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## Bahá'í Faith

*Know thou that every fixed star hath its own planets,  
and every planet its own creatures, whose number  
no man can compute.*

Bahá'u'lláh, in *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*

The Bahá'í Faith, which today has five to six million followers worldwide, emerged in the mid-nineteenth century when a Persian nobleman, known as Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892 C. E.), had a vision of God's will for humanity and proclaimed himself one of God's Messengers. According to the Bahá'í faithful, Bahá'u'lláh appeared as a successor to God's previous great Earth-based Messengers, or Manifestations, among them Krishna, Buddha, Moses, Zoroaster, Jesus and Muhammad.

Central to the Bahá'í Faith are the ideas that each human has a non-material soul created by God and that the physical body of each human being offers a temporary home for that human's soul. According to the beliefs of the Bahá'í Faith, both the soul and that soul's human body are created by God at the same moment. During one's brief lifetime, one seeks to fulfill "the purpose which that Creator has fixed for His creatures,"<sup>1</sup> which is "to know his Creator and to attain His Presence."<sup>2</sup> After the physical death of the body, the soul endures in the spiritual world, which exists outside of time and space. The soul is not reincarnated into another body in any other location in our physical universe, nor is any place in the physical universe the location of human souls in the afterlife.

Several decades after founding the religion now known as the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh appointed his eldest son 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921 C. E.) as his spiritual successor and

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-4-0-6.html>

<sup>2</sup> Bahá'u'lláh. (1990). *Gleanings from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (pocket-size edition, p. 70). US Bahá'í Publishing Trust. Retrieved from <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/b/GWB/>

leader of the faith. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was given the authority to be the sole interpreter of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and the respect from the Bahá'í Faith community that his interpretations would be accepted as theological absolutes. "Bahá'u'lláh, in the Book of His Covenant, confirmed the appointment of His Son 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the interpreter of His Word and the Center of His Covenant. As the interpreter, 'Abdu'l-Bahá became the living mouth of the Book, the expounder of the Word; as the Center of the Covenant, He became the incorruptible medium for applying the Word to practical measures for the raising up of a new civilization."<sup>3</sup> Since some of the words and writings of Bahá'u'lláh and the interpretations thereof by 'Abdu'l-Bahá are about science and extraterrestrial life, the words and writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá provide a vehicle for understanding how the Bahá'í would handle knowledge about extraterrestrials.

One of the fundamental tenets of the Bahá'í Faith is the unity of religion and science. For the Bahá'í faithful, religion and science are systems of knowledge that must be in harmony. Religion must withstand the analysis of reason. What is learned from one must reinforce what is learned from the other, and no conflict can exist between the two. As explained by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Bahá'u'lláh has declared that religion must be in accord with science and reason. If it does not correspond with scientific principles and the processes of reason, it is superstition. For God has endowed us with faculties by which we may comprehend the realities of things, contemplate reality itself. If religion is opposed to reason and science, faith is impossible; and when faith and confidence in the divine religion are not manifest in the heart, there can be no spiritual attainment."<sup>4</sup>

The Bahá'í also strongly espouse expanding our knowledge about the universe. Doing so, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is a religious imperative: "There are certain pillars which have been established as the unshakeable supports of the Faith of God. The mightiest of these is learning and the use of the mind, the expansion of consciousness, and insight into the realities of the universe and the hidden mysteries of Almighty God. To promote knowledge is thus an inescapable duty imposed on every one of the friends of God."<sup>5</sup>

In his 1945 tract *Foundations of World Unity*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes that "as God is creator, eternal, and ancient, there were always creatures and subjects existing and provided for. There is no doubt that divine sovereignty is eternal. ... If we conceive of a time when there were no creatures ... we dethrone God and predicate a time when God was not."<sup>6</sup> The logic presented by 'Abdu'l-Bahá is straightforward: God has always existed—God "is eternal"—and living creatures created by God have always existed—"there were always creatures"—in God's universe. However, since Earth and humankind on Earth are

<sup>3</sup>"Message on the Centennial Day of the Covenant" (1992, November 26), in *Letters from the Universal House of Justice, 1986–2001*; Retrieved from [http://en.bahaitext.org/MUHJ86-01/145/Message\\_on\\_the\\_Centennial\\_of\\_the\\_Day\\_of\\_the\\_Covenant](http://en.bahaitext.org/MUHJ86-01/145/Message_on_the_Centennial_of_the_Day_of_the_Covenant)

<sup>4</sup>'Abdu'l-Bahá. (1982). *The promulgation of universal peace* (2nd ed., pp. 298–299). US Bahá'í Publishing Trust. Retrieved from <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/PUP/>

<sup>5</sup>'Abdu'l-Bahá. (1982). In *selections from the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Bahá'í World Centre: Haifa), section 97 [19]; Retrieved from <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/c/SCH/>

<sup>6</sup>'Abdu'l-Bahá. (1945). *Foundations of world unity* (p. 101). Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust. Retrieved from <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/c/FWU>