and the reflections that accompany them, are recorded. Otherwise, they remain unknown, private experiences from which others cannot benefit through reflection and study. What the nature and character of mysticism might be in Bahá'í experience can only emerge consequently when the Bahá'ís who have had such experiences venture to record them, and offer them in a spirit of collaboration to those scholars who would be in a position to appreciate them further by identifying their dynamics and characteristic features.

[o] The fact that genuine mystical experiences are relatively rare should not, however, disqualify mysticism from the scrutiny of the scholar, and it has not done so in other religious traditions.

[p] A mystical worldview can serve, moreover, as one of those great "esoteric" focal points that unites the great religions,<sup>82</sup> and it would be interesting to observe what common characteristics there might be in the mystical experiences of Bahá'ís and how these compare to those experiences in other traditions. More significantly, it would be interesting to observe what these experiences might reveal about the nature of God, the soul or the spiritual life.

[q] Notwithstanding, Shoghi Effendi has signalled certain cautions in regard to mystical experiences.<sup>83</sup> William James has also recorded some reservations in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* with regard to the mystic's claims. Although the mystic's supernatural experiences may confer psychic certitude upon the soul making the mystic "invulnerable" in his/her convictions (*Varieties* 324) these rare experiences confer upon the mystic no special authority that would warrant our uncritical acceptance of such experiences or the adoption of the mystic's personal lifestyle (*Varieties* 325). Nevertheless, despite the varieties that mark their subjective experiences, the unanimous voice with which they speak of the supernatural states of the soul interacting intimately with its Creator or with other spiritual forces in transcendent worlds, creates in those who seek to understand and to share in these experiences a willingness to listen to their voice. The mystics offer to those who have not had the experience, "hypotheses" (*Varieties* 328) of a divine life which is more dramatic and real than anything thus far imagined or experienced.

## Conclusion

I have discussed the foregoing propositions to argue for a more diversified and comprehensive view of Bahá'í theology. Such development and diversification are in order, not only to make Bahá'í theology meaningful to scholars of religion, but also to correlate the insights of the Bahá'í revelation and the reflections of Bahá'í philosophers and theologians with the views of contemporary scholars and modern schools of thought and progressive movements. A more comprehensive view of theology would have consequently profound implications for providing a unifying vision of humanity's intellectual life, and particularly for "global theology", those comparative religious studies which are currently at the forefront of a world intellectual and spiritual movement to foster a consciousness of the oneness of humanity, one that advocates at the same time the development of a world ethic<sup>84</sup> and spirituality in which all of the adherents of the world's great religions might feel at home.

In a spirit of dialogue, I leave the last word to St. Augustine who said: "And if anyone says, "I understand your meaning well enough, but it's not true," I ask him to state his own position and refute mine. If he does this sincerely and without malice and will inform me of his views (if I am still alive, that is), then I shall count my efforts well rewarded. If he cannot let me know personally, then I would be delighted if others profit from his views."<sup>85</sup>

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup>. Through a Bahá'í perspective, this paper discusses issues mainly in the Judeo-Christian tradition and western philosophy. I am grateful to B. Hoff Conow for her perceptive questioning and editorial suggestions that contributed to the clarification of several points while the paper was being written.
- <sup>2</sup>. See J.A. McLean, "Prolegomena to a Bahá'í Theology", *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 5.1, pp. 25-66. This article is intended to be a clearing ground or preliminary discussion of some basic parameters of Bahá'í theology. It defines the concept of Bahá'í theology more closely through an examination of terminology, considers the relativity of religious truth in its relation to the Absolute and its deabsolutising role in interreligious dialogue, discusses the apophatic and cataphatic aspects of the Bahá'í concept of both the hidden and manifest God, and explores other aspects of Bahá'í cosmology based on Bahá'u'lláh's *Lawh-i-kullu't-ta'ám* (The Tablet of All Food).
- <sup>3</sup>. *Revelation theology* or *source theology* refers to the authoritative, objective, and normative truths of the Bahá'í sacred writings or those elucidated by the Bahá'í Faith's duly appointed interpreters. Authoritative means that the teaching is binding on believers; objective means that the truths of source theology are commonly perceived and recognized as true by the community of believers; normative means that the teaching is recognized by believers as the standard of truth. *Derivative theology* (commentary) refers to the subjective, relative and non-binding elucidation of Bahá'í teachings by competent scholars. Subjective here means that the commentary is particular to the viewpoint of the writer and becomes objective only where a common consensus exists as to its validity. I do not infer that *derivative theology* has the same status as revelation, but that revelation is the source of theology, and that theological concepts form much of the grammar of revelation itself.
- <sup>4</sup>. The formulation here of theology as a comprehensive science reflects in its basic idea some of the views formulated by Cambridge philosophical theologian F.R. Tennant in his two volume work *Philosophical Theology*. (1, 1935, 2, 1937) and in his *Philosophy of the Sciences*. (1932) Such a view I believe is also implicit in Bahá'u'lláh's statement that "the source of all learning is the knowledge of God...", a very weighty statement that connects theology (knowledge of God) with all learning. The concept of theology as a comprehensive science, however, dates back to Aquinas and perhaps before. See Aquinas below in this Proposition. Aristotle held the same view of philosophy as the interpreter of all knowledge.
- <sup>5</sup>. I have equated here Bahá'u'lláh's "knowledge of God" with theology. This would seem to be a radical redefinition since in the Bahá'í understanding human interpretations of the Word of God can never be on a par with divine revelation. Bahá'u'lláh's "knowledge of God" would seem, moreover, to be equated in the first instance with the truths of the scriptures of the world's religions. With the foundational maxim stated in 1.[a], Bahá'u'lláh would also seem to be pointing directly to himself (mystical communion) as well as to his Book. However, outside of these considerations, all knowledge of God becomes theology (interpretation or commentary) whenever an

individual analyses or comments on the Divine Word. Unless we are reading or listening to the Word of God in its pure form, a form of worship by which we receive and participate in the power and mystery of the divine utterance, any human interpretation of the scripture necessarily falls into the definition of "the knowledge of God" as theology. Otherwise, the knowledge of God would be confined strictly to reading or to listening.

- <sup>6</sup>. The complete sentence is: "Science is an effulgence of the Sun of Reality, the power of investigating and discovering the verities of the universe, the means by which a man finds a pathway to God."
- <sup>7</sup>. This point was first given in-depth discussion in Juan R.I. Cole's much cited *The Concept of Manifestation in the Bahá'í Writings*, a comparative study of Bahá'í and Islamic concepts of the manifestation of God. (The Association for Bahá'í Studies, 1982). Cole's discussion of "theophanology" which has its roots in the Judeo-Christian tradition was commentary on Shoghi Effendi's description of the "rise" and "march" of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh as a "Supreme Theophany" (*The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 97). Shoghi Effendi indicated that he used the word "theophany" in one context to mean Dispensation: "Theophany is used in the sense of Dispensation". (quoted in the first edition of the *Lights of Guidance*" n. 251, p. 82). The more common meaning of theophany is a an extraordinary visible, albeit temporary, manifestation of the Divine. I have also discussed manifestation theology under the heading "The Hidden and Revealed God. Negative and Manifestation Theology" through a discussion of Bahá'u'lláh's cosmological tablet *Lawh-i-kullu't-ta'ám* in "Prolegomena to a Bahá'í Theology", *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 5:1, March-June 1992, 53-61 .
- <sup>8</sup>. Pagination used here from *Blaise Pascal. Thoughts, Letters, Minor Works*. (The Harvard Classics, vol. 48, 1910)
- <sup>9</sup>. From *Commentary of Four Books of Sentences (Scriptum in IV Libros Sententiarum)*, Prologue, q.1, a.. The *Sententiae* was a work of the medieval theologian Peter Lombard (c. 1100-60) who taught at the cathedral school of Paris and who was appointed Bishop of that same city in 1159. Lombard's four books were: (1) the Trinity (2) the Creation and Sin (3) the Incarnation and the Virtues (4) the Sacraments and the Four Last Things. The *Sententiae* was the "sum" of Catholic theology up to that time and remained the standard textbook until it was superseded by the *Summa* of Aquinas.
- <sup>10</sup>. All the quotations in Proposition 1.[m] are from p. 35.
- <sup>11</sup>. Generally dialectic is a method of discursive logic used either to argue in favour of one point of view, or sometimes to resolve contradictory points of view. "Dialectic" (*Republic* 341-47) was the most important part of the "Education of the Philosopher" (Part Eight, Book Seven) in which Socrates says: `Then you [Glaucon] agree that dialectic is the coping-stone that tops our educational system; it completes the course of studies and there is no other study that can rightly be placed above it.' `I agree" (347)
- <sup>12</sup>. This last point was made by Mr. Ian Semple, former member of the Universal House of Justice, in personal correspondence. (11-25-1994)
- <sup>13</sup>. Marty's complete sentence is: "The theologian, be she the story-teller or the pastor, be he the professional exegete or the pastoral counselor, by my definition, exists to interpret the world and the life of a people in the light of a transcendent reference — in this case of *theos*" (5). For Bahá'ís the meaning of "pastor" would have to be broadened beyond its usual meaning of cleric. A pastor would be one who seeks to guide others to a safe place. Since Bahá'í theology is firmly grounded in a personal, Creator-God and belief in the soul, new ground should be broken to interface with those traditions, such as Buddhism, which claim to have no grounding in *theos* or the soul.
- <sup>14</sup>. I do not mean "emergence of something out of nothing" in a literal, absolute sense. By the "emergence of something out of nothing", I refer to the artist's skill of creating something in a new form that was not recognizable in its previous one.
- <sup>15</sup>. In the sacred story of the aboriginal Australian, "dream time" was in the beginning.

- <sup>16</sup>. The complete quotations are: "O SON OF MAN! Rejoice in the gladness of thine heart, that thou mayest be worthy to meet Me to mirror forth My beauty." (*The Hidden Words*, Arabic 36); "O SON OF MAN! Ascend unto My heaven, that thou mayest obtain the joy of reunion, and from the chalice of imperishable glory quaff the peerless wine." (*The Hidden Words*, Arabic 61); "O SON OF SPIRIT! With the joyful tidings of light I hail thee: rejoice! To the court of holiness I summon thee; abide therein that thou mayest live in peace for evermore." (*The Hidden Words*, Arabic 33).
- <sup>17</sup>. Although the context of the discussion is music, and particularly the human voice, the text of `Abdu'l-Bahá cited above clearly indicates a wider application of the aesthetically pleasing than music alone.
- <sup>18</sup>. The context of the phrase "the beauty of holiness" is contained within `Abdu'l-Bahá's exhortation that colleges and universities uphold "three cardinal principles". They are: (1) Wholehearted service to the cause of education (2) Service to the cause of morality. (3) Service to the oneness of the world of humanity. To manifest "the beauty of holiness" is part of `Abdu'l-Bahá's counsel to the students that they should observe "inculcating in their lives the beauty of holiness and the excellency of virtue....".
- <sup>19</sup>. This is the translation of the King James version. The R.S.V. says "Ascribe unto the Lord the glory of his name; worship the Lord in holy array." *Hadrat Kadósh* means literally the "splendour of holiness".
- <sup>20</sup>. Aristotle's passive and remote God, the Prime Mover, does not however reciprocate by an attraction to all those things that move toward It.
- <sup>21</sup>. I do not mean that there is an iron-clad division between the cognitive the non-cognitive concept. Non-cognitive does not mean in any sense irrational. The "cognitive statement" is preoccupied with establishing a high degree of certainty. The non-cognitive statement, while it is broadly rational, does not target the Yes/No, Right/Wrong, True/False question.
- <sup>22</sup>. I mean "vision quest" in the broad sense of having a spiritual vision and understanding of things.
- <sup>23</sup>. I am speaking analogically in Proposition 4.[b]. I do not intend a variety of actual spoken dialects and languages.
- <sup>24</sup>. I do not infer by this statement that creative writing must have *per force* a theological purpose, and I do not advocate that creative writing be forced into the service of theology. By "any psychological sense", I mean simply that creative writing seeks to portray the dynamics of human psychology.
- <sup>25</sup>. Much of the analytical minutiae of the logical positivists on the functions of language defined all metaphysical statements as "non-sense". G.E. Moore (1873-1958) in *Principia Ethica*, for example, turned ethics into a verification of the linguistic functions of the definitions of word meanings. There was, however, an overall positive "spin-off" to the logical positivist's sometimes tedious discussions of language; namely, that they helped to clarify the distinctions between cognitive and non-cognitive language, and cautioned writers to take great care in the use of words and definitions. As stated in the above proposition, theologians would obviously reject the logical positivists' attempt to eliminate metaphysics, which restricted the meaning of statements only to those which are logically true or false [a statement is meaningful if it is false?] or those which could be empirically tested. See, for example, Rudolf Carnap's essay, "The Elimination of Metaphysics Through the Logical Analysis of Language" (60-81) in A.J. Ayer, ed. *Logical Positivism*, (The Free Press, Macmillan, New York, 1959). Carnap, however, was prepared to concede that metaphysics expressed a vague "general attitude of a person toward life" (*Lebenseinstellung, Lebensgefühl*) (78) but that theologians and metaphysicians simply deluded themselves if they thought they were saying something meaningful. Carnap viewed metaphysics as a poor and inadequate substitute for art (80) in which the metaphysician used declarative sentences to express essentially nothing. Since the 1950's the logical positivists have come under criticism themselves by other linguistic philosophers for their restrictive theories .

- <sup>26</sup>. Shoghi Effendi interprets Bahá'u'lláh's cogent phrase this way: "What Bahá'u'lláh meant primarily with "sciences that begin and end in words" are those theological treatises and commentaries that encumber the human mind rather than help it to attain the truth." (See "Writers and Writing", *The Compilation of Compilations*, 2:411). Shoghi Effendi has elsewhere explained that Bahá'u'lláh's dictum does not apply to philosophy [generally], although it could well apply to *some* schools of philosophy.
- <sup>27</sup>. For a theological approach to the meaning of spirituality and the dynamics of transformation see J.A. McLean *Dimensions in Spirituality. Reflections on Spiritual Life and Transformation in Light of the Bahá'í Faith*. (George Ronald, Oxford, 1994)
- <sup>28</sup>. Further to this last point, see Proposition 8: "Theology and the Existential Moment".
- <sup>29</sup>. Interested readers may wish to pursue the series of exchanges that took place in *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* between Iraj Ayman on the one hand, Craig Loehle, Susan B. Brill, M.K. Rohani and John Hatcher on the other concerning the indispensability of knowing source languages in the exercise of Bahá'í studies. Iraj Ayman opened the door to the polemic with a comment that continued an earlier discussion between Craig Loehle ("On Human Origins: A Bahá'í Perspective", *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 2.4. 1990) and a follow-up commentary by Arash Abizadeh (*The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 3.1.1990) which elicited a further response from Loehle. (*The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 3.2.1990) But it was Ayman's subsequent comment that elicited a rash of responses: "One major requirement of scholarly study of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is sufficient mastery of the two languages in which these are revealed." ("Commentary", *J.B.S.* 4:1 March-June 1991). Susan B. Brill, M.K. Rohani, John S. Hatcher, Iraj Ayman and finally the original author Craig Loehle all exchanged letters on the point. (*The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 4.3.1991, 5.2.1992)

While no one would wish to argue the point that knowledge of source languages is indispensable for the translation and closer study of the Bahá'í writings, unfortunately Ayman's statement gave the impression of being elitist, i.e. only those who know Arabic and Persian can be true Bahá'í scholars. Ayman maintained, however, in a subsequent clarification, that "I had absolutely no intention to promote any kind of elitism..." ("Commentary", *J.B.S.* 4:3 September-December 1991). However Ayman's original statement was intended and interpreted, the basic fallacy in the "knowing the source languages argument" is that knowledge of these languages will somehow solve the hermeneutical dilemma. Expert translators are frequently dogged by hermeneutical quandaries and inadequacies. Knowing the source language is obviously a basic requirement for a deeper appreciation of particular texts. It does not, however, *ensure understanding* of the text. The problem is well known to anyone who has tried to decipher the meaning of a daunting text written in one's own tongue. I am inclined to Sen McGlinn's commonsensical view expressed to me in correspondence that "**some** Bahá'í scholars" require a thorough knowledge of source languages. (my emphasis) Other scholars can rely upon this linguistic expertise in a venture of cooperative learning in the same fashion as the exegetes rely on the skills of non-exegetes in other areas. This method is in fact already practised by Bahá'í scholars.

- <sup>30</sup>. Widengren was a scholar of Iranian religion (*Hochgottglaube im alten Iran*, 1938) who helped pioneer modern studies of pre-islamic Iranian religion.
- <sup>31</sup>. Shoghi Effendi.
- <sup>32</sup>. Juan R.I. Cole makes the point in the conclusion of his article that "...philosophers of religion, when considering such issues as theological pluralism, have tended to draw abstract propositions from religious texts and then to treat those propositions in the same way that mathematical propositions would be treated. My argument here has been that such a procedure ignores the literariness, the *textuality* of religious texts." (472) What Cole has in mind by the "textuality" of religious writings are conventional literary devices employed in sacred texts and any allusions to episodes in other sacred histories that might help frame the text, as well any strictly theological meaning. "Textuality" also requires taking into account the mytho-symbolic dimensions of sacred text. Where

the literary-textual approach is ignored in the reading of sacred texts in favour of the theological propositional approach, a "thin" (473) reading occurs which deprives religious texts of the richness of their literary heritage and consequently of their effectiveness and, in Cole's view, implications for pluralism.

- <sup>33</sup>. Wordsworth writes: "Aristotle, I have been told, has said, that Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing: it is so: its object is truth, not individual but local, but general and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion."
- <sup>34</sup>. Verbal report or "pilgrim's note" of `Abdu'l-Bahá to Mrs. Mary L. Lucas in "A Brief Account of My Visit to Acca", Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Society, 1905.
- <sup>35</sup>. An instructive beginning of this discussion has been made by Bret Breneman in "Socrates'/Plato's use of Rhetoric. A Bahá'í Perspective" in *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 4:1, March-June 1991, 1-18. In his article, Breneman focuses on the nature and purposes of rhetoric in classical antiquity as an attempt to "wed eloquence with the noble goals of philosophy". (1) He emphasizes, however, that the study of classical rhetoric remains of enduring value to moderns in assisting "our understanding of human utterance and expression." (1) Breneman takes the position that the influence of classical rhetoric depended on the proof of Socrates' moral character. Breneman then relates this statement to the Bahá'í teachings on the interdependence of a virtuous character and fine speech (11-17).
- <sup>36</sup>. *Kerygma* is a verbal noun which means "to herald, announce, proclaim". It was used by the apostle Paul to refer to the proclamation he and the apostles had been charged with disseminating. In theological and New Testament studies the word came to have a technical meaning to refer to one common core of earliest Christian teaching. The earliest form of Bábí-Bahá'í teaching also took the forms of proclamation in the declaration of the Báb (May 23, 1844). New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann in *Kerygma and Myth* and in his *Theology of the New Testament* used Heideggerean *existentialia* to reinterpret the *Kerygma* as the divine word hidden in the myth of the life and death of the cosmological saviour-hero Jesus, a divine word that could be released by a process of demythologising (*Entmythologisierung*). The traditional Christian kerygmatic language of the cross with its redemptive death and resurrection of Christ were translated by Bultmann into a new self-understanding based on the existential preoccupation with authentic and unauthentic existence.
- <sup>37</sup>. On September 10, 1911 `Abdu'l-Bahá said in his first public talk in the West at the City Temple, London: "This is a new cycle of human power. All the horizons of the world are luminous, and the world will become indeed as a garden and a paradise. It is the hour of unity of the sons of men and of the drawing together of all races and classes."
- <sup>38</sup>. This last expression derives from Harvey Cox's discussion of religion in *The Secular City* (1965). It usually refers to a secular outlook that has dispensed with religion. Here it refers to a world that is attaining spiritual maturity.
- <sup>39</sup>. The Báb made this declaration in the official residence of the governor of Adhírbáyján in the presence of the Muslim ecclesiastical dignitaries of the city of Tabríz at the end of the period of his imprisonment in the mountain fortress of the village of Chíríq (1848-50). Convened at the request of the Grand Vazir, the meeting was in effect a trial of the courts spiritual in order to decide the fate of the Báb whom the Muslim clergy had imprisoned for being a dangerous heretic. The trial led to the Báb's subsequent execution. In the presence of the governor, the highest Muslim ecclesiastical dignitaries of the city, and the heir to the Peacock throne, prince Násiri'd-Dín Mírzá, the Báb fearlessly proclaimed to the awe-struck assembly: "I am, 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* 21). The messianic figure of the twelfth imám (*Qá'im*) whom the Báb

claimed to be was held in such lofty reverence that all stood up at the mention of his name. This explains the Báb's reference to "at Whose mention you have risen".

40. Thanks to Grace Calí, Tillich's secretary from 1955-1962 during his Harvard years, for drawing this passage to my attention.
41. There appears to be the same identity crisis within some circles of the community of Bahá'í scholars surrounding the word "apology" as there was in the larger community surrounding the legitimacy of the expression "Bahá'í theology". The following section has been written consequently to redefine and legitimize apology in contemporary Bahá'í scholarship, for it is my impression that certain scholars view Bahá'í apology as an inferior form of Bahá'í scholarship. While popular and apologetical approaches to the Bahá'í Faith may have been lacking scholarly rigour in the past, these approaches do not represent definitive or ideal forms of apologetics. It seems to me, moreover, that the apologetic demands of the Bahá'í *kerygma* event have not been adequately served in Bahá'í scholarship to date. Bahá'í *Kerygma* still seeks to vindicate its momentous claims. Since the academy currently looks askance at apology, some Bahá'í scholars may be prone to adopting the view that references to the BKE are anachronistic. To take such a view, however, puts serious limitations on the Word of God and ignores the vital nature and function of Bahá'í proclamation.
42. Krieger writes: "I will show first how pluralism resulted from an *internal split*, a break in the continuity of Western cultural identity. This entails showing how Christian theology arose from apologetic impulse and how, to this day, the *pragmatics* of theological thinking, indeed all Western thinking, remain determined by what may be called the *apologetic method*.." (17-18).
43. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has prophesied that in time there will be universal opposition to Faith of Bahá'u'lláh: "...How great, how very great is the Cause! How very fierce the onslaught of all the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Ere long shall the clamor of the multitude throughout Africa, throughout America, the cry of the European and the Turk, the groaning of India and China, be heard from far and near. One and all, they shall arise with all their power to resist His Cause" (Cited in Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 17).
44. The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* prohibits, for example, alcohol whether light or strong. Shoghi Effendi widened the prohibition to include "everything that deranges the mind" (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, n. 144) which includes all mood-altering drugs consumed for non-medicinal purposes. Alcohol is permitted only when it "constitutes part of a medical treatment" (n. 144). Gambling, homosexuality, adultery, gossip, backbiting and calumny which are epidemic throughout the western world, although by no means confined to it, are also prohibited. However, any criticism of homosexuality which is currently widely tolerated in western society, and especially in North America, is viewed by moderns as being narrow-minded prejudice and a violation of "political correctness".
45. This one sentence alone takes in apology as well as the study of history, scripture and prophecy.
46. See Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).
47. Tillich, however, was aware of the dangers of the apologetical approach. In historical Christianity, he deplored the continual narrowing down and exclusion that resulted from dogmatic definition.
48. Zaynu'l-Muqarrabin, "the most eminent of the transcribers of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings" ., made a compilation of 103 "Questions and Answers" which contain answers revealed by Bahá'u'lláh to various questions which had been submitted to Him by believers. (Numbers 104-107 contain no questions.) The Universal House of Justice states that the "Questions and Answers" "constitutes an invaluable appendix to the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*" (Introduction to the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 9).
49. I owe this last thought to a conversation with Jim Dessen of Manotick, Ontario.
50. Proposition 9.[c] with some slight alterations has been taken from "Prolegomena to a Bahá'í Theology", 41.

- <sup>51</sup>. This turn of phrase is a modified expression of Kierkegaard's phrase the "teleological suspension of the ethical" found in his "Problem 1" titled "Is there such a thing as a teleological suspension of the ethical?" in *Fear and Trembling and the Sickness Unto Death*, p. 64. "Problem 1" is Kierkegaard's interpretation of God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac. This command brings about the suspension of another divine command: "Thou shalt not kill". Kierkegaard admits to having ambivalent feelings about Abraham and his gesture which was a transgression of the law: "Therefore, though Abraham arouses my admiration, he at the same time appals me." (71) Kierkegaard's resolution of the dilemma is that: "As the individual he [Abraham] became higher than the universal" (77). This interpretation is consistent with Kierkegaard's predilection for the supreme importance of individuality. My heuristic interpretations of the biblical story are: (1) It contains a late echo of the prohibition of child sacrifice which some have argued was practised by the early Israelites, although this point is disputed. (2) More symbolically, the point of the story may be that prophetic authority is so great that it sweeps away (murders) well established, unquestionable divine laws.
- <sup>52</sup>. *Époché* and *Éidós* were two techniques that formed part of Edmund Husserl's method of phenomenology. Phenomenology was a movement begun by Brentano and brought to prominence by Husserl (1859-1938). (See *Cartesian Meditations* (trans. 1960), *The Idea of Phenomenology* (trans. 1964), *The Paris Lectures*, (trans. 1964)). Basically, phenomenology aims at the description or study of things as they appear. Husserl understood phenomena as essences which the mind intuited in an a priori fashion. He viewed the task of philosophy as one of describing these essences. Husserl thought that the world had to be bracketed, that is, the subject had to lay aside all preconceptions of the object (*Époché*) in order to understand the *Éidós*, the essence of a phenomenon. Phenomenology also furthered the study of being undertaken by such existentialists as Heidegger and Sartre. The application of the phenomenological method to comparative religion led to a heightened objectivity of phenomena as reflected for example in van der Leeuw's *Phänomenologie der Religion (Religion in Essence and Manifestation)* which retained nonetheless the theological perspective of the Gospel as being the fulfilment of religion: "Von Christentum aus unsern Blick auf der Welt der historischen Religionen richtend, meinen wir zu sehen, daß das Evangelium sich zeigt als Erfüllung der Religion überhaupt" (*Phänomenologie*, p. 614) [From the perspective of Christianity, and directing our view to the world of the historical religions, we have in mind to see that the Gospel reveals itself especially as the fulfilment of religion (my translation)]. It is, however, difficult if not impossible to practice the principles of *Époché* and *Éidós*, for there is always bias of some kind. Even in the selection of the material there is bias. Van der Leeuw chose his data chiefly from the religions of pre-literate societies rather than from the living religions. Comparative religionist Mircea Eliade used the phenomenological method in such a way that he retained an objective approach while retaining a sympathetic identification to the subject matter. Phenomenology also led scholars to inquire into the nature of religious consciousness. This produced, for example, such works as Rudolf Otto's *Das Heilige (The Idea of the Holy)*, 1917) which went through 25 editions in 20 years, an attestation to its popularity. Phenomenology was also used by W. Brede Kristensen, Joachim Wach and others. For further readings on the method of phenomenology as it applies to the study of religion see Joseph Dabney Bettis, ed., *Phenomenology of Religion* (SCM Press, 1969).
- <sup>53</sup>. BHC
- <sup>54</sup>. My translation differs somewhat from the translation used in Schaefer's book.
- <sup>55</sup>. Some of the following propositions relate a few ethical statements to the task of the Bahá'í scholar. My assumption infers a certain morality of knowledge, that is, that ethical perspectives and practices, or their lack, will significantly influence the direction, content and conclusions of the scholar.
- <sup>56</sup>. The complete quotation is: "The divine religions embody two kinds of ordinances. First, there are those which constitute essential, or spiritual, teachings of the Word of God. These are faith in God, the acquirement of the virtues which characterize perfect manhood, praiseworthy moralities, the acquisition of the bestowals and

bounties emanating from the divine effulgences — -in brief, the ordinances which concern the realm of morals and ethics. This is the fundamental aspect of the religion of God, and this is of the highest importance because knowledge of God is the fundamental requirement of man" (Promulgation 403).

- <sup>57</sup>. "The first thing which emanated from God is that universal reality, which the ancient philosophers termed the "First Mind," and which the people of Bahá call the "First Will." (*Some Answered Questions* 203) Also: "No sign can indicate His presence or His absence; inasmuch as by a word of His command all that are in heaven and on earth have come to exist, and by His wish, which is the Primal Will itself, all have stepped out of utter nothingness into the realm of being, the world of the visible." (*The Kitáb-i-Iqán* 98) `Abdu'l-Bahá says further that "Will is that active force which controlleth these relationships and these incidents. Such is the epitome of the explanation of fate and predestination." (*Selections From the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá* 198) In context, what `Abdu'l-Bahá seems to be indicating by "these relationships and these incidents" are the necessary physical actions and reactions that must occur within nature: "For example, God hath created a relation between the sun and the terrestrial globe that the rays of the sun should shine and the soil should yield" (*same*).
- <sup>58</sup>. In his discussion of "The Justice and Mercy of God" `Abdu'l-Bahá says: "Now the question of the good or evil of things is determined by reason or by law." The representatives of the law tendency he gives as [orthodox] Jews. (*Some Answered Questions*, p. 266) `Abdu'l-Bahá then gives "the theologians" as representatives of the tendency to both law and reason. `Abdu'l-Bahá states further that reason, rather than revelation, is the basis for considering reprehensible acts evil and worthy of punishment. Vengeance too, according to `Abdu'l-Bahá, is blameworthy according to the dictates of reason. (*ibid* 266-67) `Abdu'l-Bahá's account incites us to raise the question of the role and the relationship of both reason and revelation in determining ethical conduct.
- <sup>59</sup>. The quaranic verse "God doeth whatsoever He willeth, and ordaineth whatsoever He pleaseth" [reference] is quoted several times by Bahá'u'lláh in *The Kitáb-i-Iqán [Book of Certitude]*. See, for example, 97, 170, 243.
- <sup>60</sup>. For an analysis of the *Aqdas* that attempts to understand it "from the perspective of contemporary national and international law" (35), see Martha L. Schweitz "The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*: Bahá'í Law, Legitimacy, and World Order" in *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 6:1, March-June, 1994, 35-59. Whatever the strictly legal implications of the *Aqdas* are, it is also clear that one of the unique features of the *Aqdas* is precisely the fusion of a mysticism of divine love and canon law. The *Aqdas* will not separate love from law. Consider this phrase: "Let your joy be the joy born of My Most Great Name, a Name that bringeth rapture to the heart, and filleth with ecstasy the minds of all who have drawn nigh unto God." (38) Also: "Say: From My laws the sweet-smelling savour of My garment can be smelled, and by their aid the standards of Victory will be planted upon the highest peaks. The Tongue of My power hath, from the heaven of My omnipotent glory, addressed to My creation these words: "Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty." Happy is the lover that hath inhaled the divine fragrance of his Best-Beloved from these words, laden with the perfume of a grace which no tongue can describe" (20-21). Such more mystical statements are a reminder that the *Aqdas* can never be reduced to a "mere code of laws".
- <sup>61</sup>. See this proposition for the full quotation.
- <sup>62</sup>. The context was `Abdu'l-Bahá's emphasizing to the Bahá'ís that he was not the second coming of Christ. The full quotation is: "O ye believers of God! Each person must summon the people to the Servitude of `Abdu'l-Bahá and not the Christhood; and no soul must either publicly or privately utter one word against or in contradiction to the general Teachings, and no one must believe that `Abdu'l-Bahá is the "Second Coming of Christ", nay, rather he must believe that he is the Manifestation of Servitude, the Main-spring of the Unity of the human world, the Herald of the True One with spiritual power throughout all regions, the Commentator of the Book according to the divine text, and the Ransom to each one of the believers of God in the transitory world."
- <sup>63</sup>. While Niebuhr refers to behaviour or conduct generally with his reference to "nature" above, his remarks have a

certain relevance to the notion of responsibility in the work of the Bahá'í scholar that concerns me here.

- <sup>64</sup>. "The Bahá'í Faith: A Summary", 1938 edition. Einstein said that science was "the attempt to make the chaotic diversity of our sense-experience correspond to a logically uniform system of thought." See "The Fundamentals of Theoretical Physics" in Albert Einstein's *Ideas and Opinions* 315. For Einstein's views of the method of science, see "Physics and Reality", no. 1 "General Consideration Concerning the Method of Science" (*Ideas* 283-286). It is here that Einstein makes the point that science is "nothing more than a refinement of every day thinking." (283) By this Einstein means that the scientist structures and formulates an understanding of the connections of sense experiences. Out of this structured thinking emerges a coherent body of knowledge about the "real external world". (284). Einstein said elsewhere, however, in response to questions from a Japanese scholar that "It is difficult even to attach a precise meaning to the term "scientific truth." Thus the meaning of the word "truth" varies according to whether we deal with a fact of experience, a mathematical proposition, or a scientific theory. "Religious truth" conveys nothing clear to me at all" (*Ideas* 255). This statement would seem to inveigh against another affirmation of Einstein that the language of science was a universal language. See "The Common Language of Science" in *Ideas* 326-328.
- <sup>65</sup>. Although science is increasingly coming to a unified theory of the universe, its cosmology remains partial since it excludes an understanding of the human being.
- <sup>66</sup>. I recognize that the writings of some of the more recent scientists such as biologist Richard Dawkins seemed to be retreating back into a radical separation of science and religion. However, the creative insights of the philosopher scientists who founded the new physics and who favoured a more complementary role between science and religion come closer to the Bahá'í view.
- <sup>67</sup>. Ken Wilber writes in *Quantum Questions. Mystical Writings of the World's Great Physicists* that in spite of the fact that the physicists in his anthology "did not believe that physics and mysticism shared similar worldviews"... "they nevertheless *all* became mystics" (Preface). The profound and thought-provoking essays of Prince Louis de Broglie (theory of "matter waves"), Sir Arthur Eddington (theoretical physics of stellar systems), Werner Heisenberg (matrix quantum mechanics), Wolfgang Pauli ("exclusion principle", anticipation of neutrino), Erwin Schrodinger ("Schrodinger's wave equation"), Sir James Jeans (dynamic theory of gases, electromagnetism, the nature of nebulae, etc) all have the purpose of in some way reconciling the rational with the mystical. One is further struck by the cogent, terse, insightful philosophic expression of these essays. They are written with the acumen and insider experience of great mystical philosophers. "The Cambridge Club" (see this proposition) worked out a number of theories that had gone a long way in reconciling the principles of science with a geometrical religion of "mind stuff". Unfortunately, their work was interrupted by world war two which redirected science to the military effort.
- <sup>68</sup>. The mystical monist views of the great physicists comes very close to pantheism. God or Spirit is radically immanent in the religious views of the philosopher scientists. Their faith in the organisational mind seems to leave no place for transcendence. Transcendence, while allowing for immanence, makes explicit the belief that God is "above", "beyond", "greater than", "distinct from", "wholly other" than his creation. Indeed, He is worthy of love, worship and praise.
- <sup>69</sup>. Although David Foster in *The Philosophical Scientists* includes Bertrand Russell as one of the "1930 Cambridge Club" (2), as is well-known, Russell categorically dissented from any spiritual interpretation of the universe.
- <sup>70</sup>. See also Schrödinger's remarkable essay, "The Oneness of Mind" in Ken Wilber, editor, *Quantum Questions*, pp.[...]
- <sup>71</sup>. Proposition 12 in its treatment of Bahá'í history addresses a concern that Bahá'í scholarship may be unknowingly drifting toward a too rigid demarcation between the engaged-apologetic approach of Bahá'í philosophers and theologians on the one hand, and the critical-objective approach of the sociologist-historians on the other hand.

I argue that both methods must be used inclusively. Apologetic approaches must show evidence of critical thinking, and the events of Bahá'í history must find wider meaning in the asking and answering of theological and existential questions.

- <sup>72</sup>. Held in Cambridge, England, September 30-October 1, 1978. Also published in *Bahá'í News*, June 1979. Proposition [h] reflects the tenor of that statement.
- <sup>73</sup>. There is a tendency among modern historians to no longer hold to a concept of objectivity in history. According to this view, all that historical accounts can aim for is plausibility and consistency. But I am wondering if the concept of objectivity in history can be completely jettisoned. It would seem more accurate to speak of "tentative objectivity", meaning that until further proof is forthcoming, certain "facts" shall be considered objective. Even ideological antagonists can agree on some modicum of historical factuality in the telling of events. Shoghi Effendi has moreover recognized the possibility of [objective] factuality when he wrote: "The Cause requires scholars versed in various branches of learning who can "interpret the teachings to suit the facts". (letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi in *Bahá'í Youth: A Compilation* 16) Thanks to Dr. Graham Hassals for this quotation.
- <sup>74</sup>. In this point about the analogy of past events, I have followed somewhat loosely Ernst Troeltsch's (1865-1923) view of analogy in history as outlined in his article "Historiography" in Hastings' *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, 6:716 ff. However, in other respects, Troeltsch's views of history should be contrasted with those of the Bahá'í Faith. Troeltsch did not believe in any special interventions by God within history. For Troeltsch there were no special or privileged events. Apart from these views, from an orthodox Christian perspective, Troeltsch's views were damning for they relativised Christianity, making it only one religion among many, shorn of any absolute claims, special status or unique power.
- <sup>75</sup>. In telling of the story of Abraham, `Abdu'l-Bahá said: "Since the exile of Abraham from Ur of Aleppo in Syria produced this result, we must consider what will be the effect of the exile of Bahá'u'lláh in His several removes from Tihrán to Baghdád, from thence to Constantinople, to Rumelia and to the Holy Land." *Some Answered Questions*, p. 13. The "result" of Abraham's exile referred to by `Abdu'l-Bahá are the prodigious effects of the establishment of the belief in the unity of God, the bestowal of the Holy Land as patrimony to the Semites, Abraham's prophetic descendants such as Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Muhammad, Christ and the Báb, and the influence of the Hebrew Bible on Christian Europe (13). One can only speculate as to the far-reaching effects of Bahá'u'lláh's exile.
- <sup>76</sup>. *Some Answered Questions* 31.
- <sup>77</sup>. There are to date regrettably few scholarly articles written by Bahá'ís which explore the phenomenon of mysticism. In 1953 Bahá'í physicist Glenn Shook wrote *Mysticism, Science and Revelation* in straightforward language which gives an instructive account of mysticism in Bahá'í perspective. The book, *Once to Every Man and Nation. Stories About Becoming a Bahá'í*, whose half title is taken from James Russell Lowell's (1819-1891) anti-slavery poem of the same name, although its main intent is not to detail individual mystical experiences, recounts some by the way. See, for example, Rona M. Freeman's "The Figure in the Red Robe", Sally Eiler's "A Spiritual Crown", Violet Dutov Tichenor's "Thrill of Recognition", Thomas Lysaght's "In the Clouds of Glory", especially Margot Johnson's "Seasons of the Soul" and Elaine Shevin's "In Desperation", as well as Randie Gottlieb's "Mind and Heart". If one adds the dream and prayer as signs of mystical experience, other stories apply. Moojan's Momen's "The Psychology of Mysticism and its Relationship to the Bahá'í Faith" reflects a certain ambiguity about the topic which looks at mysticism from a medical perspective. (See "The Psychology of Mysticism and its Relationship to the Bahá'í Faith", *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin* 2:4, March 1984, 4-21.) Certainly pathology sometimes masquerades as mysticism, but when one reads the accounts of the mystics themselves, their speech is punctuated with delight reflecting what William James calls in the Gifford Lectures of 1901 (*The Varieties of Religious Experience*) as a generally "optimistic" (323) frame of mind in a "religion

of healthy-mindedness" (76-108). Staying within a few examples of the Christian tradition, that religion of delight is reflected in St. John of the Cross when he says that the immense desert of the soul is "delicious" (313). Saint Teresa speaks of an "unspeakable happiness" (316). Saint Ignatius of "intoxicating consolations" (317). The father of Christian mysticism, Dionysius the Areopagite, speaks everywhere in superlatives in his cataphatic language of the *via negativa*. God is *super* everything. (319) Jacob Boehme writes of the "Primal Love" as "that only good" (320). The great contradictions that we sometimes find in the writings of the mystics stems from their having to endure the condition of transiting back and forth from two worlds at the same time, the natural to the supernatural and the reverse, of being wrenched down from the supernal world back to the mundane.

- <sup>78</sup>. The companion volumes *The Hidden Words (Kalimát-i-Maknúnih)* and the *Kitáb-i-Iqán (Book of Certitude)* shed much light on Bahá'u'lláh's mystical works when read conjointly with *The Seven Valleys and The Four Valleys*.
- <sup>79</sup>. To "win his way" suggests other spiritual attributes: courage, patience, steadfastness, struggle and endurance.
- <sup>80</sup>. Becoming "one with the Creator" does not in any sense mean that the soul takes on the essence of divinity or shares in that divine essence. It refers to an experience of unity without there being identity of essence.
- <sup>81</sup>. Quoted by Jalil Mahmoudi in "Irfán, Gnosis, or Mystical Knowledge", *World Order*, Summer 1973, 10.
- <sup>82</sup>. Sufi mystic and philosopher of the world religions Frithjof Schuon distinguishes the "esoteric" mystical core of the great religions from the "exoteric" outer hull of its diverse cultural expressions, doctrinal formulations, dualistic worldviews and claims of exclusivity. Through a deeper penetration of the various guises of myth, symbol and metaphor, one can experience an underlying unity of the great religions at the level of the esoteric heart. See *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* 7-60.
- <sup>83</sup>. The possibility of mystical experience is clearly acknowledged in the Bahá'í Faith, although Shoghi Effendi states that true mystical experiences are rare. He indicates that there is a danger in self-generated, presumably imaginary mystical experience, brought on more likely than not by the inordinate desire to have one. According to Shoghi Effendi, God rather than self, would be the author of the "deeply spiritual experience". (*Lights of Guidance*, no. 1054). If we view dreams as a dimension of mysticism, the Bahá'í writings acknowledge the importance of dreams for the imparting of truth, guidance, and self-understanding. Shoghi Effendi writes, however, that dreams are more or less conditioned by both the preoccupations and the purity of the mind of the dreamer. (*Lights of Guidance*, no. 1051) Regarding visions, Shoghi Effendi maintained that visions were not confined to the prophets alone, but that is difficult to distinguish between imaginations and true visions. However, the possibility of the true vision is clearly acknowledged for pure and receptive souls (*ibid*, no. 1052). Whatever "revelations" an individual may have, however, cannot be construed as constituting infallible guidance which is reserved for the prophets alone (*ibid* no. 1053). Following `Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi warned that Bahá'ís are not to tamper with psychic phenomena (*ibid*, no. 387) such as seances. There may be some beneficial uses to clairvoyance such as its application to police work in the search for missing persons and criminals, but further research is needed here. The risk of concentrating excessively on the development of psychic faculties is that we might weaken the development of purely spiritual virtues by neglect. For a fuller discussion of these questions, see *XLVI. Psychic Phenomena* in *Lights of Guidance*, pp. 385-397. (first edition)
- <sup>84</sup>. See, for example, *A Global Ethic. The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions*. (Eds. Hans Küng, Karl-Josef Kuschel, Continuum, New York, 1993)
- <sup>85</sup>. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 1, iii, 5, cited by Hans Küng in *Infallible? An Inquiry* 249-50.