Bahāʾīs

(6,160 words)

Adherents of Bahāʾism *(ahl al-Bahāʾ),* widely known as the "Bahāʾī Faith," an independent world religion with Islamic origins. The Bahāʾī religion, a universalization of Bābism, was founded by Mīrzā Ḥusayn-ʿAlī Nūrī (1817–92), known as Bahāʾ Allāh/Bahāʾullāh (Splendor of God; standardized Bahāʾī spelling, Bahāʾu'llāh), in Baghdad in the year 1863. In 1866, it emerged as a distinct faith-community in Adrianople (Edirne). Bahāʾī identity is fully independent. While Bahāʾīs do not identify as Muslims, Bahāʾīs regard the Qurʾān with profound respect as divine revelation, as do Muslims, except that Bahāʾīs have their own corpus of sacred scriptures, quite apart from the Qurʾān.

Bahāʾīs also believe in Muḥammad as the "Seal of the Prophets and of the Messengers" (going beyond the Qurʾān's honorific of Muḥammad as the "Seal of the Prophets" *(khātam l-nabiyīn)* in Q 33:40) and hold him to be the final Messenger for the "Cycle of Prophecy." Prophecy foretells, as well as tells forth. In Bahāʾī doctrine, the "Cycle of Prophecy *(kawr-i nubuvvat)* or "Adamic Cycle" *(kawr-i ādam)* prepared the world for the "Cycle of Fulfillment" *(kawr-i taḥaqquq va ikmāl)* or "Bahāʾī Cycle" *(kawr-i Bahāʾī)*, symbolically foreshadowed in the Qurʾān as the "Great Announcement" (*al-nabāʾ al-ʿaẓīm,* Q 78:2; Bahāʾullāh, *Kitāb l-aqdas*, par. 167). This Cycle of Fulfillment was inaugurated by the Bāb, who prophesied the imminent advent of "Him who God shall manifest" *(man yuẓhiruhu llāh),* whom the majority of Bābīs (followers of the Bāb) came to recognize as Bahāʾullāh.

A Bahāʾī theology of pluralism, with special reference to Islam, may be based on a statement by Shoghi Effendi, "Guardian" of the Bahāʾī Faith (1921–57): "Unequivocally and without the least reservation it proclaims all established religions to be divine in origin, identical in their aims, complementary in their functions, continuous in their purpose, indispensable in their value to mankind." (S. Effendi, *World Order*, p. 58). This, of course, applies as much to Islam as to other religions.

Having arisen out of Islamic historical context and milieu, the Bahāʾī religion has certain Islamicate elements, yet Bahāʾism exhibits certain other features that are *supra*-Islamicate and distinct in character. For instance, Islamic doctrine adheres to a belief in successive revelations,

beginning with Adam, and culminating with the Prophet Muḥammad as the "Seal of the Prophets." In Bahāʾī teachings, the idea of *successive* revelations is invested with a teleology that transforms it into "*progressive* revelation" *(tajdīd va takāmul-i adyān)* where the succession of Messengers throughout the history of religions is not only sequential but cumulative, coefficient with the social evolution of humanity (Y. Ioannesyan, The concept of the "manifestations of God's will"). As humankind advances socially, so does the corresponding need for guidance and laws suited to the exigencies of the day and age. Here, "progressive" conveys the notion of "superior" in respect of "fuller" and "more advanced," without making a claim of intrinsic superiority.

Before focusing on Bābī and Bahāʾī approaches to the interpretation of the Qurʾān, some distinctive features of Bahāʾism may be highlighted here. Bahāʾullāh, on 22 April 1863 privately declared himself "Him whom God shall manifest" *(man yuẓhiruhu llāh),* the messianic theophany foretold by the Bāb. In open epistles to Queen Victoria, Napoleon III, Pope Pius IX and other world leaders during the Adrianople and ʿAkkā (Haifa) periods (1864-92), Bahāʾullāh publicly proclaimed himself the advent of the millenarian "Promised One" of all religions — a "multiple-messiahship" (C. Buck, *Unique,* 158), i.e. the Zoroastrian Shāh Bahrām Varjāvand, the Jewish Everlasting Father (*Isa* 9:6)/Lord of Hosts, the Christian Spirit of Truth, the Shīʿī al-Ḥusayn *redivivus*, the Sunnī return of Christ, and "Him who God shall manifest," as announced by the Bāb (see APOCALYPSE).

As "World Reformer" *(muṣliḥ al-ʿālam),* Bahāʾullāh advocated world peace, parliamentary democracy, disarmament, an international language, the harmony of science and religion, interfaith concord as well as gender and racial equality. From a historicist perspective, Bahāʾī principles represent modernist universalizations of Islamic canons — which were announced during the reform period in the Ottoman Empire where Bahāʾullāh was an exile (Alkan, *Dissent,* p. 90 and ch. 4) — yet transcending the traditional believer/infidel dichotomy (see BELIEF AND UNBELIEF). On the basis of a comparative approach to the writings of Bahāʾullāh and the Ottoman reformers, we can say that certain ideas, such as the criticism of autocratic rule and its substitution by a constitutional monarchy, certainly converged. The approach of Ottoman and Iranian reformers was embedded in the framework of a modernist or revivalist Islam. However, the responses of Bahāʾullāh — and those of his eldest son and designated successor, ʿAbdu l-Bahāʾ (1844–1921) — can be regarded

as supra-Islamic and universalistic reforms that went beyond the proposals of the reformers in the Ottoman Empire (Alkan, *Dissent,* p. 218). Much the same held true in comparison with the Islamic reforms advocated by Iranian modernists (Buck, Bahāʾullāh as "World Reformer").

In precocious religious preparation for a global society, Bahāʾullāh's signal contribution was to sacralize certain secular modernist reforms within an irreducibly original paradigm of world unity in which peace is made sacred. By designating his son ʿAbdu l-Bahāʾ (Servant of Bahāʾ, d. 1921) as interpreter, exemplar and successor and by establishing elected councils, Bahāʾullāh instituted his Covenant, symbolized as "the Crimson Ark" (C. Buck, *Paradise,* ch. 5). This is the organizing principle of the Bahāʾī community and the means to safeguard its integrity against major schism. Succeeding ʿAbdu l-Bahāʾ in 1921 as "Guardian" of the Bahāʾī Faith, Shoghi Effendi (d. 1957) globalized and evolved the Bahāʾī administration as a system of local and national Spiritual Assemblies. This led in 1963 to the establishment of the Universal House of Justice, the international Bahāʾī governing body, on Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel.

The purpose of the Bahāʾī Faith, as the religion is now known, is to unify the world through its principles of unity, which range from family relations to international relations. According to a recent survey, some 50 Bahāʾī principles of unity have been identified in the primary sources (Persian, Arabic and English) as follows:

50 Bahāʾī Principles of Unity

> I. Individual Relationship with God: (1) "Mystic feeling which unites nan with God"; II. Family Relations: (2) Unity of Husband and Wife *(vaḥdat);* (3) Unity of the family *(ittiḥād va ittifāq dar miyān-i khāndān);* III. Interpersonal Relations: (4) Oneness of Emotions *(iḥsāsāt-i vāḥida);* (5) Spiritual Oneness *(vaḥdat-i rawḥānī);* IV. Gender Relations: (6) Unity of the Rights of Men and Women *(vaḥdat-i huqūq-i rijāl va nisāʾ);* (7) Unity in Education *(vaḥdat-i uṣūl va qavānīn-i tarbiyat);* V. Economic Relations: (8) Economic Unity *(ittiḥād-i iqtiṣādī);* (9) Unity of People and Wealth *(ittiḥād-i nufūs va amvāl)* [i.e. beneficence/philanthropy]; VI. Race Relations: (10) Unity in Diversity; (11) Unity of Races *(vaḥdat-i jins);* VII. Environmental Relations: (12) Unity of Existence (Oneness of Being and Manifestation (Arabic: *waḥdat al-wujūd wa shuhūd*/Persian: *vaḥdat-i*

vujūd va shuhūd); (13) Unity of Species *(vaḥdat-i jins);* (14) Unity with the Environment; VIII. Interfaith Relations: (15) Unity of God *(tawḥīd-i ilāhī);* (16) Mystic Unity of God and His Manifestations; (17) Unity of the Manifestations of God *(maqām-i tawḥīd);* (18) Unity of Truth *(vaḥdat-i ḥaqīqat);* (19) Unity Among Religions *(ittiḥād dar dīn);* (20) Peace Among Religions *(sabab-i ulfat bayn-i adyān/ṣuḥul bayn-i adyān);* IX. Scientific Relations: (21) Unity of Science and Religion *(vaḥdat-i 'ilm va dīn);* (22) Methodological Coherence; (23) Unity of Thought *(vaḥdat-i ārā)* in World Undertakings; X. Linguistic Relations: (24) Unity of Language *(vaḥdat-i lisān);* XI. International Relations: (25) Unity of Conscience *(vaḥdat-i vujdān);* (26) Unity in Freedom *(vaḥdat-i āzādī);* (27) Evolving Social Unities; (28) Unity in the Political Realm *(vaḥdat-i siyāsat);* (29) Unity of Nations *(vaḥdat-i vaṭan);* (30) Unity of All Mankind/World Unity *(ittifāq-i kull va ittiḥād-i 'umūm/vaḥdat-i 'ālam-i insānī);* (31) Unity of the World Commonwealth; (32) Unity of the Free; XII. Bahāʾī Relations: (33) Unity of the Bahāʾī Revelation; (34) All-Unifying Power *(jaat-i jāmi'a);* (35) Unity of Doctrine; (36) Unity of Meaning; (37) Bahāʾī Unity *(vaḥdat-i Bahā'ī);* (38) Unity among Bahāʾī Women *(al-ittiḥād wa'l-ittifāq);* (39) Unity in Religion *(vaḥdat-i dīnī);* (40) Unity of Station *(ittiḥād-i maqām);* (41) Unity of Souls *(ittiḥād-i nufūs);* (42) Unity in Speech *(ittiḥād dar qawl);* (43) Unity in [Ritual] Acts *(ittiḥād-i ā'māl);* (44) Unity of Bahāʾī Administration; (45) Unity of Purpose; (46) Unity of Means; (47) Unity of Vision; (48) Unity of Action; (49) Unity of the Spiritual Assembly *(yigānigī);* (50) Unity of Houses of Justice and Governments (Buck, *God & Apple Pie*, p. 329; id., Fifty Bahāʾī principles of unity).

Applying a secular methodology to better understand the genesis of these doctrinal, ethical, social and administrative principles, the Bahāʾī religion may be viewed as a distinctive "response to modernity." From a faith-perspective, however, Bahāʾīs hold that the Bāb and Bahāʾullāh were each the recipients of divine revelation *(waḥy),* with new social teachings best suited for modernity and postmodernity.

Bahāʾism underwent transformations in ethos and organization throughout three missionary phases: the Islamic context (1844–92), the international missions (1892–1963) and global diffusion (1963–present). The Islamic context was co-extensive with the combined ministries of Bahāʾullāh and

his precursor, Sayyid ʿAlī-Muḥammad Shīrāzī (1819–50), known as the Bāb (Gate), the prophet-martyr of the Bābī movement.

The year 1260/1844 marked the Shīʿī millennium, a thousand lunar years since the occultation of the Twelfth Imām (see IMĀM; SHĪʿISM AND THE QURʾĀN). On 22 May 1844 the Bāb effected a decisive, eschatological break from Islam by means of composing, aloud before a guest, Mullā Husayn Bushrūʾī (1813–1849), that evening, the first sūra *(Sūrat al-Mulk)* of an exegetical work, entitled *Sustainer of the Names (of God) (Qayyūm al-asmāʾ),* often referred to as the *Commentary on the Sūra of Joseph,* an audacious and revolutionary commentary on the twelfth sūra of the Qurʾān (see JOSEPH). In this work he "proclaimed himself the focus of an Islamic apocalypse" (T. Lawson, Structure, 8).

The Bāb's earliest works exhibit a conscious effort to extend and amplify a qurʾānic voice, a crucial warrant of revelation. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* is its claim to be the "new Qurʾān" (22). To illustrate this audacious claim, two exemplars may be cited: "And verily, had these two Furqans not been from God, they (i.e. people) would, verily, have found in them more disparities" (QA 99, trans. Y. Ioannesyan, Prophetic mission of the Bāb, p. 14). And: "Verily, We have sent down this Book as the mystery of the Qurʾān. … And there is no one except for those who have renounced God, who would question even one of its letters as not being from God. And verily, God hath sent it (i.e. the Book) down by His pre-existent might to His Remembrance (i.e. the Bāb) anew, with a new Truth, in a new way" (QA 41, id., p. 19). N. Mohammadhosseini, confirming this same claim, explains that the Bāb, in QA 3, "mentions three times that the Qurʾān has been revealed to his heart" (*idem,* The Commentary on the Sūra of Joseph, p. 8). Similar claims are made in QA 7 and 26 (id.). N. Saiedi states generally: "The *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* is also frequently called the 'Qurʾān' or the 'Inner Qurʾān'" (*idem, Gate of the Heart,* p. 140). In the first chapter of the QA, the Bāb makes the stunning declaration that his religion is henceforth the "true Islam" to which all should turn: "Thus whoso seeketh Islam (submission to God), let him submit unto this Remembrance. … Whoso rejecteth this true Islam, God shall not accept, on the Day of Resurrection, any of his deeds" (trans. Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart,* p. 142).

The QA is written in the form of the divine reality speaking to the Bāb, which Cambridge Orientalist, Edward Granville Browne, presumed to be the "Universal Intelligence" *(ʿaql-i kull)* (The Bābis of Persia, p. 909, n. 2). Evidence from the QA, according to Y. Ioannesyan (Prophetic mission of the Bāb, *passim*), shows that the Bāb proclaimed his teaching as an independent divine revelation, while Bābism, from its inception, emerged as a post-Islamic, independent religious system. The divine origin of QA Book and its uniqueness are repeatedly emphasized. The Bāb is privileged in the QA as "the Word of God" (i.e. personifying the Bāb as the recipient and manifestation of divine revelation).

The Bāb clearly differentiates between Muslims ("the people of the Qurʾān") and the Bābis as "the people of this Book," referring to the QA). Such evidence, and more, prove that Bābism went well beyond any reformist movement in Islam and that the Bāb did not fall into the category of an Islamic modernist or reformer. No founder of a school would ever claim this station for himself as the Bāb did. The QA is so extraordinary as to be revolutionary within an Islamic context. This remarkable text instantly projected the Bāb beyond the orbit of Islam, notwithstanding the QA's consciously qurʾānic style and discourse.

One of the Bāb's most distinctive exegetical techniques is his "exploded commentary," which is an exegetical *tour de force.* In works on Q 108 and Q 103, the exegesis proceeds "not only verse by verse, or even word by word, but also letter by letter" (T. Lawson, Dangers, 179). For instance, the Bāb wrote a commentary on the sūra of *al-Kawthar* (Q 108), the shortest sūra in the Qurʾān, consisting of four lines of Arabic only. Based on the text of a very early manuscript which originated during the Bāb's life-time, the Bāb's *Commentary on the sūra of al-Kawthar* spans over two hundred pages in length, in which the Bāb interprets every letter of every single word comprising *al-Kawthar* in manifold aspects. This highly mystical and original work is full of imagery that serves as a grammar of symbols vindicating the mission of the bearer of a new religious revelation which the Bāb claimed for himself (Y. Ioannesyan, The Bāb's Commentary on the sūra of *al-Kawthar, passim*). O. Ghaemmaghami reinforces this thesis in a close reading of an episode, found midway through the *tafsīr*, in which the Bāb recounts his meeting with the Hidden Imam. After an in-depth analysis, Ghaemmaghami concludes: "In an exquisite performance of storytelling the Bāb is able to carefully present himself as the promised Imam" (*idem,* The Bāb's Encounter with the Hidden Imam, p. 185). The Bāb's commentaries on the Qurʾān are remarkable in that, by force of his

prophetic authority, "interpretation became revelation" (T. Lawson, Interpretation, 253). In 1848, he produced a new law code *(Bayān-i fārsī),* paradoxically super-Islamic in piety, yet supra-Islamic in principle. According to A. Eschraghi, the Bāb had three primary purposes in producing this new *sharīʿa:* (1) to prepare for the advent of "He whom God shall manifest"; (2) "to provoke the clerical establishment and shatter the foundations of their often-abused institutionalized authority" which "led to the ulama's hostility and the Bāb's subsequent martyrdom"; and (3) to prove the independence of the the Bābī religion from Islam (*idem,* Undermining the foundations of orthodoxy, 238).

After the Bāb's execution (1850) by the Persian authorities, Bahāʾullāh revitalized the Bābī community by employing symbolic interpretation as strategy to abolish episodic Bābī antinomianism. In the Arabic *Tablet of "all food"* (*Lawḥ-i kull al-ṭaʿām,* 1854 — note that the titles of Bahāʾi works written in Arabic are conventionally given in Persianized form), Bahāʾullāh related the abolishment of the Jewish dietary restrictions in Q 3:93 to the mystical and cosmological realms. While the Baghdad period (1853–63) was eschatologically charged with his own messianic secrecy *(ayyām-i buṭūn),* Bahāʾullāh, in his pre-eminent doctrinal work, the *Book of certitude* (*Kitāb-i īqān, hereafter Īqān*), advanced an extended qurʾānic and biblical argument to authenticate the Bāb's prophetic credentials. This remarkable text was "revealed" (as stated in the colophon) in the span of 48 hours. It was the late Bahāʾī scholar, Ahang Rabbani, who discovered that the *Īqān* was written in January 1861 (Rabbani, Conversion, pp. 34–35). Bahāʾullāh's repertoire of exegetical techniques includes most of the twelve "procedural devices" attested in the classical commentaries (Wansbrough, QS, part ii) as well as others.

Bahāʾullāh's style of discourse is itself exegetical, with frequent pairings, linked by the Persian metaphorical genitive *(iḍāfa-yi majāzī),* of qurʾānic symbols and referents. Hermeneutically, *Certitude* resonates with five Islamic orientations to symbolism: 1. the semanticism of rhetoric, especially the science of tropes *(ʿilm al-bayān);* 2. the dialectic of theology *(kalām);* 3. reason *(ʿaql)* and analogy *(qiyās)* as a reflex of philosophy *(falsafa)* and jurisprudence *(fiqh);* 4. the use of allusion *(ishāra)* and gnosis *(maʿrifa qalbīya)* in Ṣūfī/Ishrāqī mysticism (see ṢŪFISM AND THE QURʾĀN); 5. recourse to apocalyptic presentism, adducing prophetic proof-texts to instantiate a realized eschatology, a common characteristic of millenarian sectarianism.

In his *Commentary on the sūra "By the sun" (Tafsīr sūrat wa-l-shams),* while critical of rhetoric *(ʿilm al-balāgha)* and the cognate qurʾānic sciences, Bahāʾullāh echoes al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) and al-Taftazānī (d. 791/1389) in stressing the need to harmonize literal and figurative interpretations (C. Buck, *Symbol,* 91-2, 104). In his *Tablet on esoteric interpretation (Lawḥ-i taʾwīl),* citing Q 3:5, Bahāʾullāh states that eschatological verses are properly susceptible to esoteric interpretation *(taʾwīl)* whereas qurʾānic laws are to be understood by their obvious sense (*tafsīr,* see EXEGESIS OF THE QURʾĀN: CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL).

Islamic prophetology is anchored in the received interpretation of Q 33:40, which is widely believed to establish Muḥammad as the final prophet (see PROPHETS AND PROPHETHOOD). In what is perhaps his most significant exegetical maneuver, Bahāʾullāh relativizes that claim in order to supersede it, refocusing the reader's attention a mere four verses later (Q 33:44) on the eschatological attainment to the presence of God *(liqāʾ Allāh)* on the last day (see ESCHATOLOGY):

> Even as the Lord of being hath in His unerring Book (Qurʾān), after *(baʿd az)* speaking of the "Seal" in His exalted utterance: "Muḥammad is the Apostle of God and the Seal of the Prophets" (Q 33:40), hath revealed unto all people the promise *(vaʾda)* of "attainment unto the divine Presence *(liqāʾyi khudā)*." To this attainment to the presence of the immortal King testify the verses of the Book, some of which We have already mentioned (*vide* par. 148: Q 29:23, 2:46, 2:249, 18:111, 13:2). The one true God is My witness! Nothing more exalted or more explicit than "attainment unto the divine Presence" hath been revealed in the Qurʾān. *(va khudā-yi vāḥid shāhid-i maqāl ast kih hīch amrī aʿẓam az liqāʾ va asraḥ-i az an dar furqān zikh nayāftih.)* Well is it with him that hath attained thereunto, in the day wherein most of the people, even as ye witness, have turned away therefrom.
>
> And yet, through the mystery of the former *(avval)* verse, they have turned away from the grace promised by the latter *(thānī),* despite the fact that "attainment unto the divine Presence" in the "Day of Resurrection" *(liqāʾ dar yawm-i qiyām)* is explicitly stated in the Book (Qurʾān). (Bahāʾullāh, *Certitude*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, Pars. 181–182; parenthetical references added; id. *Īqān,* Pars. 181–182).

In this pivotal passage, although Bahāʾullāh relates back to "verses of the Book, some of which We have already mentioned," a quick search of the *Īqān* shows that, in par. 148, Bahāʾullāh cites Q 29:23, 2:46, 2:249, 18:111, 13:2. Yet in this passage, Bahāʾullāh also alludes to a Qurʾānic announcement of the "attainment unto the divine Presence" in the "Day of Resurrection" *(liqāʾ dar yawm-i qiyām)* that comes "after" *(baʿd az)* the "Seal" verse.

Shoghi Effendi, in his dual role as authorized translator and interpreter of Bahāʾī scriptures, provides a word-for-word, literal translation in rendering the Persian so: "And yet, through the mystery of the former." Then Shoghi Effendi inserts one word for amplification: "verse" (not in the original Persian). This subtle, yet highly significant, gloss disambiguates the text, narrowing the reading from an *episodic* sequence of prophetic/ eschatological events ("Seal of the Prophets" followed by "Divine Presence") to a textual, qurʾānic sequence, i.e. of a pair verses descriptive of this same sequence. This makes perfect sense since the preposition "after" *(baʿd az)* can also mean "next."

An attractive hypothesis (with strong evidence shy of conclusive proof) is that Bahāʾullāh intended this pair of verses, Q 33:40 and Q 33:44, to be read together. Indeed, the very next verse after the "Seal" verse that refers to the eschatological encounter with God is Q 33:44, which reads: "Their greeting the Day they meet Him will be, "Peace." And He has prepared for them a noble reward" (Saha International). A Shīʿī rendering is: "On the day when they will be brought into the presence of their Lord, their greeting to each other will be, 'Peace be with you.' God has prepared an honorable reward them" (Muḥammad Sarwar).

Here, cognates of *liqāʾ* and *yawm* are found in Q 33:44. The Arabic word for "they will meet Him" is *yalqawnahu* (3rd person masculine plural imperfect verb, related to *liqāʾ*) and "Day" is *yawma* (accusative masculine noun). These terms correspond — conceptually as well as linguistically — to Bahāʾullāh's reference to "'attainment unto the divine Presence' in the "Day of Resurrection'" *(liqāʾ dar yawm-i qiyām)*.

In 1974, the late Bahāʾī scholar and martyr, Kamāl al-Dīn Bakhtāvar (executed in Kashmar in Khurasan, Iran on 26 July 1981), in his *Risāla-yi Istimrār-i Ẓuhūrāt-i Ilāhiyya* (Tehran 1974), pp. 101–102, drew the very same connection between Q 33:40 and 33:44 that, in 1995, Buck

independently made in *Symbol and Secret* (pp. 194–98) (Bakhtāvar, *Risāla*, 101 (quoting Q 33:44a)–101 (quoting Bahāʾullāh, *Kitāb-i īqān*, par. 181/p. 112).

The juxtaposition — indeed, the pairing — not only of two concepts, but two pivotal verses — Q 33:40 and Q 33:44 — has dramatic effect. Among Muslims worldwide, the importance of Q 33:40 is universally acknowledged. In the *Īqān*, Bahāʾullāh places Q 33:44 on a par with Q 33:40. Indeed, as paramount in prophetic history as the advent of Muḥammad as the "Seal of the Prophets" surely is, of even greater moment is the eschatological encounter with God, according to Bahāʾullāh's interpretation/argument.

It now remains to be seen how Bahāʾullāh interprets Q 33:44 and parallels (adduced in par. 48 as Q 29:23, 2:46, 2:249, 18:111, 13:2.). Arguing that direct beatific vision of God is impossible, Bahāʾullāh reasons that Q 33:44 anticipates a future theophany who, as *deus revelatus* and divine vicegerent, is symbolically God by proxy. Similarly, Bahāʾullāh, in an earlier Baghdad work, *Gems of divine mysteries (Jawāhir al-asrār)*, explains:

> Know then that the paradise *(hadhihi al-janna*, lit. "this Garden"*)* that appeareth in the day of God *(yawm Allāh)* surpasseth every other paradise and excelleth the realities of Heaven *(ḥaqāʾiq al-riḍwān)*. For when *(baʿd alladhī,* lit. "after") God—blessed and glorified is He—sealed the station of prophethood *(maqām al-nubuwwa)* in the person of Him Who was His Friend *(ḥabībihi),* His Chosen One *(ṣafiyyihi),* and His Treasure *(khiyaratihi)* amongst His creatures, as hath been revealed from the Kingdom of glory: "but He is the Apostle of God and the Seal of the Prophets" (q 33:40), He promised all men that they shall attain unto His own presence in the Day of Resurrection *(waʿada al-ʿibād bi-liqāʾihi yawm al-qiyāma)*. In this He meant to emphasize the greatness of the Revelation to come, as it hath indeed been manifested through the power of truth.(Bahāʾullāh, *Gems of Divine Mysteries*, par. 58; id., *Jawāhir al-Asrār*, par. 58.

Here, a greater "Revelation" is posited. Revelation is a concept familiar to all Muslims. Simply put, Bahāʾullāh, at some length in the *Īqān*, argues that the Qurʾān presages the advent of the Bāb as the "Promised One." Of even greater moment is what Bahāʾullāh implies. The entire thesis of

Buck's monograph, *Symbol and Secret* (1995/2004), is that the primary eschatological symbol in the *Īqān* is the Bāb, while, at the same time, a messianic "secret" pervades the *Īqān* as a subtext, charging the work with heightened eschatological tension, auguring Bahāʾullāh's imminent declaration of his mission, to the discerning, whether before or after Bahāʾullāh's prophetic mission commenced. By force of explicative logic, *Certitude* — arguably the world's most-widely-read non-Muslim qurʾānic commentary — served as an advance prophetic warrant for Bahāʾullāh's proclaimed mission to unify the world.

Bahāʾullāh's other Qurʾān commentaries include, *inter alia*, *Commentary on the mysterious* (lit. "disconnected") *letters* (*Tafsīr-i ḥurūfāt-i muqaṭṭaʿa;* see LETTERS AND MYSTERIOUS LETTERS), which incorporates a discourse on the Light Verse (Q 24:35); *Commentary on "He is" (Tafsīr-i Hū[wa])*. As A. Eschraghi notes, Bahāʾullāh "initially engaged in esoteric and allegorical qurʾānic exegesis" but, from the 1860s onwards, "the prominence of 'Islamic' topics clearly diminished in Bahāʾullāh's writings as he works towards founding a new religion and introduces distinct doctrines" (*idem,* Promised One, 112). Moreover, Bahāʾullāh, while affirming the legitimacy of the Imamate in principle, criticizes the popular Shīʿī belief in existence of a Twelfth Imam. Eschraghi notes that "it became patently clear that Bahāʾ Allāh did not believe in the Twelfth Imam's continued presence" (referring to the Greater Occultation), yet "stopped short of explicitly denying his very existence" (*idem,* Promised One, 123). In roundly critiquing Twelver Shīʿī Mahdī doctrines as impossible of literal fulfillment, Bahāʾullāh radically reinterpreted the Shīʿī eschaton such that the "Bahāʾī Faith" is more aptly characterized as a "de-messianized" religion, rather than a "messianic movement" (id., p. 134). (For a similar analysis, see C. Buck, Bahāʾullāh as Zoroastrian Saviour.)

Succeeding his father Bahāʾullāh on the latter's passing in 1892, ʿAbdu l-Bahāʾ authored works of *tafsīr* as well, which provide both exoteric and esoteric commentaries. A good example is ʿAbdu l-Bahāʾ's *tafsīr* on the opening verses of sūra 30. Alive to the priority of spiritual over material realities, ʿAbdu l-Bahāʾ quickly addresses the exoteric meaning by acknowledging the standard commentary that these verses refer to the overthrow of the Byzantines in 614 CE by the Persian king Chosroes. Then ʿAbdu l-Bahāʾ gives nine esoteric, or mystical, interpretations in which he sets forth the stages of the soul in the Arc of Ascent (M. Momen, ʿAbdu l-

Bahāʾ's commentary on the qurʾānic verses concerning the overthrow of the Byzantines, *passim*). See also N. Alkan, "By the Fig and the Olive." ʿAbdu l-Bahāʾ's commentary in Ottoman Turkish on the qurʾānic sūra 95.

Since the works of the Bāb, Bahāʾullāh and ʿAbdu l-Bahāʾ constitute the corpus of Bahāʾī scriptures, the Qurʾān itself, while respected and revered by Bahāʾīs worldwide (numbering some seven million, with Bahāʾī communities established in every country in the world except for North Korea and the Vatican City), does not occupy a central place in Bahāʾī doctrine and praxis. However, because of their positive disposition toward the Qurʾān and Muḥammad alike, Bahāʾīs have long promoted a positive appreciation for the Book and Prophet *par excellence.* In this regard, Bahāʾīs are natural allies of Muslims. A sad irony is that this view of common cause based on common ground is not always reciprocated. The Bahāʾī-Muslim encounter in Iran — the country where the Bābī and Bahāʾī religions originated — continues to be fraught with difficulty (due to ongoing persecution of the Bahāʾīs as the largest non-Muslim religious minority in Iran), which topic is outside the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that Bahāʾīs appreciate, and will continue to value, their historical and doctrinal Islamic heritage.

Christopher Buck

Acknowledgments:

The present writer gratefully acknowledges the following readers for their edits and recommendations: Moojan Momen, Ph.D. (independent scholar); Youli Ioannesyan, Ph.D. (faculty, Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, Russia); Omid Ghaemmaghami, Ph.D. (Assistant Professor of Arabic, Department of Classical and Near Eastern Studies, Binghamton University, State University of New York); Necati Alkan, Ph.D. (scholarship holder and lecturer in the Department of Islamic Studies at Bamberg University, Germany); Daniel Gebhardt, M.A. (Temporary Faculty in the Department of Philosophy, University of Nevada, Reno).

Bibliography

Primary:

Bāb, the (ʿAlī Muḥammad), *Tafsīr sūrat al-ʿaṣr,* Cambridge, Browne Or. Ms. F. 9 (6).

id., *Tafsīr sūrat al-kawthar,* Cambridge, Browne Or. Ms. F. 10 (19).

Note: The following inventory of the Bāb's works of qurʾānic *tafsīr* is adapted (excluding the Bāb's commentaries on various *aḥadīth*) from N. Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart. Understanding the Writings of the Bāb,* Waterloo, ON, Canada 2008, pp. 408–9:

id., *Tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf (Qayyūm al-asmāʾ),* Iran National Archives (INBA) Vol. 3.

id., *Tafsīr-i āya-yi nūr* I (Commentary on the Verse of Light I). INBA 14:495–98.

id., *Tafsīr-i āya-yi nūr* II (Commentary on the Verse of Light II). Collection of the Writings of the Bāb ("Collection"), unpublished. Manuscript copy dated 27 Muḥarram 1331 AH, 10–26.

id., *Tafsīr-i bismillāh* (Commentary on bismillāh). INBA 64:33–34; 60:1–56.

id., *Tafsīr-i hāʾ* (Commentary on the letter *hā'*). INBA 53:81–125.

id., *Tafsīr-i kullu l-ṭaʿām* (Commentary on "all food"). Collection, 211–33.

id., *Tafsīr-i sirr-i hāʾ* (Commentary on the mystery of *hā'*). INBA 86:154–92.

id., *Tafsīr-i sūra-yi baqara* I (Commentary on the Sūra of the Cow I). INBA (INBA): 69:156–377.

id., *Tafsīr-i sūra-yi baqara* II (Commentary on the Sūra of the Cow II). INBA 69:377–410.

id., *Tafsīr-i sūra-yi ḥamd* (Commentary on the Sūra of Praise). INBA 14:32–37.

id., *Tafsīr-i sūra-yi kawthar* (Commentary on the Sūra of Abundance). INBA 53:91–193.

id., *Tafsīr-i sūra-yi tawḥīd* (Commentary on the Sūra of Unity). INBA 14:209–21.

id., *Tafsīr-i sūra-yi vaʾl-ʿaṣr* (Commentary on the Sūra of the Afternoon). INBA 14:105–208.

id., *Tafsīr-i vāv* (Interpretation of the letter *vāv*). Collection, 249–65.

Bahāʾullāh (Mīrzā Nūrī), *Alvāḥ-i mubāraka-yi ḥaḍrat-i Bahāʾ Allāh,* ed. Mishkīn-Qalam, Bombay 1310.

id., *Kitāb-i īqān*, Persian edition, Hofheim-Langenhain, Germany 1998. In Persian. Trans. S. Effendi, *The book of certitude,* Wilmette 1931.

id., *Lawḥ-i kull al-ṭaʿām,* in *Iran national Bahāʾī archives,* xxxvi (private printing), 268–77.

id., *Tafsīr-i ḥurūfāt-i muqaṭṭaʿa* (also known as *Lawḥ-i āya-yi nūr*), in ʿA.H. Ishraq-Khavari (ed.), *Māʾida-yi āsamānī,* Tehran 1973, iv, 49–86 (unreliable).

id., *Tafsīr sūrat wa-l-shams* [in Arabic], in M.D. Ṣabrī (ed.), *Majmūʿa-yi alvāḥ-i mubāraka-yi ḥaḍrat-i Bahāʾullāh,* Cairo 1920, 2–17.

Secondary:

N. Alkan, *Dissent and heterodoxy in the late Ottoman empire. Reformers, Bābīs and Bahāʾīs,* Istanbul 2008.

id., "By the Fig and the Olive." ʿAbdu l-Bahāʾ's commentary in Ottoman Turkish on the qurʾānic sūra 95, in *Bahāʾī studies review* 10 (2001), 115–26.

A. Amanat, *Resurrection and renewal. The making of the Bābī movement in Iran,* 1844–1850, Ithaca 1989.

Bakhtāvar, K., *Risāla-yi Istimrār-i Ẓuhūrāt-i Ilāhiyya*, Tehran 1974. Available at http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/vol14/bakhtavar/Bakhtavar_Risalih_Istimrar.pdf. Accessed 26 November 2015.

E. Browne, The Bābīs of Persia. II. Their Literature and Doctrines, in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, New Series 21.4 (Oct. 1889), pp. 881–1009.

C. Buck, Beyond the "seal of the prophets." Bahā'u'llāh's *Book of Certitude (Ketāb-e Iqān)*." C. Pedersen & F. Vahman (eds.), *Religious texts in Iranian languages*, Copenhagen 2007.

id., *Paradise and paradigm. Key symbols in Persian Christianity and the Bahāʾī Faith,* Albany 1999.

id., A brief description of the *Kitāb-i Īqān,* in *Occasional papers in Shaykhī, Bābī and Bahāʾī studies* 2 (1998).

id., *Symbol and secret. Qurʾān commentary in Bahāʾullāh's Kitāb-i Īqān,* Los Angeles 1995/2004.

id., A unique eschatological interface. Bahāʾullāh and cross-cultural messianism, in *Studies in Bābī and Bahāʾī history* 3 (1986), 156–79.

id., Bahāʾullāh as Zoroastrian Saviour, in *Bahāʾī studies review* 8 (1998), 14–33.

id., Bahāʾullāh as "World Reformer," in *Journal of Bahāʾī Studies* 3.4 (1991), 23–70; 5.1 (1992), 69–72 (correction).

id., *God & Apple Pie: Religious Myths and Visions of America*, Kingston, NY 2015.

id., Fifty Bahāʾī principles of unity. A paradigm of social salvation. *Bahāʾī studies review* 18 (2012), 3–44.

J. Cole, *Bahāʾullāh's commentary on the Sūra of the Sun,* in *Bahāʾī studies bulletin* 4 (1990), 4–27.

id., A tablet by Bahāʾullāh on the figurative interpretation of scripture *(Lawḥ-i Taʾvīl),* in *Translations of Shaykhī, Bābī and Bahāʾī texts* 1 (1997).

S. Effendi, *World Order of Bahā'u'llāh*, Wilmette 1991.

A. Eschraghi, Undermining the foundations of orthodoxy. Some notes on the Bāb's sharia (sacred law), in T. Lawson and O. Ghaemmaghami (eds.), *A Most Noble Pattern. Collected Essays on the Writings of the Bāb, ʿAlī Muḥammad Shirāzī (1819–1850),* Oxford 2012, 223–47.

id., Promised One *(mawʿūd)* or Imaginary One *(mawhūm)*? Some Notes on Twelver Shīʿī Mahdī doctrine and its discussion in writings of Bahāʾ Allāh, in O. Mir-Kasimov (ed.), *Unity in Diversity. Mysticism, Messianism and the Construction of Religious Authority in Islam,* and Boston 2014, pp. 111–34.

id., *Studien zum schrifttum des Bāb* [Studies in the Bāb's writings]: 1. Teil: Die Koran-auslegungen des Bāb" [Part 1: The Qurʾān Commentaries of the Bāb] and "2. Teil: Der Anspruch des Bāb in seinen frühen schriften" [Part 2: The Bāb's claim as set forth in his early writings], in *Beiträge des ʿIrfān-kolloquiums* 2004, ʿIrfān-studien zum Bahāʾī-schrifttum, Band 2*,* Hofheim, Germany 2005, pp. 7–46 and 47–81 (in German).

O. Ghaemmaghami, A Youth of Medium Height: The Bāb's Encounter with the Hidden Imam in Tafsīr Sūrat al-Kawthar, in T. Lawson and O. Ghaemmaghami (eds.), *A Most Noble Pattern. Collected Essays on the Writings of the Bāb, ʿAlī Muḥammad Shirāzī (1819–1850),* Oxford 2012, 175–95.

Y. Ioannesyan, The prophetic mission of the Bāb as presented in the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ*, in *Pismenniye pamyatniki vostoka*. *Written monuments of the orient* 2.15 (2011), 184–213 (in Russian).

id., The concept of the "manifestations of God's will" in Bābism and the Bahāʾī religion, in *Pismenniye pamyatniki vostoka* 1.16 (2012), 151–73 (in Russian).

id., The Bāb's Commentary on the sūra of *al-Kawthar*, in *Pismenniye pamyatniki vostoka* 1.20 (2014), 126–42 (in Russian).

id., trans., Bahāʾullāh, *Kitāb-i īqān (The Book of Certitude). An academic translation from the original Persian into Russian, with introduction, commentary and a textological supplement*, St. Petersburg 2001 (in Russian).

S. Lambden, A tablet of Mīrzā Ḥusayn ʿAlī Bahāʾullāh, in *Bahāʾī studies bulletin* 3 (1984), 4–67.

T. Lawson, *Gnostic apocalypse and Islam: Qurʾān, exegesis, messianism, and the literary origins of the Bābi religion,* London and New York 2011.

id., Interpretation as revelation. The Qurʾān commentary of Sayyid ʿAlī Muḥammad Shīrāzī, in Rippin, *Approaches,* 223–53.

id., The terms "remembrance" *(dhikr)* and "gate" *(bāb)* in the Bāb's commentary on the sūra of Joseph, in *Studies in Bābī and Bahāʾī religions* 5 (1988), 1–63.

id., The structure of existence in the Bāb's *tafsīr* and the Perfect Man motif, in *Bahāʾī studies bulletin* 6 (1992), 4–25.

id., The dangers of reading. Inlibration, communion and transference in the Qurʾān commentary of the Bāb, in M. Momen (ed.), *Scripture and revelation,* Oxford 1997.

id., Reading reading itself. The Bāb's "Sūra of the bees," in *Occasional papers in Shaykhī, Bābī and Bahāʾī studies* 1 (1997).

D. MacEoin, *The sources for early Bābī doctrine and history,* Leiden 1992.

M. Momen, ʿAbdu l-Bahāʾ's commentary on the qurʾānic verses concerning the overthrow of the Byzantines. The stages of the soul, *Bahāʾī Studies Review* 12 (2004), 67–90.

N. Mohammadhosseini, The Commentary on the Sūra of Joseph, in T. Lawson and O. Ghaemmaghami (eds.), *A Most Noble Pattern. Collected Essays on the Writings of the Bāb, ʿAlī Muḥammad Shīrāzī (1819–1850),* Oxford 2012, 6–27.

A. Rabbani, The conversion of the great-uncle of the Bāb, in *World Order*, 30.3 (1999), 19–38.

N. Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart. Understanding the Writings of the Bāb,* Waterloo, ON, Canada 2008.

P. Smith, *The Bābi and Bahaʾi religions,* Cambridge 1987.

H. Taherzadeh, *Selections from the writings of the Bāb,* Haifa 1978.

Wansbrough, *QS*.