

The Timeless Principles of Religion: A Comparative Study Across Christian, Islamic, and Bahá'í Thought

By Iman Motlagh Arani

Abstract

This article offers a comparative theological map of nine “timeless principles” as they appear in Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith: the oneness of God; the unknowability of the divine essence; creation by God's sovereign act; the office of prophethood; the authority of revealed law; the cardinal virtues (justice, compassion, truthfulness, love); final judgment and the hereafter; the supremacy of revelation; and the renewal of religion across history. Using close readings of primary scriptures and authoritative doctrinal sources, the study identifies deep convergences on monotheism, transcendence, moral obligation, eschatological accountability, and the primacy of revealed guidance, alongside principled differences—especially concerning Trinitarian grammar and *tawhīd*, the structure of authority after the founding revelation, and the modality of historical renewal. Particular attention is given to the “closure” claims in Christianity and Islam (canonical finality and *khatm al-nubuwwa*) and to the Bahá'í doctrine of progressive revelation (including its thousand-year horizon), as well as to Shī'ī distinctions between prophethood and guardianship. The result is a model of unity-in-differentiation: a shared theological and ethical core expressed through distinct economies of law, authority, and history. The analysis aims to sharpen confessional self-understanding while widening the basis for principled interfaith cooperation.

Introduction

Among the most far-reaching propositions in Bahá'í theology is the assertion that all the great religions of the world share the same essential principles. If this claim can be sustained through careful study, it provides a compelling framework for viewing the diversity of religious expression not as a chronicle of mutually exclusive doctrines but as the historical unfolding of a single divine purpose. It would suggest that the apparent differences between Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith—differences in theology, ritual, and legal form—conceal a common structure of spiritual and moral truth. If, however, such unity dissolves under close examination, it would indicate that these religions articulate fundamentally different accounts of reality, with implications for theology, interfaith dialogue, and the possibility of a shared global ethic.

This study undertakes a systematic comparative analysis of nine foundational principles that, according to the most authoritative sources within each tradition, stand at the heart of their theological and moral vision. These principles are drawn not from secondary summaries or popular apologetics, but from primary texts—the Bible, the Qur'án, and the Bahá'í Writings—together with the theological and philosophical expositions of figures whose authority is recognized in their respective communities. The method is twofold: first, to examine each principle within the doctrinal and historical framework of its own tradition, grounding it in

explicit authoritative statements; second, to bring these principles into comparative view, identifying genuine convergences as well as irreducible differences.

The nine principles examined here, ordered from the most basic theological affirmations to their social and eschatological implications, are as follows:

(1) the oneness of God, affirmed as the ultimate reality, the source of all being, and the sole object of worship; (2) the unknowability of God's essence, which safeguards divine transcendence while allowing for the manifestation of divine attributes; (3) creation *ex nihilo*, the belief that the universe, including matter itself, was brought into being by God out of nothing; (4) the role of prophethood and messengers, whereby God communicates His will to humanity through chosen intermediaries; (5) divine law and moral principles, revealed for the ordering of human society, the realization of justice, and the fostering of spiritual growth; (6) the centrality of moral virtues such as justice, compassion, truthfulness, and love, which form the substance of the religious life; (7) the Day of Judgment and the hereafter, the conviction that all will be held accountable before God and rewarded or punished accordingly; (8) the supremacy of divine revelation, the view that the revealed word of God in each dispensation is the ultimate and authoritative source of truth; (9) the renewal of religion through successive messengers, the belief that divine guidance is not static but periodically renewed in forms suited to the needs and capacities of the age.

By structuring the inquiry around these nine principles, the analysis will allow each tradition to speak in its own voice while providing a framework for measured comparison. The aim is neither to dissolve the distinctiveness of Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith into an artificial sameness nor to exaggerate their differences, but to assess whether these affirmations can be meaningfully described as “timeless principles” shared across the three religions. In doing so, this article seeks to clarify the theological basis—and the limits—of religious unity in the Abrahamic tradition.

Principle 1. The Oneness of God

The unity of God stands as the bedrock of all three traditions under consideration, though articulated in distinct theological vocabularies and historical contexts. In Christian theology, this unity is not merely the monotheistic claim that there is only one God; it is an ontological assertion of God's absolute simplicity and the identity of His essence and existence. Thomas Aquinas, drawing on Exodus 3:14 — “*Ego sum qui sum*” — insists that “God did not say: I am this or that, but simply I Am. I am what? I am ‘I Am.’” This is the metaphysical declaration that God's essence is His existence (*ipsum esse subsistens*), a truth which “forms the bedrock of Thomistic metaphysics.” Augustine's statement, “Only those books of Scripture which are called canonical have I learned to hold in such honor as to believe their authors have not erred in any way in writing them,” testifies to the unassailable authority of the revelation by which this unity is made known. The biblical witness affirms it without qualification: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deut. 6:4); “I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is

no God” (Isa. 44:6); “Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me” (Isa. 43:10). Christian theology thus binds divine unity to the doctrine of simplicity — “God is perfectly simple and non-composite” — and approaches it through the *via negativa*, purging anthropomorphic projections, while affirming with Paul that there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (Eph. 4:5–6). The New Testament crystallizes this unity not as an abstract monad but as the living communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — one Being in three Persons — integrating divine oneness with the mystery of the Trinity.

Accordingly, the Nicene–Constantinopolitan confession does not dilute Israel’s monotheism but explicates it: God is *μία οὐσία, τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις*—one essence in three hypostases—such that the Son is consubstantial (*homoousios*) with the Father and the Holy Spirit is “the Lord and Giver of life ... who proceeds from the Father.” The personal distinctions are relations of origin (unbegotten, begotten, proceeding), not parts or shares in deity; hence the one, simple divine essence is numerically identical in the three Persons. There is therefore one will, one power, and one operation toward creation (*opera ad extra indivisa*), with personal “appropriations” assigned only by fittingness. Perichoresis (mutual indwelling) secures that the Persons are in one another without composition, so that divine simplicity is not partitioned but personally subsistent. Unity, then, is not a solitary monad but the plenitude of the one God’s undivided life in triune communion.

Islam’s doctrine of *tawḥīd* presents an equally uncompromising monotheism, expressed with unmatched concision in Sūrat al-Ikhlās: “Say: He is God the One, God the Eternal. He begot no one nor was He begotten. No one is comparable to Him” (Q 112:1–4). The Qur’ān’s repeated rejection of *shirk* — “Do not assign partners to Me” (Q 6:151) — positions the oneness of God as “the very foundation of Islam” and “the most important and pivotal concept.” It declares, “Your God is One God; there is no god but Him, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful” (Q 2:163), and, “There is no deity except Him. Everything will perish except His Face” (Q 28:88). The Prophet Muḥammad’s summation, preserved in the *ḥadīth*, identifies the first clause of the *shahāda* — *lā ilāha illā Allāh* — as the purest formulation of divine unity. Classical theology, as reflected in commentaries on Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī’s *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, insists that God’s attributes — His Face, Hands, Eyes — “befit Allah alone” and must be affirmed “without changing them or ignoring them completely or twisting the meanings or giving resemblance to any of the created things,” for “there is nothing like unto Him, and He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seer” (Q 42:11). In Shī‘ī thought, *tawḥīd* also encompasses God’s exclusive right to legislate and guide through divinely appointed Imāms, the “gateways to Allah” whose obedience is obedience to Him. Whether in Qur’ānic idiom or prophetic tradition, *tawḥīd* is not only a theological claim but the foundation of worship, law, and the entire moral order.

The Bahá’í writings affirm the oneness of God with equal absolutism, expanding its meaning into a vision of divine transcendence that explicitly denies the possibility of comprehending the divine essence. “God in His Essence and in His own Self hath ever been unseen, inaccessible, and unknowable,” writes Bahá’u’lláh. “There is none other God but Him, the Almighty, the All-

Bounteous. We testify that He is One in His Essence, One in His attributes.” He further declares: “Too high is the All-Merciful for the hearts of those who have recognized Him to apprehend His true nature, or for the minds of men to hope to fathom His essence.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, citing ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib, states that “perfect belief in Divine Unity consists in the denial of all His attributes” — not in negating God’s perfections, but in recognizing that such attributes as conceived by the human mind are only signs, never the divine essence itself. The Qur’ānic *tanzīh* (“incomparability”) is here universalized: “Exalted, immeasurably exalted, art Thou above the strivings of mortal man to unravel Thy mystery” (*Prayers and Meditations*, no. 94). This insistence on unknowability does not diminish God’s self-disclosure; rather, it heightens the significance of the Manifestations of God, “the Bearers of the trust of God... the embodiments of His attributes,” through whom “the Presence of God Himself is attained.” Bahá’u’lláh thus unites metaphysical unity with the historical unity of the Prophets: “If thou wilt observe with discriminating eyes, thou wilt behold them all abiding in the same tabernacle, soaring in the same heaven, seated upon the same throne, uttering the same speech, and proclaiming the same Faith.” The oneness of God is therefore inseparable from the oneness of His revelation and the unity of humankind — “Ye are all the leaves of one tree and the drops of one ocean” — making divine unity the organizing axis of theology, ethics, and social order alike.

When placed side by side, the doctrinal affirmations of Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá’í Faith reveal both a shared confession and distinctive theological elaborations. Christianity integrates unity with the mystery of triune communion, rooted in the Shema and affirmed by Christ as the foremost commandment; Islam guards it through the absolute rejection of *shirk* and the Qur’ān’s uncompromising proclamations of divine uniqueness; the Bahá’í Faith links it to the mediated knowability of God through His Manifestations, emphasizing both the simplicity and transcendence of the divine essence. The convergence lies not in uniform metaphysical formulation, but in the unshakeable conviction that the One God — utterly singular, without rival or peer — is the source, measure, and end of all reality, and the foundational principle from which every other doctrine flows in the comparative study that follows.

Principle 2. The Unknowability of God’s Essence

The principle that God’s essence is ultimately unknowable to human beings occupies a central place in the theological frameworks of Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá’í Faith. While each tradition differs in its metaphysical articulation and scriptural imagery, all three converge in affirming that no created intellect can fully comprehend the inner reality of the divine being. This is not a mere statement of God’s greatness, but a doctrinal boundary marker: there is an absolute qualitative gulf between Creator and creation, one that renders any direct apprehension of God’s essence impossible. In each tradition, this conviction functions both as a safeguard against anthropomorphism and as an invitation to seek knowledge of God through the channels He has Himself ordained—whether through revelation, divine attributes, or theophanic manifestation.

In the Christian tradition, the biblical witness repeatedly asserts that God is beyond the reach of human sight, concept, and comprehension. The book of Job poses the challenge: “*Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty? They are high as the heavens, what can you do? Deeper than Sheol, what can you know?*” (Job 11:7–8 NASB). Proverbs affirms the same limit: “*Neither have I learned wisdom, nor do I have the knowledge of the Holy One. Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name or His son’s name? Surely you know!*” (Prov. 30:3–4 NASB). In the New Testament, Paul exclaims, “*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!*” (Rom. 11:33), and elsewhere concedes, “*Now we see as in a mirror dimly, but then face to face*” (1 Cor. 13:12). John’s Gospel is equally clear: “*No one has seen God at any time*” (John 1:18). These texts together form the scriptural bedrock for the conviction that, in this life, the divine essence remains hidden.

Classical Christian theology developed this biblical insight into a rigorous metaphysical doctrine. Thomas Aquinas, following the Dionysian tradition, insists that God is not a “being” (*ens*) among others, but *ipsum esse subsistens*, the pure act of being whose essence is identical with His existence. As Etienne Gilson observes, the “*causa prima est supra ens*”—God as first cause is “above being” in the ordinary sense. This means that while human reason can demonstrate *that* God exists, it cannot know *what* God is: *esse Dei est ignotum*—“the being of God is unknown.” Aquinas holds it “impossible for the soul of man in this life to see the essence of God,” and even with grace “we cannot know of God ‘what He is.’” The finite intellect cannot comprehend the infinite being “as perfectly as He is capable of being seen.” Our language, too, falters: all names for God are analogical, drawn from creaturely perfections, and “can never express his essence fully.” Hence Aquinas embraces a “negative theology” in which the highest knowledge available in this life is a “learned ignorance”—knowing that we do not know.

St. Bonaventure nuances this apophatic stance by distinguishing between comprehending and apprehending God. To “comprehend” would require equality with the object, which is impossible for creatures. Yet we may “apprehend” God insofar as His truth is manifest in creation and revelation. “Human beings can never either totally comprehend His essence or be in total ignorance of His existence.” Natural reason cannot reach the mysteries of faith, such as the Trinity; “faith alone reveals to us the nature of this model.” The result is a synthesis in which reason affirms God’s existence and certain attributes, while faith gazes toward an ungraspable essence that lies “beyond the reach of [our] natural faculties.”

In Islam, the Qur’ān and the Prophetic traditions affirm God’s incomparability and the impossibility of comprehending His essence with equal force. “*There is nothing like Him, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing*” (Q 42:11). “*No vision can take Him in, but He takes in all vision; He is the All-Subtle, the All-Aware*” (Q 6:103). God is *al-Ṣamad*—absolutely self-sufficient, without begetting or being begotten (Q 112:1–4). The reality of His “Self” (*dhāt*) and

attributes is “beyond our imagination, thinking, intellect, and wisdom,” and any attempt to deny, distort, or assimilate them to creaturely forms is a deviation from the straight path. The Qur’ān underscores human limitation: “*They ask you concerning the Spirit; say, ‘The Spirit is of my Lord’s domain, and you have been given only a little knowledge’*” (Q 17:85). Knowledge of the unseen (*al-ghayb*) belongs exclusively to God, who discloses it only to His chosen messengers (Q 72:26–27). Even these messengers confess their epistemic limitation: “*You know what is in my inner-self, though I do not know what is in Yours*” (Q 5:116); “*We have no knowledge; You alone know the things unseen*” (Q 5:109).

Islamic theology distinguishes between God’s *dhāt* (essence), which is utterly unknowable, and His *ṣifāt* (attributes), which are truly His yet remain beyond full comprehension. The apparent anthropomorphisms of the Qur’ān—references to God’s Face, Hands, Eyes—are affirmed as real attributes “without [asking] how” (*bilā kayf*), without likening them to creation, and without negating them. God’s knowledge encompasses all: “No leaf falls without His knowledge” (Q 6:59); “He knows what is before them and behind them, but they do not comprehend Him” (Q 20:110). To speak without knowledge about God is condemned as *if’tirā’ alā-llāh*—fabricating lies against God (Q 7:33). The Qur’ān itself contains *muḥkamāt* (clear verses) and *mutashābihāt* (ambiguous verses), and warns that “none knows its hidden meaning except Allah” (Q 3:7). Thus, as in Christianity, the unknowability of God’s essence in Islam is not an admission of agnosticism but a recognition of the Creator–creature distinction, safeguarded by revelation.

This foundational stance on divine incomprehensibility was further elaborated by diverse intellectual currents in the Islamic world. The Mu‘tazilites, committed to strict divine unity (*tawḥīd*), interpreted anthropomorphic Qur’ānic expressions metaphorically to safeguard God’s transcendence, arguing that reason can affirm His existence but cannot penetrate His essence. The Ash‘arites, by contrast, insisted on affirming the attributes as revealed without probing their modality (*bilā kayf*), holding that the essence remains utterly beyond human grasp. The Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’*), in their philosophical epistles, wove Neoplatonic emanation theory into Islamic cosmology, depicting God as the First Cause whose essence is ineffable. Sufi mystics, from al-Junayd to Ibn ‘Arabī, stressed that all conceptual knowledge of God is veiled, and that only through spiritual unveiling (*kashf*) can the believer approach—but never fully comprehend—the Divine. Among philosophers, Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) identified God as the Necessary Existent (*wājib al-wujūd*), whose simplicity precludes any composition and whose essence is pure existence, while al-Ghazālī affirmed the limits of reason, emphasizing experiential knowledge through divine illumination. Later, Mullā Ṣadrā integrated Qur’ānic theology, Sufism, and philosophy into his doctrine of the gradation of existence (*tashkīk al-wujūd*), in which God’s essence is the absolute and unconditioned reality, unknowable in itself yet the source of all knowable being. Across these schools, the consensus endured: God’s reality transcends every conceptual category, and human knowledge of Him is mediated entirely through His self-disclosure in revelation and creation.

In the Bahá'í writings, the unknowability of God's essence is not only affirmed but given systematic theological elaboration. Bahá'u'lláh declares: "Glorified be the Merciful One, unto Whom no allusion can be made, Whom no expression can define, nor any assertion reveal, nor any evidence describe." Human beings, as "utter nothingness," cannot magnify "Him Who hath demonstrated that no description can ever express Him and no word of praise magnify His glory." God is "too high... for the hearts of those who have recognized Him to apprehend His true nature, or for the minds of men to hope to fathom His essence... from all eternity... independent of the entire creation." What we encounter in revelation is "the effulgence of His names and attributes, and not His exalted Essence, inasmuch as that peerless King hath ever been... sanctified above ascent and descent."

This apophatic theology is developed with metaphysical precision in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Commentary on the Hidden Treasure. In the station of Primal Oneness (ahadiyyat), "all names are far from the shore of Its sanctity and It is known without Name or Attribute." The Essence is called "the Hidden Treasure, the Absolute Unknown, the Indescribable One, the Undiscoverable One," and "no likeness can be made" to it. Even the divine Names and Attributes are "utterly annihilated" in this station, and "the path to knowing the innermost Essence of the Absolute is closed to all beings." The Prophet Muhammad's confession—"We have not known Thee as Thou shouldst be known"—is cited as the apex of wisdom. Knowing God's essence is impossible because it requires "encompassing" Him, which no finite being can do, and because "for the Essence of the Absolute, there is not nor ever has been any likeness or similarity."

In Some Answered Questions, 'Abdu'l-Bahá reiterates that "the Reality of Divinity... is exempt from all conception" and "absolutely unique... invisible, incomprehensible, inaccessible." Even the most advanced human intellects can only know God through His Manifestations, for "all that the human reality knows... of the names, the attributes, and the perfections of God refer to these Holy Manifestations. There is no access to anything else: 'the way is closed, and seeking is forbidden.'" The Tablet to August Forel makes the same distinction: "Man cannot grasp the Essence of Divinity, but can... believe in God, discover the bounties of His Grace... The Divine Essence as it is in itself is... beyond all description." All attributes we ascribe are "only in order to deny imperfections" rather than to define God positively.

Across all three traditions, then, the unknowability of God's essence is upheld as a corollary of divine transcendence. In Christianity, it guards the Creator-creature distinction while allowing analogical knowledge through creation and revelation; in Islam, it safeguards *tawhīd* against anthropomorphism and grounds the humility of the believer before the *ghayb*; in the Bahá'í Faith, it is integral to the metaphysics of God's absolute unity, and functions to direct human knowing toward the Manifestations as the sole locus of divine self-disclosure. This common ground does not erase the differences in theological vocabulary and metaphysical framing, but it does reveal a shared reverence for the mystery of God—a mystery that both humbles human reason and orients it toward the signs by which the Unseen makes Himself known.

Principle 3. Creation *Ex Nihilo*

The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*—that the totality of the universe, including matter itself, was brought into existence by God without recourse to any pre-existing material—stands as a decisive affirmation of divine sovereignty and absolute causality in Christian and Islamic theology, and finds a nuanced but equally exalted expression in the Bahá'í Writings. While differing in metaphysical articulation, all three traditions reject the notion that the cosmos arose from eternal matter or as an emanation of God's essence, and all attribute its origin wholly to the divine will.

In the biblical witness, the creative act is portrayed as immediate, sovereign, and effectual, accomplished solely through the divine word. “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host” (Ps. 33:6); “For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:9). This verbal fiat signifies not a shaping of pre-existent substance, but the calling forth of being from non-being. The Second Book of Maccabees affirms the same: “Look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed” (2 Macc. 7:28). In Christian philosophical theology, this is formulated as the exclusive divine prerogative to “cause the very being (*esse*) of creatures” (Aquinas), a causality in which God is present to all things “by His very essence as the cause that gives them being” (cf. *Summa Theologiae* I.8.1). Etienne Gilson stresses that creation produces being “absolutely,” requiring no substrate: God alone is eternal, “the supreme and most pure act,” whose creative will is identical with His essence. Against Platonic and Aristotelian cosmology, which presupposed the eternality of matter, and against pantheistic theories of creation *ex Deo*, Christian orthodoxy has maintained that the Creator is distinct from the creation and under no necessity to create. The act of creation also entails the origination of time itself, for “the world was the beginning of time” (Augustine, *Confessions* XI.13); there is no “before” in which God waited to create. The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy accordingly affirms that Genesis 1–11 records historical fact and denies that scientific hypotheses may overturn its teaching of a divine creation in time. For many Christian theologians, the act of bringing all things from nothing is the supreme miracle: “If God can create the universe out of nothing, then all other biblical miracles are easy to believe” (Geisler).

The Qur'án expresses the same sovereignty with a rhetorical simplicity that resists metaphysical dilution: “He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth, and when He decrees something, He says only, ‘Be,’ and it is” (2:117; cf. 3:47, 3:59, 6:73, 36:82). The divine command *kun fa-yakūn*—“Be! and it is”—is repeated throughout as the very form of creation, whether of the heavens, the first human, or the resurrection of the dead (10:34; 21:30; 32:4–9; 50:38; 57:4). God is “the Creator of all things; He has charge of everything” (39:62), the One “who created you from nothing before” (19:67), who “created the heavens without any visible support” (31:10), and for whom “creating and resurrecting all of you is only like creating or resurrecting a single soul” (31:28). The Qur'án's polemic against idolatry often takes the form of an appeal to this

exclusive creative act: “Can He who creates be compared to one who cannot create? Why do you not take heed?” (16:17). The hadith literature amplifies this teaching: “Allah is the Creator and Sustainer of everything in the universe... Supreme and Incomparable, has no physical form, and no associates” (Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī), and “He is the Creator and the Maker, and He is not created. And whatever exists through His Action... is something created and made” (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī). This origin is not merely temporal but ontological: the created depends utterly on God for its being at every moment. To the question, “Who created the heavens? Who created the earth?” the answer is invariably “Allah” (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim), and speculative regress to “Who created your Lord?” is rejected as incoherent, for the Creator is uncreated. The classical designation *Faṭir as-samāwāt wa’l-ard* (“Originator of the heavens and the earth”) itself denotes an act without precedent or material basis, underscoring the Qur’ānic vision of creation *ex nihilo*.

While the Qur’ān affirms creation as the sovereign act of God—instantaneous, unconditioned, and without precedent—Islamic philosophy has probed the metaphysical structure of this act with considerable nuance. Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) reconciles the Qur’ānic doctrine of God as *Fāṭir* (Originator) with the principle of necessary causation by framing creation as an eternal, non-temporal emanation from the Necessary Existent (*wājib al-wujūd*). For him, *creatio ex nihilo* does not mean a transformation from absolute non-being into being, for “nothingness” has no ontological capacity; rather, it signifies that the existence of all contingent beings flows from God’s essence without any pre-existing matter or substrate. The created order exists by necessity—not in itself, but through its necessary relation to the Necessary Existent, upon whom it depends at every instant. Thus, Ibn Sīnā preserves the Qur’ānic “Be! and it is” as the articulation, in temporal language, of a timeless ontological dependence in which God’s act of origination is co-eternal with His essence, yet creatures remain wholly contingent and posterior in rank of being.

Mullā Ṣadrā, integrating Avicennian metaphysics, Qur’ānic revelation, and Sufi ontology, radicalizes this vision through his doctrine of the primacy and gradation of existence (*aṣālat al-wujūd wa-tashkīkuhu*). For Ṣadrā, *creatio ex nihilo* is not a single past event but an ongoing, dynamic act in which God continually bestows existence upon all contingent realities. The Qur’ānic *kun fa-yakūn* is thus ontologically continuous—every moment, every particle of being is renewed in dependence upon the Divine Will. Creation from “nothing” means creation without a prior cause other than God Himself, and the “nothing” here is not an existent void but the sheer absence of independent being. This perpetual creation (*al-hudūth al-dā’im*) preserves divine transcendence while affirming that existence itself is theophanic, the self-disclosure of the Real (*al-Ḥaqq*) in graded forms. In this perspective, the heavens and the earth are not merely once-originated artifacts, but ceaselessly emanating signs of the One whose creative act has neither beginning nor end.

In the Bahá’í Writings, the theme of creation from nothing is affirmed, but it is embedded within a metaphysical framework that distinguishes absolute nothingness from the state of potential existence. Bahá’u’lláh declares God to be “the Creator and no creator is there except Thee”

(*Lawḥ-i-Hikmat*), the “Fashioner of the heavens and the Creator of all things” (*Lawḥ-i-Arḍ-i-Bá*), who “hath made being to come forth from nothingness” (*Haft Vādí*). Yet He also affirms that “God’s creation hath existed from eternity, and will continue to exist forever. Its beginning hath had no beginning, and its end knoweth no end” (*Lawḥ-i-‘Abdu’r-Razzáq*). This apparent paradox is resolved by recognizing that the title “Creator” presupposes a creation: just as “Lord of Men” presupposes the existence of a servant, so the divine attribute of creatorship implies an eternal relationship to that which is created. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explicitly rejects the philosophical notion that “absolute nonexistence” could become existence: “absolute nothingness cannot find existence, as it has not the capacity of existence” (*Some Answered Questions*, p. 344). Creation, therefore, is not the production of being from a sheer void, but the bringing forth into manifest reality of forms and potentialities eternally present in the divine knowledge: “The Creator always had a creation; the rays have always shone from the reality of the sun... The names and attributes of God require the existence of beings, and the Eternal Bounty does not cease” (*Some Answered Questions*, p. 345). These realities exist “in the mirror of the Divine Knowledge” (*Commentary on the Hidden Treasure*, p. 43) in a state of absolute unity, and through God’s will they are substantiated in the external world: “When God manifested His glory, these... which had a virtual existence... found their existence substantiated” (*Some Answered Questions*, p. 357). This is described as a dependence “of emanation—that is to say, creatures emanate from God; they do not manifest Him” (*Some Answered Questions*, p. 282), akin to the way rays proceed from the sun without diminishing its substance.

The Bahá’í teachings further clarify this by distinguishing between unoriginated, pre-existent realities and contingent beings. The Divine Essence—“pure sanctity and absolute holiness... invisible, incomprehensible, inaccessible”—is the Necessary Being, existing without cause and “independent in His Essence.” God’s names and attributes, such as knowledge and power, are identical with His essence and thus equally without beginning. The “world of existence,” in its totality, is described as eternal, “having neither beginning nor end,” even though its individual forms are phenomenal and transient. Central to this cosmology is the “First Will” or “First Mind,” the first emanation from God, without temporal beginning or end, yet existing in complete ontological dependence upon the Divine Reality. In this framework, “absolute nothingness” is not the source of creation; rather, all things have their archetypes in the “mirror of the Essence of the Absolute” in a state of absolute unity, receiving concrete form only through divine volition.

Within this metaphysical order, the act of creation is continuous and relational, not a singular event sealed in the past. The Eternal Bounty perpetually emanates existence, bringing forth worlds and beings in correspondence with the divine purpose. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá likens this to the sun’s radiance, which has always shone and will always shine. The emergence of created things, then, is the transition from hidden potentiality within the divine knowledge to manifested reality within the contingent order. Even the human species, He affirms, “has existed from all eternity” in its essential reality, though its physical forms are composed, decomposable, and bound by

temporal conditions. This vision harmonizes the eternal, unchanging reality of God with the ceaseless renewal of creation, situating *creatio ex nihilo* within a doctrine of emanation that preserves both divine transcendence and the eternal dependence of all being upon the Necessary Existent.

All three traditions thus affirm that the universe owes its existence entirely to God, that no pre-existent material limits His creative act, and that His will is the sufficient and sole cause of being. Christianity and Islam articulate this as a temporal origination of the cosmos *ex nihilo*; the Bahá'í Writings, while affirming the bringing-forth of being “from nothingness,” frame this within an eternal act of emanation from divine knowledge, rejecting the possibility of absolute nothingness and emphasizing the continuous dependence of creation on the Creator. In each case, however, creation is not a one-time event left to run its course, but an ongoing expression of divine will and purpose, in which every existing thing is, at each moment, held in being by the One “in whose Hand lies control over all things” (Qur’án 36:83).

Principle 4. The Role of Prophethood and Messengers

In all three traditions under study, divine communication is not an abstract diffusion of ideas but a concrete historical event mediated through chosen individuals—prophets and messengers—who stand as the focal points of God’s self-disclosure to humanity. The necessity of such intermediaries arises from the shared conviction, already examined in the doctrine of divine unknowability, that the essence of God transcends human comprehension. It is only through these appointed figures that the divine will is made accessible, articulated in human language, and endowed with binding authority.

In Christian thought, the prophetic office is anchored in the conviction that “all Scripture is inspired by God” (theopneustos) and is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16–17). The inspiration of the sacred writings does not mean that the prophets themselves were divinized, but rather that God “breathed” His word through them in such a way that, without effacing their individuality or literary style, they spoke with unerring truthfulness. The sources emphasize that in this work of inspiration, God “utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared,” without overriding their human faculties. Except for certain sections like the Decalogue, the Scriptures were not verbally dictated; rather, some forty human authors composed them in diverse literary forms—historical narrative, poetry, prophecy, personal correspondence, theological treatise—each reflecting unique backgrounds and concerns. Yet, because “God cannot err” (Heb. 6:18), the resulting Scriptures are “without error or fault in all their teaching,” whether in relation to God’s saving acts, the events of world history, or the order of creation. As St. Thomas Aquinas affirms, “our faith rests upon the revelation made to the apostles and prophets who wrote the canonical books” (*Summa Theologica*, I, Q.1, A.8), a position echoed by Augustine’s insistence that the inspired authors “have not erred in any way in writing them.” This inerrancy is understood analogously to the Incarnation itself: “Like Christ, the Bible is

completely human, yet without error,” for God is its ultimate cause, while the prophets and apostles are its secondary causes.

In the biblical record, the prophet is more than a predictor of future events; he is a “man of God,” a “watchman,” and one who must declare “all the words which the LORD has spoken... not adding to them nor taking away” (cf. Deut. 4:2). The authenticity of a prophet’s message is confirmed by converging signs—miracles, moral integrity, and the fulfillment of predictions—so that “when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about... that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken” (Deut. 18:22). This standard of absolute truthfulness, so central to the Old Testament office, is equally applied to the apostles of the New Testament and supremely to Christ Himself. Jesus explicitly upheld the divine authority and inerrancy of the Old Testament, calling it the “Word of God” (Mark 7:13), “truth” (John 17:17), and affirming that “Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). He endorsed the historicity of Adam and Eve, Jonah in the great fish, and the flood of Noah, often grounding His moral teaching upon their literal truth. He rebuked the Sadducees, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God” (Matt. 22:29), underscoring that ignorance of Scripture is a cause of theological error.

Moreover, Jesus promised that divine revelation would continue through His apostles: “The Helper, the Holy Spirit... will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26), and “When He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). These assurances ground the Christian conviction that the New Testament writings are themselves divinely inspired, the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise to convey “all truth” to His followers. Because Jesus is God incarnate, His teaching is held to be entirely free from error; to impute falsehood to Him would be to accuse God Himself of error or deception, a conclusion Christian theology rejects as incompatible with divine omniscience and moral perfection. The apostles, in turn, carefully distinguished between their own opinions and the words of the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 7:10–12), evidencing their intent to transmit His teaching faithfully.

Jesus of Nazareth is thus presented in the New Testament as the culmination of the prophetic tradition— “the Word made flesh” (John 1:14)—in whom the offices of prophet, lawgiver, redeemer, and ultimate revealer converge. His words bear the same authority as the written Torah, for He declared, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Matt. 24:35). In His person, according to Christian belief, “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets... has in these last days spoken to us in His Son” (Heb. 1:1–2). The prophetic office, whether in its Old Testament form, its apostolic continuation, or its Christological fulfillment, is therefore inseparable from the conviction that God has communicated to humanity in words that are wholly true, wholly trustworthy, and utterly binding.

In Islam, the Qur’ānic witness to prophethood is equally emphatic. “It is not given to any human being that Allah should speak to him unless it be by revelation, or from behind a veil, or by

sending a Messenger to reveal what He wills by His leave” (Q 42:51). Muhammad, described as “God’s Messenger and the seal of the prophets” (Q 33:40), is held to have conveyed the divine message in its entirety, without omission or distortion—“O Messenger! Proclaim that which has been sent down to you from your Lord” (Q 5:67). The Qur’ān itself is regarded as the unmediated speech of God (*kalām Allāh*), “a clarification of all things” (Q 16:89), whose recitation was safeguarded by divine agency (Q 75:16–19). Prophets before Muhammad—Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus—are affirmed as part of an unbroken chain of guidance, each sent to a specific people, yet all proclaiming the same essential truth: “We make no distinction between any of His messengers” (Q 2:285). Authenticity in Islamic prophecy is confirmed by the congruence of the message with previous revelation, the moral perfection of the messenger, and, in some cases, miracles granted as proofs, such as the staff of Moses or the healing acts of Jesus (Q 3:49). After the Prophet’s death, the safeguarding and authoritative interpretation of revelation is entrusted to the community, with particular weight given to the Sunnah—his sayings and actions—recorded in rigorously authenticated *hadith* collections. Classical Islamic scholarship insists that whatever the Messenger declares unlawful is as if Allah Himself declared it unlawful, underscoring the principle that prophetic authority is absolute within the domain of divine guidance.

Islamic tradition distinguishes between a *Nabī* (prophet) and a *Rasūl* (messenger), a distinction that clarifies the scope of prophetic authority. A *Nabī* is one who receives divine revelation, whereas a *Rasūl* is a *Nabī* specifically commissioned to deliver a new message, law, or scripture. Thus, while every *Rasūl* is a *Nabī*, not every *Nabī* is a *Rasūl*. The Qur’ān attests that God sent prophets and messengers to every community in their own language, so that the message might be clear (Q 14:4), and charges them with explaining and elucidating divine revelation (Q 16:44). Among these messengers, five are accorded special rank as *ulu’l-‘azm* (“possessors of steadfastness”): Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, each entrusted with a major dispensation and a revealed scripture. Muhammad’s mission is explicitly described as universal—“a mercy to the worlds” (Q 21:107)—in contrast to the more localized scope of earlier prophets.

The finality of prophethood (*khatm al-nubuwwa*) is a cornerstone of Islamic belief. The Qur’ān names Muhammad as “the Seal of the Prophets” (Q 33:40), a title interpreted in both Sunni and Shī‘ī traditions to mean that no prophet or messenger will come after him. Numerous *hadith* affirm this: “Indeed, messengership and prophethood have ceased; there shall be no messenger after me, nor any prophet” (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim), and “I am al-‘Āqib—after whom there is no prophet.” This finality implies the perfection and completion of the divine message, for “Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and chosen for you Islam as your religion” (Q 5:3). Within this framework, all future guidance must accord with the Qur’ān and the authentic Sunnah.

Islamic sources emphasize the comprehensiveness of Muhammad’s revelation: he was taught “all the divine scriptures that God had sent to all past prophets,” and the Qur’ān itself affirms that it

contains a clarification of everything needed for human guidance. His mission thus encompasses the cumulative truths of prior dispensations while abrogating or superseding their legal codes where necessary. His greatest miracle is the Qur'án itself, regarded not only as an inimitable literary masterpiece but as a perpetual sign of his prophethood. To fabricate sayings in his name or to interpret the Qur'án “according to one’s own opinion” without requisite knowledge is treated as a grave sin, underscoring the inviolability of prophetic speech.

Muhammad’s role also extends to eschatology and intercession. He is described as “the leader of the sons of Adam on the Day of Resurrection, the first whose grave will be opened, the first to intercede, and the first whose intercession will be accepted.” His *shafā‘a* (intercession) is a unique prerogative, granted by God, for his community and, in some traditions, for the righteous among all peoples. In Shi‘ī theology, the Prophet’s mission continues in a derivative form through the divinely appointed Imāms—twelve in total—who safeguard the Qur'án’s meaning and ensure the continuity of divine guidance. The awaited Mahdī, the final Imām, is prophesied to fill the earth with justice, leading even Jesus upon his return.

The Qur'án encapsulates the prophetic office as both revelatory and exemplary: “Whoever obeys the Messenger obeys Allah” (Q 4:80). The Prophet’s Sunnah is described as “the best guidance,” his character as the embodiment of the Qur'án, and his mission as the eradication of falsehood and the establishment of a “straight path” for all humanity and jinn. Thus, in Islamic theology, the prophets—especially Muhammad—are not merely conduits of divine speech but the authoritative interpreters, exemplars, and guardians of the revealed will of God, their words and deeds forming a normative model for every generation.

In the Bahá’í Faith, the concept of prophethood is recast within the framework of the “Manifestations of God,” a term designating a unique order of being who perfectly reflect the attributes of the divine while remaining distinct from the divine essence itself. Bahá’u’lláh affirms that “God in His Essence hath ever been unseen, inaccessible, and unknowable,” and therefore manifests Himself “in the Dawning-Places of His Cause and the Repositories of the pearls of His knowledge” (*Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 102). These Manifestations—Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muḥammad, the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh, among others—are “mirrors” in which the light of God is fully reflected; to behold them is to behold the “Presence of God” (*Lawḥ-i-Ibn-i-Dhib*, p. 302). Their utterances are the Word of God, their laws the commands of God, their prohibitions the prohibitions of God. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes them as “Universal Educators,” whose purpose is “to make the world of man the world of God... that unity, fellowship, and love be won for the whole human race” (*Tablet of the Seven Candles*, p. 373). Each inaugurates a new religious dispensation, suited to the moral and social needs of the age, while affirming the essential unity of all previous messengers: “If thou wilt observe with discriminating eyes, thou wilt behold them all... uttering the same speech, and proclaiming the same Faith” (*Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 128). In Bahá’í doctrine, their authority is such that “unto no one is given the right to question His authority or to say why or wherefore” (*Ishráqát*, p. 23).

The role of these Manifestations is at once spiritual, moral, social, and civilizational. As “tutors in the assembly of the All-Merciful” and “physicians in the hospital of the Lord,” they vivify souls, awaken intelligence, rectify morals, and inspire humanity to acquire both natural and spiritual perfections. They are “rectifiers of morals, improvers of character, and encouragers of the virtuous,” illuminating human realities with “divine attributes and... virtues from the kingdom of God.” Their advent marks a “spiritual springtime,” renewing the world with freshness and vitality, as “the tree of life is just beginning to grow” and “the earth... irradiated with the light of its Lord.” This regenerative power extends to social order: they are divine lawgivers, founders of new cycles, and the organizers of the world, establishing systems of justice and unity suited to the evolving needs of humankind. Their mission encompasses the abolition of enmity, the promotion of peace, and the raising of humanity to the consciousness of its essential oneness—“if unity be gained, all other problems will disappear of themselves.”

The Bahá’í writings identify three stations in the reality of the Manifestations: the physical, the human (rational soul), and the divine. In their physical station, they share the limitations of mortal existence—eating, drinking, weariness, and death. In their human station, they possess a “holy reality” luminous in itself, not borrowing light as the moon does from the sun, but shining with innate brilliance and consciousness of the mysteries of existence from childhood. In their divine station, they are the “Word of God” and the “Eternal Bounty,” without beginning or end, transcending the conditions of the contingent world. These three stations coexist without confusion: the Manifestation is at once utterly human and the perfect vehicle for divine self-disclosure.

Essential to their mission is their infallibility—not merely moral impeccability but “essential infallibility,” inseparable from their being. “Whatever emanates from Them is identical with the truth, and conformable to reality,” for their knowledge is innate, immediate, and not acquired through study. They “understand the essential connection between things” and legislate divine law in perfect correspondence with the requirements of the age. This divine knowledge enables them to “establish the Law of God,” and their supernatural power—manifest in their ability to transform individuals and societies—serves as an abiding proof of their mission.

History offers abundant testimony to the transformative efficacy of their appearance. Abraham, exiled and persecuted, became the source of monotheism for much of the world. Moses, though “a stammerer” and of humble origin, brought forth a complex legal and moral system. Christ abrogated Mosaic ordinances, reformed morals, and laid the foundation for teachings of universal love. Muḥammad, an unlettered man from a barren peninsula, united warring tribes and launched a civilization of profound spiritual and scientific achievement. The Báb, though young and without formal learning, revolutionized Persian society and prepared the way for Bahá’u’lláh, whose revelation offers the “most perfect solution” to the world’s social and spiritual ills and aims at the realization of global peace and unity.

Yet, despite their perfections, the Manifestations invariably encounter rejection, persecution, and calumny—often at the hands of the religious leaders of their own communities. Denounced as impostors, magicians, or madmen, they endure imprisonment, exile, and martyrdom, while their followers suffer similar fates. Such opposition, however, never diminishes the creative force of their word, which remains “an infallible proof” and “abiding testimony” for all ages. Their writings are divine revelation, “sent down from the heaven of the Will of your Lord,” containing “the knowledge of all that hath been and shall be,” and are to be received as “the unerring Balance established amongst men” by which all things are to be weighed.

Ultimately, in Bahá’í thought, the Manifestations of God are perfect mirrors reflecting the Sun of Truth. In their essential unity, they are “one soul and the same person... uttering the same speech,” while in their individuality they are servants of God, exemplars of humility, and sacrificial lovers of humanity. Recognition of them—past, present, and future—is the path to knowing God, attaining eternal life, and participating in the progressive unfoldment of divine guidance throughout human history.

What unites the Christian, Islamic, and Bahá’í understandings of prophethood is the recognition that divine truth, in its purity, is not self-discovered by human reason but must be mediated through individuals specially chosen and commissioned by God. In all three traditions, these figures—whether called prophets, messengers, apostles, or Manifestations of God—serve as the locus of revelation, the guarantors of its authenticity, and the living exemplars of its application. Their authority rests not on political power, personal charisma, or philosophical insight, but on divine commissioning, attested by the congruence of their message with previous revelation, the transformative moral and spiritual impact of their mission, and, in many cases, the confirmation of miracles. While Christianity and Islam regard prophets as inspired human beings whose inspiration is safeguarded from error by divine will, the Bahá’í Faith advances a more ontologically defined category, seeing the Manifestations as a distinct order of being who perfectly reflect the attributes of God while remaining ontologically distinct from the divine essence. In each case, their function is indispensable: without them, the will of God would remain inaccessible, and humanity would be left to the conjectures of its own unaided intellect.

Yet the scope and self-understanding of the prophetic mission diverge in significant ways. In Christianity, the prophetic office culminates in Christ, who unites in Himself the roles of prophet, lawgiver, redeemer, and final revealer, His life and teaching constituting the definitive self-disclosure of God in history. Islam affirms the universality of Muhammad’s mission to all humanity and designates him as “Seal of the Prophets,” the final messenger whose Qur’anic revelation completes and safeguards the chain of divine guidance. The Bahá’í Faith situates each Manifestation within a larger, progressive sequence of revelations, each inaugurating a new spiritual “cycle” suited to the age, while affirming the essential unity of all previous messengers. In all three perspectives, however, the prophets stand as the hinge between the eternal and the temporal, through whom the transcendent God enters history, renews moral and spiritual life, and guides His creation toward the fulfillment of its divinely intended purpose.

Principle 5. Divine Law and Moral Principles as the Foundation of Social Order, Justice, and Spiritual Growth

Divine law and moral principles, as revealed through the Manifestations of God, constitute the supreme charter for human life, ordering society, ensuring justice, and fostering spiritual growth. The Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, the Qur’án, and the Bahá’í Revelation each affirm that such laws are of divine origin, absolute in authority, and disclosed through chosen intermediaries who speak by God’s command. They are not the result of human speculation or evolving social consensus, but emanate from the transcendent will of God, communicated through His inspired Word, and adapted in form to the needs of each prophetic age.

From the Biblical perspective, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–17). The prophets “spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20–21), ensuring that their utterances were “true and trustworthy” in all matters to which they were moved to speak. “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 29:29). Because “Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar” (Proverbs 30:5–6), the Biblical tradition holds the law to be inviolable, pure, and the sure guide to life: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). Christ Himself declared, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (John 17:17), affirming the Old Testament as “the Word of God” (John 10:35) and without error (Matthew 22:29). His own teaching bore the seal of final authority: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18), and “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Matthew 24:35). These principles extend into detailed prescriptions for justice, such as the Decalogue’s commands against murder, adultery, theft, false witness, and covetousness (Exodus 20:12–17), injunctions for impartial judgment (Leviticus 19:15), and the prophetic insistence that “To do righteousness and justice is desired by the LORD more than sacrifice” (Proverbs 21:3). The law’s function is not merely to restrain wrongdoing, but to form a holy people, teaching them to “love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5–6), to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18), and to transmit these commandments “diligently to your sons” (Deuteronomy 6:7).

The Qur’án likewise presents itself as “the Book... explaining clearly everything” (Qur’án 16:89), the “Criterion” (*furqān*) between right and wrong, the “firm rope of Allah” and the “straight path” by which humanity is led “from the depths of darkness into light” (Qur’án 14:1). It enjoins a comprehensive moral and legal order: “Verily! Allah enjoins al-‘adl (justice) and al-iḥsān (perfect benevolence), and giving (help) to kith and kin, and forbids al-fāḥishah (shameful deeds), al-munkar (all that is prohibited), and al-baghy (all kinds of oppression)” (Qur’án 16:90). It commands exclusive worship of God, goodness to parents, the prohibition of murder “except

by right,” honesty in trade, just testimony, and fidelity to covenants (Qur’án 6:151–152; 4:58–59). The Prophet Muḥammad declared that “your lives, your properties, your honours... are sacred to one another” and that justice is a fundamental value governing all social behavior. Qur’anic law provides for fair retribution while commending pardon, demands truthful testimony, condemns oppression, and calls the faithful to “hold fast to God’s rope all together” (Qur’án 3:103) in unity. Its sanctions, from prescribed penalties to injunctions against bribery and partiality, aim to preserve the rights of all and to protect the vulnerable, while its commands to pray, give alms, and show kindness to parents unite spiritual devotion with social responsibility.

The Bahá’í Writings affirm these same principles in a form adapted for the present age, identifying the recognition of the Manifestation of God as “the first duty prescribed by God unto His servants... the fountain of His laws” (Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 1). God in His Essence is “unseen, inaccessible, and unknowable” (Lawḥ-i-Ibn-i-Dhib, p. 313), yet “His straight Path” is set forth in “words and utterances of highest eloquence” (Ishráqát, p. 99) through the “Luminaries of truth” (Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 102) who are His Viceregents among men. The laws they reveal are “the lamps of My loving providence... the keys of My mercy” (Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 2), “the wellspring of life unto the world” (Ishráqát, p. 113), and the “supreme animating power for the advancement of the world” (Lawḥ-i-Dunyá, p. 206). Their purpose is “promoting the knowledge of God, and... furthering unity and fellowship amongst men” (Lawḥ-i-Ibn-i-Dhib, p. 232), abolishing practices such as slavery, and enjoining universal education, moderation, honest labor, and prohibition of intoxicants. Justice, “which traineth the world,” is upheld as the supreme social force, requiring rulers to weigh themselves “in the balance of equity and justice” (Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd, p. 164) and peoples to consort “with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship” (Bishárát, p. 7).

In all three traditions, the injunctions against murder, adultery, theft, false testimony, and covetous desire are not merely social conventions but expressions of divine will rooted in God’s nature and human dignity. Christianity frames them within the Decalogue revealed to Moses, affirmed by Jesus, and deepened in the Sermon on the Mount, where the prohibition of murder extends to harboring anger (Matt. 5:21–22) and adultery to lustful intent (Matt. 5:28). Life is sacred because humanity is made in the image of God (Gen. 9:6), and truthfulness is upheld as a cardinal virtue because God Himself “cannot lie” (Titus 1:2). Paul’s letters reinforce honesty, fidelity, and contentment as hallmarks of the Spirit-filled life (Eph. 4:25; Phil. 4:11–12). Islam affirms these same prohibitions in the Qur’án and Sunnah: “Do not take life, which Allah has made sacred, except by right” (Q 17:33); “Do not go near adultery: it is an outrage and an evil path” (Q 17:32); “Cut off the hand of the thief” (Q 5:38); “Do not mix truth with falsehood” (Q 2:42); and “Do not covet what Allah has given some of you over others” (Q 4:32). The Prophet Muhammad’s teachings make these commands integral to faith itself, linking them to the major sins whose avoidance is necessary for salvation. In both faiths, the moral law applies to the inner

life as well as to outward conduct, condemning envy, deceit, and lust as much as overt violence or theft.

The Bahá'í writings likewise prohibit the unlawful taking of life, sexual immorality, theft, lying, and covetousness, but place them within a broader ethic of justice, trustworthiness, detachment, and the oneness of humanity. Bahá'u'lláh abolishes holy war between believers, enjoins His followers to “suffer themselves to be killed rather than kill,” and prescribes indemnity for accidental death. He commands chastity, condemns “roving in the wilderness of desires,” forbids “laying hands on the property of others,” and exalts truthfulness as “the foundation of all human virtues,” while warning against slander and idle talk. Covetousness is treated not only as wrongful desire but as a symptom of attachment to the transient world; detachment, generosity, and wishing for one's neighbor what one wishes for oneself are enjoined as the cure. In this vision, moral prohibitions are inseparable from positive virtues: refraining from harm is coupled with actively fostering trust, unity, and compassion in the community.

Across these three Revelations, divine law is thus seen as the revealed pattern for individual sanctification and collective life: it originates in the will of God, is authenticated by His chosen Messengers, and embraces both immutable spiritual principles—faith, justice, love, truthfulness, purity, humility—and mutable ordinances adapted to the needs of each age. Its aim is not merely external order but inward transformation: to “cleanse and purify” the heart from the “love of the world” (Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 128), to instill “the fear of God... the supreme instrument for [humanity's] preservation” (Lawḥ-i-Ibn-i-Dhib, p. 241), and to make each soul “the focus of divine blessings” (Some Answered Questions, p. 88). By obeying such laws, humanity participates in the divine purpose for history—the creation of a unified, just, and spiritually illumined civilization. across the three traditions, these commandments function as concrete expressions of the divine order in human life, designed to protect the sanctity of persons, property, and truth, and to cultivate a society in which justice and mutual regard prevail. Christianity and Islam ground them in immutable revelation, binding on all humanity; the Bahá'í Faith affirms their enduring validity while situating them within the principle of progressive revelation, where the eternal moral law is renewed and expanded to meet the needs of each age. All agree that obedience to these commands is both a duty owed to God and a safeguard of human flourishing.

Principle 6. The Centrality of Moral Virtues in the Religious Life

In Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith, the moral life is not an adjunct to faith but its very essence. The virtues of justice, compassion, truthfulness, and love are presented as divine mandates rooted in God's own nature, and they form the indispensable framework for spiritual growth, the ordering of human society, and the fulfillment of humanity's ultimate purpose. These virtues are not merely admirable qualities; they are conditions for salvation, pillars of civilization, and reflections of divine attributes in the human realm.

Justice as the Foundation of Order and Piety

In the Christian Scriptures, justice is both a divine attribute and a moral obligation. Jesus Christ commands His followers to practice the “weightier matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness” (Matthew 23:23), linking justice to covenant fidelity. The Psalms proclaim, “The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of His unfailing love” (Psalm 33:5), indicating that justice is inseparable from divine love. For Thomas Aquinas, justice is “the perpetual and constant will to render to each his right” (*Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q.58, A.1), a virtue that orders human relations according to divine truth.

Islamic teaching likewise exalts justice (‘adl) as an all-encompassing principle. The Qur’ān declares, “O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even against yourselves or your parents or your kin” (Qur’ān 4:135), showing that justice transcends personal interest and tribal loyalty. It is explicitly linked with piety: “Be just; that is nearer to piety” (Qur’ān 5:8). The Prophet Muhammad affirmed that justice “is the balance set by Allah” and that its neglect invites divine wrath (*Jāmi‘ at-Tirmidhī*, Vol. 6, p. 35).

In the Bahá’í Writings, justice is called “the best beloved of all things in My sight” (Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 1), and Bahá’u’lláh affirms that it “traineth the world” and is upheld by “two pillars, reward and punishment” (*Ishráqát*, p. 115). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá identifies justice as the foundation upon which “the tent of existence is upheld” (*Some Answered Questions*, p. 306), without which neither social order nor spiritual integrity can endure.

Compassion as the Manifestation of Divine Mercy

For Christians, compassion is the imitation of Christ, who “had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36). The call to “be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36) makes divine mercy the archetype for human conduct. The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) locates true religion in concrete acts of compassion toward the vulnerable.

In Islam, compassion (rahma) is one of the most frequently invoked divine names: *al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm* (“the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful”). The Qur’ān describes the Prophet Muhammad as a “mercy to the worlds” (Qur’ān 21:107), making compassion integral to the prophetic mission. A hadith states, “The merciful are shown mercy by the Most Merciful. Be merciful to those on the earth and the One in heaven will be merciful to you” (*Jāmi‘ at-Tirmidhī*, Vol. 4, p. 20).

Bahá’u’lláh repeatedly enjoins compassion, linking it to divine likeness: “Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich... a consolation to the sorrowful” (*Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd*, p. 165). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declares that “the essence of religion is to be kind to the poor, to help the needy, to care for the orphan, and to comfort the sorrowful” (*Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, no. 2). Compassion thus functions as the social embodiment of the divine attribute of mercy.

Truthfulness as the Ornament of the Human Soul

In the Bible, truthfulness is a divine requirement: “You shall not bear false witness” (Exodus 20:16) and “Speak the truth to one another” (Zechariah 8:16). Jesus describes Himself as “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), making truth not only a moral imperative but a Christological reality. Paul exhorts believers to “put away falsehood” and “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15, 25), combining veracity with charity.

Islam treats truthfulness (ṣidq) as a sign of faith. The Qur’ān commands: “O you who believe! Fear Allah and be with those who are true” (Qur’ān 9:119). The Prophet Muhammad said, “Truthfulness leads to righteousness, and righteousness leads to Paradise” (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. 8, p. 13). Falsehood, by contrast, leads to sin and ultimately to hellfire.

In the Bahá’í teachings, truthfulness is “the foundation of all human virtues” (*Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 36). Bahá’u’lláh enjoins His followers to “let your eye be chaste, your hand faithful, your tongue truthful and your heart enlightened” (*Lawḥ-i-Hikmat*, p. 137). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that “the greatest ornament of man is truthfulness” (*Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, no. 136), without which no other virtue can be sustained.

Love as the Fulfillment of the Law

In Christianity, love is the supreme commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart... and your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37–39). Paul affirms, “Love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:10) and the “greatest” of the theological virtues (1 Corinthians 13:13). The Johannine writings explicitly link love for others to the knowledge of God: “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4:8).

In Islam, love for God (maḥabba) is expressed through obedience: “Say: If you love Allah, follow me, and Allah will love you” (Qur’ān 3:31). The Prophet said, “None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself” (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. 1, p. 12). Love thus becomes the ethical expression of faith and the cement of community.

Bahá’u’lláh elevates love to a cosmic principle: “It is incumbent upon all to be united in love and fellowship” (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 143). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declares that “love is the cause of God’s pleasure, the cause of the illumination of the world of humanity” (*Paris Talks*, p. 36). This love is universal, transcending all barriers: “Glory not in love for your country, but in love for all mankind” (*Lawḥ-i-Hikmat*, p. 137).

Integration of the Virtues in the Religious Life

Across these traditions, justice without compassion becomes harsh legalism; compassion without justice degenerates into partiality; truthfulness without love becomes cruelty; and love without truth collapses into sentimentality. The revealed law exists to shape these virtues in harmony, producing a life that reflects the attributes of God in human form. In Christianity, they are the “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22–23); in Islam, they constitute the adornment of faith (ḥusn al-

khuluq); in the Bahá'í Faith, they are the “ornaments of the temple of man” (*Lawh-i-Ibn-i-Dhib*, p. 316).

The centrality of these virtues confirms that religion's true aim is not merely external conformity to divine law but the internalization of divine attributes in the believer's life. In this way, justice, compassion, truthfulness, and love become both the evidence of authentic faith and the substance of humanity's ultimate perfection.

Unity of Source, Transformation of Society, and Eschatological Significance

In Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith, these virtues are grounded in the very being of God: in Christianity, as participations in divine perfections; in Islam, as manifestations of the Names and Attributes of Allah; in the Bahá'í Faith, as reflections of God's attributes in the Manifestations. They are transformative for the individual—disciplining desire, opening the heart, purifying speech, and directing will toward the common good—and foundational for civilization. Societies devoid of these virtues fall into tyranny, cruelty, mistrust, and division. Finally, each tradition links these virtues to the Day of Judgment: in Christianity, they determine entry into the kingdom (Matthew 25:31–46); in Islam, they are weighed on the scales (Q 101:6–9); in the Bahá'í Faith, they form the standard by which the Manifestation judges the world (Gleanings, p. 277). Thus, they are not merely temporal guides but eternal measures of the soul's destiny.

In sum, the centrality of justice, compassion, truthfulness, and love in the moral and spiritual vision of Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith reveals a profound convergence: each upholds these virtues as essential to knowing God, fulfilling divine law, achieving human unity, and securing eternal life. Far from being optional ideals, they are the very substance of religion itself.

Principle 7. The Day of Judgment and the Hereafter: Accountability, Reward, and Punishment Before God

In Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith, the conviction that all will be held accountable before God is an article of faith inseparable from the nature of divine justice and the ultimate destiny of the soul. The Day of Judgment is not merely an eschatological horizon; it is the consummation of God's governance over creation, the disclosure of hidden realities, and the vindication of His law in the moral order of the universe. Whether conceived as a cosmic assize at the end of history, a universal spiritual reckoning at the advent of a Manifestation of God, or the perpetual moral tribunal before the all-seeing Judge, this doctrine unites the three traditions in affirming that every human being will be rewarded or punished according to truth.

God as the Righteous Judge and the Certainty of Judgment

In the Biblical witness, God is “the Judge of all the earth” who “will do right” (Genesis 18:25), impartial toward princes and the poor alike (Job 34:19), “establishing His throne for judgment” (Psalm 9:7) and weighing the heart (Proverbs 21:2). Christ teaches that “the Son of Man... will repay each person according to what he has done” (Matthew 16:27), and in the apocalyptic

vision, the books are opened, the dead are judged “according to what they had done” (Revelation 20:12). Aquinas affirms that this final judgment manifests God’s perfect justice, rendering to each “according to his works” in proportion to divine truth (ST II-II, Q.58, A.1).

In Islam, God is *Mālik Yawm ad-Dīn* (“Master of the Day of Judgment,” Qur’ān 1:4), the sole arbiter before whom “every soul will be fully compensated for what it earned” (Q 3:161). The Qur’ān enjoins believers to “stand out firmly for justice... even against yourselves” (Q 4:135) and affirms that “no soul shall bear the burden of another” (Q 6:164). Hadith literature describes the Day as one of direct audience with God, without interpreter, when each person will be asked about their life, wealth, knowledge, and use of their body (Jāmi‘ at-Tirmidhī, *al-Riqāq*).

In the Bahá’í Writings, divine judgment is described both as an eschatological reality and as a process inaugurated with each Manifestation. “There needeth none but thyself to make out an account against thee this day” (Chihár-Vádí, p. 8), for the “time is at hand when whatsoever lieth hid in the souls and hearts of men will be disclosed” (Lawḥ-i-Ibn-i-Dhib, p. 278). The “Day of God” is the disclosure of spiritual reality, the separation of faith from denial, and the establishment of divine justice as “the best beloved of all things” and the “foundation upon which the tent of existence is upheld” (Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 1; *Some Answered Questions*, p. 306).

Human Accountability for Actions, Words, and Intentions

Across these traditions, accountability encompasses deeds, speech, and the inner state of the heart. In the Bible, “God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing” (Ecclesiastes 12:14), and “on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak” (Matthew 12:36). In Islam, the “record” (*kitāb*) of each person’s life is maintained by angels (Q 82:10–12), to be laid open on the Day when “the earth will report its news” (Q 99:4). In the Bahá’í writings, even virtues are void unless grounded in the recognition of God’s Manifestation; actions are accepted only after the soul has attained “the knowledge of God” (Lawḥ-i-Ibn-i-Dhib, p. 252; *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 306, 359).

Reward for the Righteous

For the righteous, the Day of Judgment is the revelation of divine good-pleasure. In Christianity, the faithful “shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matthew 13:43), inheriting “eternal life” (Romans 6:23) and the “crown of righteousness” (2 Timothy 4:8). In Islam, the reward is entry into *Jannah*, “gardens beneath which rivers flow” (Q 4:57), free of fear or grief, where desires are fulfilled and blessings multiplied (Q 39:73–74). In the Bahá’í texts, paradise is defined as “attaining unto the Presence of God” through recognition of His Manifestation, receiving “divine perfections... everlasting felicity... and the meeting of God in the world of eternity” (*Some Answered Questions*, pp. 294–295). For the pure of heart, “a deed is, verily, its own reward” (Súriy-i-Vafá, p. 389).

Punishment for the Wicked

Punishment is likewise portrayed in moral and spiritual terms. In Scripture, the wicked are “cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15), experiencing “eternal destruction” (2 Thessalonians

1:9). The Qur’ān describes *Jahannam* as a place of scorching fire, molten drink, and utter despair (Q 14:49–50; 22:19–20), where the disbelievers are “fuel for the Fire” (Q 3:10). In the Bahá’í writings, hell is “thine own self, O thou who dost associate a partner with God and doubtest” (Ishráqát, p. 24): the state of being veiled from God, bereft of spiritual life, and bound by the “fire” of unbelief. Those who reject the Manifestation are “condemned to death” and “accounted among the dead” (Kitáb-i-Íqán, pp. 95, 99; Lawḥ-i-Nápulyún II, p. 344).

The Spiritual Nature of the Judgment

While Christianity and Islam affirm a future, universal judgment, the Bahá’í writings stress that the “Day of Resurrection” occurs with the advent of each Manifestation, when the faithful are distinguished from the heedless and the fruits of belief or denial are made manifest (Kitáb-i-Íqán, pp. 71, 121–122). Prophecies of cosmic signs—darkened sun, falling stars, quaking earth—are interpreted symbolically, referring to the eclipse of religious authority, the collapse of former dispensations, and the renewal of creation through the Word of God (*Some Answered Questions*, pp. 199–202).

Eternal Consequences and the Progress of the Soul

In all three traditions, the verdict of the Judgment determines the soul’s eternal trajectory. Yet the Bahá’í writings emphasize that the soul, once freed from the body, “continues eternally” and may advance infinitely in perfections, even beyond death, through divine bounty, the prayers of others, and good works performed in its name (*Some Answered Questions*, pp. 299–301). Heaven and hell are thus not fixed localities but conditions of nearness or remoteness from God—states which begin in this life and endure into the next.

Unity of Justice, Mercy, and Purpose

The doctrine of the Day of Judgment unites justice and mercy in a single divine act. It affirms that God’s governance is morally ordered, that no act is hidden, and that the destiny of every soul accords with truth. It also serves as a present summons: in Christianity, to live in holiness “waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God” (2 Peter 3:12); in Islam, to “fear Allah and be with those who are true” (Q 9:119); in the Bahá’í Faith, to “arise to receive that which [one] deserve[s]” in the Day of the Lord (*Some Answered Questions*, p. 162). This conviction—of inevitable accountability and the irrevocable consequences of recognition or rejection—anchors the moral life in an eschatological horizon and calls humanity to readiness before the Judge of all.

Physical Resurrection and Spiritual Resurrection: Identity, Continuity, and the “Eater–Eaten” Objection

A persistent difficulty raised against the coherence of judgment and recompense concerns the relation between identity and matter at the resurrection. The classical *shubha* of the *ākil wa’l-ma’kūl* (the eater and the eaten) imagines one person’s body becoming, through digestion and assimilation, the very substance of another’s body; if both must rise “in the same body,” to whom, it is asked, do the shared particles belong? The dilemma is sharpened by reports that

vividly depict corporeal rising: “You will be resurrected (and assembled) barefooted, naked and uncircumcised.” [Sahih al-Bukhari Vol. 4, p. 411, Darussalam; 327, Sahih Muslim Vol. 4, p. 342, Darussalam] And again: “There is nothing of the human body that does not wastes away or perish or decay except one bone; that is the last coccyx bone (of the tail) and from that bone Allah will reconstruct the human body on the Day of Resurrection.” [Sahih al-Bukhari Vol. 6, p. 382, Darussalam] Even the phenomenology of recompense is rendered with concreteness: “No one is wounded in the cause of Allah — and Allah knows best who is wounded in His cause — but he will come on the Day of Resurrection with his wounds flowing with blood, the color will be the color of blood but the scent will be the fragrance of musk.” [Sahih Muslim Vol. 4, p. 211, Darussalam; 370, Sahih al-Bukhari Vol. 4, p. 1, Darussalam] Nor is the interval between death and rising portrayed as nullity: “When a man dies, he is shown his place morning and evening. If he is one of the people of Paradise, then (he is shown his place) in Paradise, and if he is one of the people of the Fire, then (he is shown his place) in the Fire. Then it is said: This is your place to which you will be resurrected on the Day of Resurrection.” [Sahih Muslim Vol. 7, p. 256, Darussalam] and “When a human being is laid in his grave and his companions return and he even hears their footsteps, two angels come to him and make him sit up and ask him: ‘What did you use to say about this man, Muhammad?’ ... ‘Look at your place in the Hell-Fire. Allah has changed for you a place in Paradise instead of it.’” [Sahih al-Bukhari Vol. 2, p. 242, Darussalam] Popular perplexity in Shi‘i narrations is candid: “When the Qa’im rises, people will say, How could this be? Even his bones must have decayed.” [Kitab al-Ghayba: The Book of Occultation, p. 69, libgen.li; 239, Kitab-al-Ghayba-The-Book-of-Occultation, p. 239, Negeen Press]

The force of the objection, however, depends upon reducing personal identity to a custodianship of particles. The philosophical and theological traditions deny that reduction. Avicenna’s demonstrations center the human person in the rational soul, a subsistent, immaterial substance that uses the body as instrument but endures apart from it: “The human soul is independent of the body in its existence. Thus, every one of us can affirm the existence of his soul as such from direct consciousness. The human soul is therefore a substance.” [75, Avicenna, *Avicenna’s Psychology: An English Translation of Kitāb al-Najāt*, Book II, Chapter VI, p. 10, Hyperion Press] Summarizing his argument, one source notes: “The first six chapters discuss the independence of the rational soul from the body. This soul, Ibn Sina asserts, is independent from the body in existence and dependent only on its causes, the eternal substances. Though it uses the body as its instrument, it is not part of the body, but simply subsists in it. As such, the death of the body does not affect its existence.” [143, Ibn Sina, *Ibn Sina’s Remarks and Admonitions: Physics & Metaphysics*, p. 54, Columbia University Press] (For Ibn Sīnā’s proof “that, though the soul occurs with the occurrence of the body, it does not die with its death, nor is it essentially subject to corruption,” see *al-Najāt, al-Ṭabī‘iyyāt*, bk. 6, pp. 223–27. [152, *Ibn Sina’s Remarks and Admonitions*, p. 188, Columbia University Press]) On this soul-centric account, the eater–eaten paradox is ill-posed: it treats numerical identity as a problem of shared matter rather than the continuity of the self whose acts were authored through the body.

The later Sadrian synthesis radicalizes the same intuition by transposing it into an ontology of becoming. Through *al-ḥaraka al-jawhariyya* (substantial motion), the soul and body are phases of one intensifying reality; the body is the soul's lowest disclosure. At death, the soul—now the principal—manifests an eschatological body conformed to its acquired form. Resurrection is thus the re-embodiment of the same person through the persistence of form and consciousness, not a museum-grade retrieval of every atom ever metabolized. The shubha of the eater and eaten therefore dissolves: what made A to be A and B to be B was never the numerical identity of particles but the abiding soul-form that organized them. Classical kalām supplies a complementary resolution by speaking of *ajzā' aṣliyya* (essential parts) preserved by God; what is taken as nutritive surplus was never essential to the eater's identity and so need not be “shared back” in order for both to rise in justice. Either way, divine recompense is particularized to the very person who acted, without a double assignment of matter.

Christian doctrine, while insisting on the reality of the *resurrectio carnis*, secures sameness by appeal to form rather than to a frozen inventory of matter. The intermediate state affirms the soul's conscious endurance; the Last Day promises the restoration of *this* person in a body that is numerically one with the self yet transformed—incorruptible, impassible for the blessed, truly bodily and not a mere “spirit.” The Pauline “spiritual body” is the body under the primacy of Spirit, not a denial of embodiment. In this light, the evidences of Christ's rising as firstfruits ground the general resurrection without committing one to the absurdity of reassembling all past particles; what guarantees identity is the persistence of the person (form/soul), not the perpetual custody of atoms.

The Bahá'í writings, while affirming the soul's immortality, relocate “resurrection” to its spiritual truth. The “Day of God” is the advent of a Manifestation whereby realities are disclosed and humankind is divided into faith and denial; “raising the dead” signifies awakening from heedlessness to the life of the spirit; “heaven” and “hell” denote nearness and remoteness from God and begin in this life. “Return” is thus of qualities and perfections, not of a numerically identical material composition; transmigration is rejected. Read together with the foregoing philosophical clarifications, this hermeneutic secures accountability without a crude reanimationism: the very agent who loved or hated, believed or denied, is the one who stands before the Judge, because what constitutes that agent—the enduring, morally qualified soul—abides and (where doctrine requires) is embodied in a mode proportionate to its reality.

Thus, the unity of justice and mercy at the Judgment is preserved without contradiction: identity is deeper than dust; bodily rising, where affirmed, is real yet not hostage to the bookkeeping of atoms; and the heart of resurrection—whether described as the soul's imperishable subsistence, the glorification of the body, or the spiritual quickening at the advent of a Manifestation—anchors recompense in truth.

Principle 8. The Supremacy of Divine Revelation

In Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith, divine revelation is upheld as the ultimate and authoritative source of truth, possessing an authority that transcends human opinion, philosophical speculation, and the mutable customs of society. This supremacy is rooted in the belief that revelation is not a human discovery of the divine but the divine self-disclosure to humanity—truth communicated by God Himself through chosen messengers. As such, the revealed Word bears the attributes of its Author: infallibility, incorruptibility, and the power to transform individuals and civilizations.

Before tracing this supremacy within each tradition, it is necessary to clarify the quality of revelation as such—its kinds, provenance, and marks of authority. In Christian theology, revelation is distinguished as general and special. General revelation discloses God in creation and conscience: “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Psalm 19), and what may be known of Him is “clearly perceived” so that all are “without excuse” (Romans 1:19–20). Yet because this knowledge is not salvific, God bestows special revelation in Holy Scripture—the “God-breathed” Word (2 Timothy 3:16) that “cannot be broken” (John 10:35) and from which “not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass ... until all is accomplished” (Matthew 5:18). Hence Scripture is inspired, infallible, and inerrant in all that it affirms—historically and doctrinally—and communicates truth in objective, propositional form. Its sufficiency, clarity (perspicuity), and permanence render it the norm that judges every philosophy and custom; reason serves it as handmaid, for sacred doctrine “is wisdom above all human wisdom,” and mysteries, while above reason, do not contradict it.

In Islam, the Qur’án is the direct Word of God, a living miracle characterized by “one text, one language, and one dialect,” revealed by *inzāl*—“sent down” from above—so that Muḥammad is its Messenger, not its author. God addresses him with “Say” hundreds of times; He bids him, “O Messenger, proclaim what has been revealed to you from your Lord” (Q 5:67), and attests, “If God had so willed, I would not have recited it to you ... I lived a whole lifetime among you before it came to me” (Q 10:16). The Book is an unassailable Criterion: “falsehood cannot touch it from any angle” (Q 41:41–42); “the word of your Lord is complete in truth and justice; none can change His words” (Q 6:115). Alongside *waḥy matlū* (the recited Revelation) stands the *Sunnah* and *Hadith* as *waḥy ghayr matlū* (unrecited revelation), by which the Prophet specifies, explains, and enacts the Book: “Whatever the Messenger gives you, take; and whatever he forbids you, abstain from” (Q 59:7). He warned against a Qur’án-only posture: “Let me not find one of you reclining on his couch ... and he says, ‘We follow what we find in the Book of Allah’” (*Jāmi‘ at-Tirmidhī*, Vol. 5, 2663). The quality of this Revelation is manifest even in the Prophet’s state during descent: at times “like the ringing of a bell,” the hardest form, when “sweat would drop from his forehead” on a cold day; at other times *Jibrīl* appeared “in the form of a man,” and twice in his true form “filling the horizon.” Asked if he saw his Lord, he replied: “Light, how could I see Him?” (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Vol. 1, 443–444). Such reports underscore that Qur’án and *Sunnah* are of divine provenance and binding authority.

In the Bahá'í Faith, Revelation is the emanation of the divine will through the Manifestations of God, “clear and polished mirrors” in whom the “Sun of Reality” is perfectly reflected. The revealed Word is the unerring Balance by which all things are weighed, and the first duty is “the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws” (Kitáb-i-Aqdas). Revelation discloses itself in unveiled and veiled modes—guiding the sincere and testing the heedless—progressively renewing divine law while preserving eternal spiritual principles. Its quality is attested not only by its transformative power but by the Manifestation’s own testimony: “I was indeed as one dead when His behest was uttered. The hand of the will of thy Lord ... transformed Me”; “the breezes of the All-Glorious were wafted over Me, and taught Me the knowledge of all that hath been”; the “kindly Voice of Gabriel” summoned Him; His “Pen of Glory” poured forth Tablets as “vernal showers” from the “clouds of divine mercy.” Thus the Bahá'í conception unites transcendence (the unknowable Essence) with nearness (the speaking Word), and binds knowledge to obedience under the Covenant that safeguards authentic interpretation.

In Christian theology, the Bible is presented as “God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16), the very speech of God inscribed in human language, and therefore wholly trustworthy. Because “God is truth” (John 14:6) and “cannot lie” (Titus 1:2), His Word is free from error and incapable of failing. Jesus Himself affirmed this authority, declaring that “the Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35) and that “not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matthew 5:18). His repeated appeal to the formula “it is written” in His teaching underscored the Old Testament’s divine authority, and His promise that the Holy Spirit would “guide [the apostles] into all truth” (John 16:13) grounds the New Testament’s status as the authentic continuation of that revelation. The theological tradition affirms that the authority of Scripture surpasses human reason, philosophical systems, and ecclesiastical tradition; the church recognizes the canon, it does not create it. As Thomas Aquinas observed, sacred doctrine “is wisdom above all human wisdom” because its principles are received directly from God. For this reason, any claim contrary to revelation is judged false, and Scripture remains the supreme standard for all matters of faith and practice.

In Islam, the Qur’án is regarded as the final and complete revelation of God, the Furqán (“Criterion”) by which truth and falsehood are distinguished. It affirms of itself that “nothing has been neglected in the Book” (Qur’án 6:38) and that its verses are “perfected, then set out clearly” (Qur’án 11:1) by the “All-Wise, All-Aware.” The Qur’án is “an unassailable Scripture; falsehood cannot touch it from any angle” (Qur’án 41:41–42), and “the word of your Lord is complete in its truth and justice; no one can change His words” (Qur’án 6:115). Its authority is inseparably linked with the Prophet Muhammad, whose role was to convey God’s message without addition or omission: “O Messenger, proclaim what has been revealed to you from your Lord” (Qur’án 5:67). His sayings and actions (Sunnah) are considered integral to revelation, for “whatever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatever he forbids you, abstain from it” (Qur’án 59:7). Authentic Hadith are thus binding, and rejecting them is equated with rejecting divine guidance.

Islamic teaching affirms those earlier revelations—such as the Torah and Gospel—were genuine but subject to human alteration, while the Qur’án remains preserved from corruption, confirming and superseding all previous scriptures. The sayings of the Imams in the Shi‘a tradition reinforce this supremacy, insisting that any tradition not in harmony with the Book of God and the Prophetic example is to be rejected. In all cases, the Qur’án’s guidance is absolute, and its authority extends over intellect, tradition, and human law.

In the Bahá’í Faith, the revealed Word of God is the direct emanation of the divine will through the Manifestations of God—figures such as Moses, Christ, Muhammad, and Bahá’u’lláh—who perfectly reflect the attributes of the unknowable God. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes these Manifestations as “clear and polished mirrors” in which the “Sun of Reality” is fully reflected; whatever They utter is identical with truth itself. The Book revealed in each dispensation is described as the “unerring Balance” by which all human claims must be weighed. Bahá’u’lláh affirms in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas that “the first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws,” without which even righteous deeds lack true spiritual effect. The Bahá’í Writings emphasize that human learning, when detached from divine guidance, can become a veil, and that the highest purpose of knowledge is to recognize the Manifestation of God in one’s own day. Each Revelation renews the divine law, abrogating elements of previous dispensations as suited to the needs of the age, while preserving the eternal spiritual principles common to all. The revealed Word is “the breath of life unto all created things,” the source of civilization, the foundation of justice, and the key to the unity of humankind. Obedience to this Word is the very definition of true liberty, and the Covenant established by Bahá’u’lláh ensures its authentic interpretation and protection from schism.

Across all three traditions, the supremacy of divine revelation rests on its divine origin, its absolute truthfulness, and its comprehensive authority over every domain of human life. It is not merely a historical record of God’s dealings with humanity but the living speech of God, a standard against which all other claims must be measured. In Christianity, it is the inspired and inerrant Scripture; in Islam, the perfectly preserved Qur’án and authentic Sunnah; in the Bahá’í Faith, the Word of the Manifestation as the direct channel of God’s will. In each case, to accept the revelation is to accept God’s authority, and to reject it is to turn away from the very source of life. Thus, the supremacy of divine revelation is not a peripheral doctrine but the foundation upon which all other principles of faith rest. It defines the believer’s relationship to truth, shapes the moral and legal order, and ensures that the guidance of God remains the ultimate arbiter in the unfolding drama of human history.

Principle 9. Renewal of Religion Through Successive Messengers

The doctrine of renewal affirms that divine guidance addresses humanity across history in ways proportioned to our spiritual capacity and civilizational need. As a comparative thesis, it describes how revelation orders time into distinct economies, each with a law and a grace fitted

to its age. Yet this thesis requires immediate doctrinal precision: while the Bahá'í Writings explicitly teach progressive revelation through successive Manifestations, mainstream Christian and Islamic theology do not affirm later prophets or new public revelation after their respective closures. Christianity holds that public revelation is complete in Christ and entrusted to the apostles—"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:1–2); "contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). Thus, "we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Dei Verbum §4); "no new public revelation is to be expected" (Catechism of the Catholic Church §66), and alleged private revelations "do not belong to the deposit of faith" nor "improve or complete Christ's definitive Revelation" (§67). The Reformed confessions concur: God's former ways of revealing "being now ceased" (Westminster Confession of Faith 1.1). Islam, for its part, teaches the finality of prophethood: "Muḥammad is not the father of [any] one of your men, but [he is] the Messenger of Allah and the seal of the prophets" (Qur'ān 33:40), confirmed by the mass-transmitted dictum "there is no prophet after me" (lā nabiyya ba'dī)—for example, in the ḥadīth al-manzilah: "You are to me as Aaron was to Moses, except that there is no prophet after me" (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī; Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim). Renewal, in these two traditions, occurs within the dispensation—by the Spirit's guidance of the Church (Christianity) and by tajdīd (revival) and the institutions of guidance (Islam)—rather than by the advent of post-apostolic or post-Muḥammadan messengers.

1. Christianity: From "Many Ways" to the Fulness in the Son

Christian Scripture portrays revelation as genuinely historical and cumulative—"in many portions and in many ways"—yet teleologically complete in Christ (Hebrews 1:1–2). The Lord's promise that the Paraclete "will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13) is read as the Spirit's indefectible governance of the apostolic Church in receiving, guarding, and authoritatively expounding what has been once for all given, not as warrant for new public revelations or later prophets. The same authority grounds Scripture's sufficiency: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable... that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16–17). The canon's inviolability is underscored by the apocalyptic warning—often appealed to as a canonical norm—"if anyone adds to" the prophetic words, "God will add to him the plagues described" (Revelation 22:18–19). Hence the conciliar synthesis: "we now await no further new public revelation" (Dei Verbum §4), and "the task of authentically interpreting the word of God... has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church" (Dei Verbum §10). Patristic voices anticipate this closure: Irenaeus insists upon the *regula fidei* handed down from the apostles, and Augustine exhorts the faithful to cleave to the canonical books "in such honor as to believe their authors have not erred" in writing. The result is not stasis but intradispensational development: doctrine unfolds under the Spirit within a closed deposit—"one

Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:5)—while the Church “awaits the blessed hope” (Titus 2:13), not new messengers.

2. Islam: The Seal of Prophets and Renewal as Tajdīd

The Qur’ān situates Muḥammad within a long chain—“We have sent messengers before you; among them are those whose story We have related to you, and among them are those whose story We have not related to you” (Q 40:78)—and then brings that line to closure: “the seal of the prophets” (Q 33:40). Sunni orthodoxy reads this with the mutawātir seal-formula *lā nabiyya ba’dī* (“there is no prophet after me”: Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī; Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim) and with the canonical sufficiency of the dīn: “This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islam as religion” (Q 5:3). In this horizon, renewal is the promised *tajdīd*: “Indeed, Allah will send to this ummah at the head of every one hundred years someone who will renew for it its religion” (Sunan Abī Dāwūd 4291; for isnād discussion, see). The pathway of ongoing guidance is communal and scholarly—“The scholars are the heirs of the prophets” (recorded by al-Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Mājah; see refs collated in)—and juridical-spiritual: “We sent them [the messengers] with clear proofs and scriptures, and We revealed to you the Reminder that you may make clear to the people what was sent down to them” (Q 16:44). The Qur’ān itself affirms the historical tailoring of revelation—“For every term is a Book ... Allah eliminates what He wills or confirms, and with Him is the Mother of the Book” (Q 13:38–39)—yet guards against extension of *nubuwwa* beyond Muḥammad.

Shi’i theology systematizes this closure by distinguishing the circle of prophethood (*dawr al-nubuwwa*) from the circle of guardianship (*dawr al-wilāya*). Prophethood—bearing a new law—ends with Muḥammad; *wilāya*—the inner guardianship and esoteric hermeneutic of the Revelation—continues through ‘Alī and the Imams. In Imāmī sources, the Imam is the “speaking Qur’ān” (*al-Qur’ān al-nāṭiq*), the divinely appointed interpreter of the Book’s inner sense, while the written text is a “silent guide” (*al-imām al-ṣāmī*). He is “the Light of God ... the Gate or Threshold that allows the passage into Divine Knowledge,” and, by Prophetic report, “I am the City of Knowledge and ‘Alī is its gate,” an image early Imāmism reads as the epistemic structure of guidance. Hence the Imam’s task is not to legislate a new *sharī‘a* after the Seal, but to disclose the *bāṭin* (inner meaning), stewarding the community’s spiritual maturation under a closed prophethood.

Ismaili prophetology develops this distinction into a doctrine of cycles. As Henry Corbin summarizes, sacred history unfolds in Cycles of Prophecy (*adwār al-nubuwwa*), each inaugurated by a speaking prophet (*nāṭiq*) and complemented by a *wāṣī*’ *asās* (foundation-legate) and a succession of Imams, for “the Imam is the repository of the esoteric meaning of the Revelation, that is to say, of saving gnosis”. A single cycle comprises a *nāṭiq* who brings the exoteric Law, an *‘asās* who grounds its inner sense, and a heptad of Imams (or heptads of heptads) culminating in the *Qā’im*/Resurrector who “closes the Cycle”. Corbin notes the Ismaili schema of seven great cycles—Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muḥammad, and the final

Qiyāma—in which the Imam is a “Silent One” (sāmī) who “does not proclaim a new Law; rather he liberates [the faithful] by ta’wīl,” the esoteric exegesis that unveils the religion’s inner Resurrection (briefly: dīn-i qiyāmat). A concise formulation of the seven-cycle architecture (nāṭiq–’asās–Imams) appears in accessible overviews drawing on Corbin’s work.

Accordingly, Shī‘ism and prophetic wisdom do not reopen nubuwwa; they translate finality into a differentiated economy of guidance: prophetic legislation has its Seal, while wilāya—theophanic wisdom and initiation—continues as the Imam’s charge (Imāmī) or as the Imam’s cycle-structuring office (Ismaili). In the Twelver horizon, the Imamate secures continuity “for every age,” and during the Greater Occultation the marji‘iyya of learned authority stewards law and doctrine; in the Ismaili horizon, the living Imam remains the key of ta’wīl and the axis of unity. In both, Islam affirms a living, self-renewing community under a closed prophethood: tajdīd by scholars and saints within the Sunnī dispensation; wilāya/Imamate in the Shī‘ī. Thus the finality of Muḥammad’s message and the durability of divine guidance are held together without contradiction.

3. The Bahá’í Faith: Progressive Revelation and the Unity of the Manifestations , and the Dispensation’s Horizon

In the Bahá’í Writings, the principle of successive Messengers is articulated as progressive revelation. Bahá’u’lláh states: “He hath in every age and cycle, in conformity with His transcendent wisdom, sent forth a divine Messenger to revive the dispirited and despondent souls with the living waters of His utterance” (Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd, p. 346). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that the law of God has two parts: immutable spiritual principles, which are “irremovable and eternal,” and social laws, which “are modified in each prophetic cycle in accordance with the necessities of the times” (Some Answered Questions, p. 139). When the cycle of one Manifestation ends, a new one begins, bringing fresh spiritual springtime to the world (Some Answered Questions, p. 245). Bahá’u’lláh affirms the unity of all Manifestations: “Should one of these Manifestations of Holiness proclaim saying: ‘I am the return of all the Prophets,’ He verily speaketh the truth” (Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 137). By the same logic, titles that appear to signal finality in one dispensation and primacy in another are reconciled within a single metaphysical economy: Christ’s “Alpha and Omega” and the Islamic conception of the Nūr Muḥammadī name not competing revelations but the one divine Reality disclosed in diverse human temples across the cycles. Hence Bahá’u’lláh’s sun-metaphor: “Though it rise from the ‘Beginning that hath no beginning’ until the ‘End that knoweth no end,’ it is none the less the same sun” (Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 140). The succession of Moses, Christ, Muḥammad, the Báb, and Bahá’u’lláh is thus a series of dawns of the same spiritual Sun.

At the same time, the Bahá’í Dispensation is bounded by an explicit covenantal horizon that guards the community from premature claims while preserving the principled periodicity of revelation: “Whoso layeth claim to a Revelation ere the completion of a full thousand years is verily a lying impostor.” This thousand-year clause does not negate progressive revelation; it

disciplines it, ensuring that the unity of the Manifestations is honored without collapsing dispensations into one another. Read together with the distinction between eternal principles and time-bound ordinances, and with the interpretive authority of the Covenant, the Bahá'í doctrine both secures historical continuity—one Sun rising in many dawns—and establishes juridical clarity about the interval before a new Manifestation may rightly be expected.

Objections: The Finality of Prophecy in Christianity and Islam

What follows is a concise, good-faith examination of arguments against an unqualified doctrine of prophetic closure as classically formulated in Christianity and Islam. The aim is not to diminish Christ's primacy or Muḥammad's unique station, nor to deny the integrity of their respective dispensations, but to ask whether Scripture and reason require the conclusion that no further divine envoy or public disclosure could ever occur. Our method is textual and conceptual: we attend to wording and context, distinguish what a verse says from what later systems infer, and consider the practical horizon of guidance across changing ages. Read this as a mapping of plausible objections that a fair-minded interlocutor might raise—objections that test the strength and scope of finality claims while honoring the internal logic and spiritual claims of each tradition. With that framing in place, we begin with Christianity.

Objections: The Finality of Prophecy in Christianity (Textual and Theological Considerations)

The following points register, in a courteous and academic spirit, reasons a fair-minded reader might advance against an unqualified Christian doctrine of prophetic closure. They do not deny Christ's primacy or the Church's claim that the fullness of revelation is given in Him; rather, they question whether Scripture and reason require the conclusion that no further divine envoy or new public disclosure could ever be given.

1) Promises of departure and return admit more than one mode of fulfillment.

Jesus speaks of going and coming again (John 14:1–3); the Ascension witnesses promise that “this same Jesus ... will come back in the same way” (Acts 1:11); Paul anticipates the Lord's descent and the gathering of believers (1 Thess 4:16–17); the Synoptics describe the Son of Man “coming on the clouds” (Matt 24:30). The dominant reading is a personal, eschatological Parousia. Yet the language itself secures *certainly of divine reappearance*, not necessarily the exclusive form of its historical mediation. A typological or mediated “return” of the same Logos is not ruled out by these verses taken simply as texts.

2) The Paraclete sayings plausibly bear a prophetic horizon.

Jesus promises “another Paraclete” who will “abide forever,” “teach you all things,” and “guide you into all truth” (John 14:16–17; 14:26; 16:13). Classical exegesis identifies the Paraclete with the Holy Spirit; yet the wording “another,” the verbs of *speaking*, *hearing*, and *declaring*, and the promise of further guidance have led some to see here a horizon of post-Christic divine teaching. Read alongside Qur'ān 61:6's announcement of a messenger “whose name is Aḥmad,” some

have argued for a prophetic fulfillment; at minimum, the Johannine promises do not, on their face, *preclude* later divine mission.

3) The historical particularity of Jesus' commission sits uneasily with a universal, all-ages finality.

Jesus states, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 15:24). His public ministry is geographically and ethnically delimited, even as the post-resurrection mandate becomes universal (Matt 28:19). If salvation history is pedagogically staged, a ministry so particular in embodiment does not by itself prove that no later envoy could be given for a subsequent stage of human maturity.

4) The Gospel corpus is moral-soteriological, not a comprehensive public law.

The canonical Gospels overwhelmingly address interior conversion and charity (e.g., love of enemies, forgiveness, purity of heart). They do not offer a complete civil, criminal, economic, or international legal code proportioned to governing complex societies in perpetuity. If "final revelation" is taken to imply normative completeness for public order through all ages, the genre and scope of the New Testament appear underdetermined without further divine legislation.

5) No autograph from Jesus complicates claims to final textual form.

The New Testament consists of apostolic memoirs and letters written after Jesus' earthly life (cf. Luke 1:1–4). There is no single prophetic autograph authored by Jesus. If a last, universal message ought—on rational grounds—to be directly recorded by the revealer to minimize distortion, the NT's compositional situation is less than ideal for asserting that no further prophetic clarification could ever be necessary.

6) Scripture's own architecture is developmental.

"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke ... but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb 1:1–2). Biblical revelation advances by epochs (patriarchal, Mosaic, prophetic, messianic). If history is an evolutionary pedagogy, reason does not demand an abrupt cessation of divine instruction after a single stage; it leaves open the possibility of subsequent economies addressing new conditions of human civilization.

7) Warnings against false prophets presuppose discernment, not categorical impossibility.

Jesus forewarns "false Christs and false prophets" who will deceive (Matt 24:24). This is often read as implying that all later prophetic claims are false. Yet the very warning presumes the recognizability of prophecy as a category and the need to test claims (cf. 1 John 4:1), rather than asserting that no genuine prophetic claim can ever recur.

8) The "distortion of earlier scriptures" argument is symmetrical.

If Christians concede that Israel at times misread or selectively received prior revelation, that shows semantic corruption is possible without textual loss. By parity of reasoning, the New Testament—however faithfully transmitted—remains vulnerable to interpretive divergence severe enough to warrant, at least in principle, fresh divine clarification in a later economy.

9) Claims of perfection and universality are historically indexed.

The Gospel corpus does not anticipate domains that now structure public life (global finance systems, technological biopolitics, planetary ecology, AI). To insist that a first-century, non-legal corpus is exhaustively sufficient for such domains risks conflating soteriological finality (Christ as definitive revealer) with normative completeness (detailed governance across all future contingencies). The latter is, at minimum, contestable.

10) The logic of ongoing divine address remains intact.

If God freely spoke across earlier ages to meet human needs, no intrinsic contradiction arises in affirming that He may speak again—in whatever manner He wills—when new historical conditions require proportionate guidance. The Gospel texts that promise Christ's return and the Paraclete's guidance establish the certainty of continued divine care; they do not, by themselves, necessitate a doctrinal axiom that prophetic mission is absolutely closed for all future time.

Conclusion (Christian focus).

These considerations do not unsettle the confession that the fullness of revelation is given in Christ. They do suggest, however, that Scripture's language of return, the Paraclete's future guidance, the particularity of Jesus' historical mission, the non-legal character of the Gospel corpus, and the developmental structure of salvation history leave conceptual space—should God so will—for further divine envoy or economy without incoherence.

Objections: The Finality of Prophecy in Islam (Textual and Doctrinal Reconsiderations)

What follows is a set of ten closely argued considerations, advanced in a spirit of respect, that question the standard reading of khatm al-nubuwwa as an absolute, trans-historical termination of divine messengership. The claim here is not that the Qur'ān fails to safeguard the uniqueness of Muḥammad's mission, but that its own semantics, contexts, and organizing principles leave room for a more capacious—indeed Qur'ānic—account of how divine guidance unfolds after him.

1) The semantics of khatam are polyvalent, not univocal.

The term khatam (with fathā on the tā') admits a range of meanings in Arabic usage: "seal," "signet," "signet-ring," even "ornamental inlay" (khatam-kārī survives as a craft term). A seal can close a text, but it can also authenticate, adorn, or protect it. Nothing in Q 33:40 forces the single sense "chronologically last." On a strictly lexical reading, khatam al-nabiyyīn can just as naturally mean "the authenticating signet of the prophets," "the seal that secures the treasury of prophecy," or "the consummating ornament of the prophetic line." To deduce "no prophet can ever come, in any form, in any future divine economy" from one polyvalent noun exceeds what the word itself can bear.

2) The verse specifies nabiyyīn, not rusul—a distinction the text itself preserves.

Classical theology distinguishes nabī and rasūl (every rasūl is a nabī, not every nabī is a rasūl). Q 33:40 speaks of the prophets (nabiyyīn), not the messengers (rusul). At minimum, this means the verse cannot, by itself, settle every question about the modalities of later divine guidance across cycles. One may argue (as many do) that “sealing prophecy” entails sealing messengership; but that conclusion is extra to the verse and depends on a systematic inference, not on the explicit wording of the text. The verse’s silence on rusul weakens attempts to erect an all-encompassing doctrine of absolute finality upon it alone.

3) The immediate context of Q 33:40 concerns adoption and kinship law, not a treatise on eschatological closure.

Sūrat al-Aḥzāb addresses the Prophet’s marriage to Zaynab and the abolition of fictive filiation (Zayd is “your brother in faith,” not “your son”). The assertion “Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men, but the Messenger of God and the khatam al-nabiyyīn” accompanies this legal clarification. It functions to mark his unique authority over Arabian custom, not to open a general discourse on whether God can ever, in a remote future, disclose Himself anew to humankind. Building a universal dogma of finality on a secondary clause within a passage on kinship reform is hermeneutically ambitious—and contestable.

4) The Prophet’s primordality, in ḥadīth and later theology, undercuts a purely temporal reading of “lastness.”

Reports—contested in isnād but formative in doctrine—speak of the Prophet’s pre-existence (“I was a prophet when Adam was between spirit and body”) and of a Muhammadan Light or Reality that precedes creation. Whatever one makes of individual chains, the broad theological point is clear: Muḥammad’s truth is metahistorical. If his firstness is not merely temporal, then his lastness need not be either. “Seal” can then be read as naming the plenitude and authentication of the prophetic reality in him—without logically barring that same reality from disclosing itself again in a new historical form when a future cycle ripens.

5) The Qur’ānic architecture of history is cyclic and term-bound.

Repeatedly the Qur’ān states: “For every nation there is an appointed term” (e.g., Q 7:34; 10:49; 23:43), and “For every term is a Book... Allah eliminates what He wills or confirms, and with Him is the Mother of the Book” (Q 13:38–39). Revelation, on this telling, is historically tailored and time-indexed; divine economy unfolds in discrete dispensations whose forms expire at their term. It is difficult to square this internal logic with an absolute, cosmic prohibition on any future divine envoy in any future age. A more coherent reading sees khatm as the seal of a cycle, not a veto on God’s freedom beyond all cycles.

6) Tajdīd (revival) cannot substitute for naskh (abrogation) where God Himself claims the prerogative to legislate “better” or “like it.”

“Whatsoever verse We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring forth one better than it or like it” (Q 2:106). The verse locates the authority to replace norms in God’s direct act, not in scholarly ingenuity. Juristic *tajdīd* can renew practice; it cannot author a divinely “better” dispensation. Modern impasses—finance as interest-based systems, family law in radically altered social orders, global governance—expose the limits of *ijtihād* without fresh revelation. If God claims the right to bring “better,” then a theology of periodic prophetic renewal is the most text-faithful way to honor that prerogative.

7) Sunni *tajdīd* and Shī‘ī *wilāya* attest the need for living guidance—but also reveal its structural insufficiency under a strict finality thesis.

Sunnism promises a centennial renewer (*mujaddid*) and esteems the “scholars as heirs of the prophets,” yet reserves abrogating authority to God alone. Imāmī Shī‘ism secures continuity by the Imamate (“for every age an Imām”) and interprets the *ḍīn*’s inner sense (*bāṭin*) through *wilāya*—but the Greater Occultation renders the decisive, living, universally recognized guide absent. In both horizons, the community implicitly acknowledges that text plus human reason is not, by itself, a complete solution across epochs. A renewed divine envoy, when cycles turn, best satisfies the Qur’ān’s own pattern of clarification by Revelation (Q 16:44).

8) The “age of rationality” argument (Iqbal’s thesis) is philosophically and historically weak.

To claim that prophecy suited an “instinctive” humanity whereas a “rational” modernity no longer needs it collapses under its own criteria. Reason flourished before Islam and Christianity (Plato, Aristotle) and has often been marshaled against religion (Hume, Marx, Nietzsche, Russell). If “rationality” is the bar, it neither guarantees adherence to revelation nor obviates the need for normative direction higher than human preference. The Qur’ān, in any case, presents itself not as a stopgap for the irrational, but as light and criterion for the rational creature—precisely because unaided reason cannot legislate grace or foresee every moral configuration of future ages.

9) Prophetic parables of time portray Islam’s dispensation as a finite “late-day” segment, not an endless afternoon.

The well-known parable likening Jews, Christians, and Muslims to three groups of laborers hired across a single day (with the Muslim share running from ‘Aṣr to sunset) frames the Ummah’s timeslot as the final segment of a day, not the abolition of future divine dawns. Reports about the Mahdī coming “even if only a day remains” similarly press the image of a closing epoch within a larger sacred history. Read together with the Qur’ān’s “term” verses, these images commend a cyclical rather than absolutist construal of finality.

10) Canon formation, chronology, and hermeneutic access argue against claiming a once-for-all textual sufficiency for all times.

Muslim scholarship itself records disagreement on the last revealed verse (many cite Q 5:3; others Q 2:281, among additional candidates). The order of sūrah's and āyāt in the codex is not strictly chronological, which complicates appeals to linear abrogation without a living arbiter. The Qur'ān distinguishes clear (*muḥkamāt*) and ambiguous (*mutashābihāt*) verses, whose fullest sense is known to God and to those firm in knowledge (Q 3:7). If those “firm in knowledge” are, by common exegetical admission, prophets and the designated Imams, then the post-Prophetic community's distance from such persons—especially after the Occultation in Shī'ism—renders claims of self-sufficient, all-epoch clarity less tenable. The Shī'ī dictum “for every age there is an Imām” acknowledges the need; the Qur'ānic pattern of cycles supplies the mode: periodic divine disclosure.

11) The argument from preservation and immunity from distortion

It is often maintained that the Qur'ān's exceptional preservation—unlike the Torah and Gospel, said to have suffered *tahrīf*—furnishes a rational proof of prophetic finality: a last message must be perfectly kept for all ages; since the Qur'ān is thus kept, no further prophet is needed. Respectfully, this inference exceeds what its premises warrant.

First, textual preservation and prophetic finality are not logically equivalent. The Qur'ān itself reserves to God the prerogative of legislative renewal: “Whatever verse We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring forth one better than it or like it” (Q 2:106). A flawlessly preserved prior text does not, on Qur'ānic terms, preclude God from addressing new historical conditions with “better” or “like” norms in a subsequent dispensation. Preservation secures a revelation's integrity; it does not circumscribe divine freedom.

Second, the premise understates the historically acknowledged plurality within the earliest reception of the Qur'ān. Canonical reports speak of revelation “in seven *ahruf*,” authorize multiple *qirā'āt*, and record 'Uthmān's standardization to prevent widening dialectal divergences. Early discussions about particular readings and codical ordering show that Islamic “preservation” has always included principled curation and harmonization. This by no means impugns Qur'ānic authority; it simply weakens the claim that Islamic transmission was uniquely variance-free in a way that would, by itself, foreclose the very category of later revelation.

Third, preservation in letters does not guarantee unanimity in meaning. The Qur'ān distinguishes *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* (Q 3:7), and the Prophet's nation is forewarned of sectarian proliferation. The existence of enduring schools and rival hermeneutics—often severe enough to provoke mutual censure—shows that a preserved text remains vulnerable to semantic drift. If *tahrīf* can be interpretive as well as literal, then preservation alone cannot function as a sufficient reason to deny the possibility or need of fresh divine clarification in a new age.

Fourth, Muslim sources themselves register outstanding questions of chronology and closure (e.g., competing reports about the last revealed verse; the codex's non-chronological arrangement). Far from undermining the Qur'ān, these data highlight that preservation required

stewardship; but they also caution against elevating preservation into a master argument for an unqualified, trans-historical finality.

Finally, practical adequacy remains at issue. *Ijtihād* and *tajdīd* extend the law's reach, yet the scale and novelty of modern problems (finance architectures, biotechnologies, global governance) expose the limits of juristic inference alone. On Qur'ānic premises, only God authors the “better” or the “like” (Q 2:106). That Shī'ī doctrine posits perpetual Imamate and *wilāya*—a living authority to unveil the *bāṭin*—implicitly concedes the enduring need for divinely rooted guidance beyond a bare appeal to textual preservation.

In sum, the permanence of the Qur'ānic text is a providential gift and a pillar of Islamic faith; but as an argument for unconditional, all-age finality, preservation is neither necessary nor sufficient. More modestly stated: preservation safeguards the integrity of a dispensation; it does not preempt the freedom of God to inaugurate another when the appointed term and the needs of humanity require it (Q 13:38–39).

Conclusion (Islamic focus). None of these points denies Muḥammad's unique station or the closure of his sharī'a for its term. They do, however, challenge the leap from khatm to an unconditional, everlasting prohibition on any future divine envoy. The Qur'ān's own lexicon, contexts, temporal architecture, and account of God's legislative prerogative collectively support an alternative: finality as the seal of a cycle, within a wider history of God's self-disclosure in which—when humanity's term and needs demand—He remains free to raise up whom He wills.

Conclusion

Read together, the three traditions yield a coherent picture of religious truth that is at once convergent and pluriform. Each insists on the reality of the one God, the limits of human cognition before the divine essence, and the necessity of revelation for right belief and right living. Each binds worship to justice, character to law, and present conduct to an eschatological horizon in which all accounts are set straight. These shared axioms are not superficial. They are generative: they shape prayer, jurisprudence, pedagogy, and the social imagination across civilizations.

The same comparison also clarifies where real differences do their work. Christian discourse explicates unity as triune communion without partition of the simple divine essence; Islamic theology guards unity through an uncompromising *tawḥīd* that resists any hint of composition; Bahá'í teaching radicalizes transcendence by locating divine self-disclosure in Manifestations who mirror the unknowable Essence. Downstream of these metaphysical commitments lie distinct architectures of authority: apostolic Scripture and magisterial discernment; Qur'ān and Sunnah within Sunni *tajdīd* and Shī'ī *wilāya*/Imamate; and, in Bahá'í thought, a living Covenant that both anchors interpretation and situates renewal within an explicitly demarcated dispensation.

The question of historical finality concentrates these differences. The study has registered, with fairness to confessional sources, that mainstream Christianity and Islam affirm closure of public revelation—albeit by different routes and with different institutional embodiments—while the Bahá’í scriptures teach principled, periodic renewal. Rather than flattening this tension, the article proposes a disciplined vocabulary for engaging it: finality may be construed as the seal of a cycle (a theological and juridical completion) without denying God’s freedom beyond that horizon; renewal may be affirmed without erasing the integrity or sufficiency of a prior dispensation for its appointed term. Shī‘ī distinctions between nubuwwa and wilāya, and Sunni accounts of tajdīd, illustrate how living guidance can be imagined within a closed canon—an insight that both honors internal doctrines and opens comparative space.

Two practical outcomes follow. First, a robust common ethic is available now: justice tempered by mercy, truthfulness joined to love, the dignity of persons, fidelity to covenant, solidarity with the vulnerable. These are not negotiable minima; they are theologically thick commitments capable of underwriting shared work on peace, poverty, religious freedom, and planetary stewardship. Second, interfaith engagement need not trade conviction for civility. Precision about differences—Trinity and tawhīd, canon and khatm, covenant and cycle—can coexist with cooperation wherever conscience and revelation set the same task.

This analysis remains a beginning. It has treated only three traditions and a selected canon of authorities; further work should broaden the textual base (including Eastern Christian and diverse Islamic schools), test the typology against concrete legal-ethical case studies, and examine how communities operationalize virtue and law under modern conditions (financial architectures, biotechnologies, digital agency, ecological thresholds). Comparative theology is best done in the first person plural: with scholars and practitioners at the same table, reading each other’s texts in their strongest sense.

If there is a single lesson, it is intellectual and spiritual humility. The three traditions converge in confessing that ultimate reality exceeds our grasp even as it discloses a path. Within that acknowledgment, unity of purpose and honesty about difference become complementary virtues. The shared conviction that God speaks—and that God’s speech obliges—can sustain a common endeavor: to build, under the light we have received, a just and compassionate civilization worthy of the name of God.

References:

Holy Bible, New American Standard Bible. (1971).

Aquinas, T. (2006). *The Summa Theologica*. (Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Trans.).

Augustine, S. (1886). *Confessions and Letters of St. Augustin* (1st ser., Vol. 1). Christian Literature

Geisler, N. L. (1988). *Signs and Wonders*. Tyndale

International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. (1982). *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics*. (Drafting Committee).

Bonaventure, S. (1259). *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* (The Journey of the Mind into God).

Abdel Haleem, M. A. S. (2005). *The Qur'an* (Oxford World's Classics). Oxford University Press, USA

Al-Ghazali. (1972). *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*. (S. Dunya, Ed.). Dār al-ma'ārif.

Rahman, F. (1952). *Avicenna's Psychology: An English Translation of Kitāb al-najāt, Book II, Chapter VI with Historico-Philosophical Notes and Textual Improvements on the Cairo Edition*. Oxford University Press.

Inati, S. C. (1996). *Ibn Sina and Mysticism: Remarks and Admonitions, Part Four*. Kegan Paul.

Mullā S·adrā. (1606). *al-Mabda' wa al-ma'ād*. (H. 'Āsī, Ed.). Al-Mu'assasa al-Jāmi'iyya li al-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī'.

Al-Bukhārī, M. I. I. (2007). *Sahih al-Bukhari* (Vol. 4, 6, 9). (N. al-Khattab, Trans.; H. al-Khattab, Ed.; A. Khaliyl, Rev.). Darussalam.

Muslim, A. H. I. A. (2007). *Sahih Muslim* (Vol. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7). (N. al-Khattab, Trans.; H. al-Khattab, Ed.; A. Khaliyl, Rev.). Maktaba Dar-us-Salam.

At-Tirmidhi, I. H. A. I. M. I. I. (2007). *Jami' At-Tirmidhi* (Vol. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6). (A. Khaliyl, Trans.; H. A. Z. A. Za'i, Ed.; Islamic Research Section Darussalam, Rev.). Darussalam.

'Abdu'l-Bahá. (n.d.). *Some Answered Questions*. (Publisher <https://oceanoflights.org/>)

Abdu'l-Bahá. (1985). *Commentary on the Hidden Treasure (Tafsir-i-Kuntu Kanzan Makhfiyyan)*. (M. Momen, Trans.). (Publication details not explicitly stated for the translation, but noted as "Third Draft 26 October 1985" in the provided source excerpt).

Bahá'u'lláh. (n.d.). *Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude*. (Shoghi Effendi, Trans.).

Bahá'u'lláh. (n.d.). *Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd: Tablet of Maqsud*. (Translated from the original Persian). In *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* (pp. 159-178). (Publisher <https://oceanoflights.org/>)

Bahá'u'lláh. (n.d.). *Haft-Vádí: Seven Valleys*. (Translated from the original Persian). (Publisher <https://oceanoflights.org/>).

Bahá'u'lláh. (n.d.). *Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat: Tablet of Wisdom*. (Translated from the original Arabic). In *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* (pp. 135-152). (Publisher not available in sources).

- Bahá'u'lláh. (n.d.). *Lawḥ-i-Ard-i-Bá: Tablet of the Land of Bá*. (Publisher <https://oceanoflights.org/>).

- Bahá'u'lláh. (n.d.). *Lawḥ-i-'Abdu'r-Razzáq*. (Partial translation from the original Persian). In *Gleanings From The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (pp. 150-151, 172-175). (Publisher <https://oceanoflights.org/>)