

Essays on Jesus and The New Testament

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Peter Terry

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INTRODUCTION

Jesus of Nazareth has been studied and written about from virtually every perspective imaginable...He¹ has been depicted as a Jewish prophet, hassid, rabbi, heretic, and zealot; as a magician, healer, mystic, philosopher; as a failed leader and as a successful savior; as a Muslim; as a Hindu avatara; as a son of God; and as God Himself. Oh yes, and, to give the scifi enthusiasts their due, as a visitor from another planet or another world. While some readers are satisfied with one or several of these depictions and wish to read no further, they won't be picking up this book and reading these essays. And if they do so, they should be prepared to see Jesus from a new perspective, that articulated in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Who is accounted by Bahá'ís to be the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, and in the Writings and recorded utterances of His eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the writings of His great-grandson Shoghi Effendi, whom Bahá'ís recognize as authoritative interpreters of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings.

The compiler of this study has spent many years in a comparative study of the teachings of Jesus and Bahá'u'lláh, as found in canonical and non-canonical sources. Most literature comparing the two is written by fervent adherents either of Christianity or the Bahá'í Faith, who seek to reaffirm the beliefs of their co-religionists, and persuade those from the "other side" to convert to their way of thinking. This study will make no such attempt.

The reader should not feel the least bit obliged to agree with anything written here or to regard it as opposed to an interpretation s/he has already found to be illuminating and congenial. Surely we can all affirm that the Word of God is abstruse and hence susceptible to multiple interpretations...and that we human beings often change our minds, change our perceptions,

¹All pronouns referring to God, and referring to Jesus and John the Baptist, and to Muhammad, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have been capitalized, out of respect for the feelings of readers who revere these religious figures and might possibly be offended if this convention had not been adopted. On the other hand, all you readers who are not offended by lower case letters, please respect the feelings of the readers who are, by not insisting that I decapitalize pronouns for future editions of this study. All pronouns that were capitalized in cited texts have been preserved, and the same is true of pronouns that were not capitalized in cited texts.

and sometimes even acknowledge to ourselves and to others that our prior understanding has been erroneous.

In one of His treatises, Bahá'u'lláh succinctly articulated a principle which I have found to be of great value and freely share with the reader²: “O My Brother, journey upon these planes in the spirit of search, not in blind imitation. A true wayfarer will not be kept back by the bludgeon of words nor debarred by the warning of allusions.” Another affirmation of this principle is in more modern and less poetic language³: “The more we read the writings the more truths we can find in them and the more we will see that our previous notions were erroneous.” This principle should keep us humble, open to discovery, open to change. And so I say, “bon voyage!”

²Bahá'u'lláh, The Seven Valleys, p. 24

³*From a letter dated 25 April 1926 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, #93, The Importance of Deepening our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith, A compilation of extracts from the Bahá'í Writings, prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, Bahá'í World Centre, published Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983; also in the Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I.*

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SCRIPTURE IN THE LIGHT OF PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

A cardinal theological principle of Bahá'u'lláh is that of progressive revelation, here articulated by Shoghi Effendi:

This same prophecy, we must furthermore recognize, attests the independent character of the Bábí Dispensation and corroborates indirectly the truth that **in accordance with the principle of progressive revelation every Manifestation of God must needs vouchsafe to the peoples of His day a measure of divine guidance ampler than any which a preceding and less receptive age could have received or appreciated.** For this reason, and not for any superior merit which the Bahá'í Faith may be said to inherently possess, does this prophecy bear witness to the unrivaled power and glory with which the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh has been invested -- a Dispensation the potentialities of which we are but beginning to perceive and the full range of which we can never determine.

The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh should indeed be regarded, if we wish to be faithful to the tremendous implications of its message, as the culmination of a cycle, the final stage in **a series of successive, of preliminary and progressive revelations.** These, beginning with Adam and ending with the Báb, have paved the way and anticipated with an ever-increasing emphasis the advent of that Day of Days in which He Who is the Promise of All Ages should be made manifest. (Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'llah*, pp. 102-103)

It should also be borne in mind that, great as is the power manifested by this Revelation and however vast the range of the Dispensation its Author has inaugurated, it emphatically repudiates the claim to be regarded as the final revelation of God's will and purpose for mankind. To hold such a conception of its character and functions would be tantamount to a betrayal of its cause and a denial of its truth. It must necessarily conflict with the fundamental principle which constitutes the bedrock of Bahá'í belief, the principle that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that **Divine Revelation is orderly, continuous and progressive** and not spasmodic or final. Indeed, the categorical rejection by the followers of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh of the claim to finality which any religious system inaugurated by the Prophets of the past may advance is as clear and emphatic as their own refusal to claim that same finality for the Revelation with which they stand identified. "To believe that all revelation is ended, that the portals of Divine mercy are closed, that from the daysprings of eternal holiness no sun shall rise again, that the ocean of everlasting bounty is forever stilled, and that out of the tabernacle of ancient glory the Messengers of God have ceased to be made manifest" must constitute in the eyes of every follower of the Faith a grave, an inexcusable departure from one of its most

cherished and fundamental principles. (Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'llah*, pp. 115-116)

...Muhammadanism is not only the last of the world religions, but a fuller Revelation than any one preceding it. The Qur'án is not only more authoritative than any previous religious gospel, but it contains also much more; ordinances, teachings and precepts, which taken together constitute a fuller Revelation of God's purpose and law to mankind than Christianity, Judaism or any other previous Dispensation. **This view is in complete accord with the Bahá'í philosophy of progressive revelation, and should be thoroughly accepted and taught by every loyal ... Bahá'í.** (Shoghi Effendi, *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community*, p. 432)

Just as the organic evolution of mankind has been slow and gradual, and involved successively the unification of the family, the tribe, the city-state, and the nation, so has **the light vouchsafed by the Revelation of God, at various stages in the evolution of religion, and reflected in the successive Dispensations of the past, been slow and progressive. Indeed the measure of Divine Revelation, in every age, has been adapted to, and commensurate with, the degree of social progress achieved in that age by a constantly evolving humanity.**

"It hath been decreed by Us," explains Bahá'u'lláh, "that the Word of God, and all the potentialities thereof, shall be manifested unto men in strict conformity with such conditions as have been foreordained by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.... Should the Word be allowed to release suddenly all the energies latent within it, no man could sustain the weight of so mighty a Revelation." "All created things," 'Abdu'l-Bahá, elucidating this truth, has affirmed, "have their degree or stage of maturity. The period of maturity in the life of a tree is the time of its fruit-bearing....The animal attains a stage of full growth and completeness, and in the human kingdom man reaches his maturity when the light of his intelligence attains its greatest power and development...Similarly there are periods and stages in the collective life of humanity. At one time it was passing through its stage of childhood, at another its period of youth, but now it has entered its long-predicted phase of maturity, the evidences of which are everywhere apparent....That which was applicable to human needs during the early history of the race can neither meet nor satisfy the demands of this day, this period of newness and consummation. Humanity has emerged from its former state of limitation and preliminary training. Man must now become imbued with new virtues and powers, new moral standards, new capacities. New bounties, perfect bestowals, are awaiting and already descending upon him. The gifts and blessings of the period of youth, although timely and sufficient during the adolescence of mankind, are now incapable of meeting the requirements of its maturity." "In every

Dispensation," He moreover has written, "the light of Divine Guidance has been focused upon one central theme...In this wondrous Revelation, this glorious century, the foundation of the Faith of God, and the distinguishing feature of His Law, is the consciousness of the oneness of mankind." (Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, pp. 118-119)

To attempt an exhaustive survey of the prophetic references to Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation would indeed be an impossible task. To this the pen of Bahá'u'lláh Himself bears witness: "All the Divine Books and Scriptures have predicted and announced unto men the advent of the Most Great Revelation. None can adequately recount the verses recorded in the Books of former ages which forecast this supreme Bounty, this most mighty Bestowal."

In conclusion of this theme, I feel, it should be stated that the Revelation identified with Bahá'u'lláh abrogates unconditionally all the Dispensations gone before it, upholds uncompromisingly the eternal verities they enshrine, recognizes firmly and absolutely the Divine origin of their Authors, preserves inviolate the sanctity of their authentic Scriptures, disclaims any intention of lowering the status of their Founders or of abating the spiritual ideals they inculcate, clarifies and correlates their functions, reaffirms their common, their unchangeable and fundamental purpose, reconciles their seemingly divergent claims and doctrines, readily and gratefully **recognizes their respective contributions to the gradual unfoldment of one Divine Revelation, unhesitatingly acknowledges itself to be but one link in the chain of continually progressive Revelations**, supplements their teachings with such laws and ordinances as conform to the imperative needs, and are dictated by the growing receptivity, of a fast evolving and constantly changing society, and proclaims its readiness and ability to fuse and incorporate the contending sects and factions into which they have fallen into a universal Fellowship, functioning within the framework, and in accordance with the precepts, of a divinely conceived, a world-unifying, a world-redeeming Order. (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 99)

It should be borne in mind that the central Edifice of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, round which in the fulness of time shall cluster such institutions of social service as shall afford relief to the suffering, sustenance to the poor, shelter to the wayfarer, solace to the bereaved, and education to the ignorant, should be regarded apart from these Dependencies, as a House solely designed and entirely dedicated to the worship of God in accordance with the few yet definitely prescribed principles established by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. It should not be inferred, however, from this general statement that the interior of the central Edifice itself will be converted into a conglomeration of religious services conducted along lines associated with the traditional procedure obtaining in churches, mosques, synagogues, and other temples of worship. Its various avenues of approach, all converging towards the central Hall beneath its dome, will not serve as admittance to those sectarian adherents of rigid formulae and man-made creeds, each bent,

according to his way, to observe his rites, recite his prayers, perform his ablutions, and display the particular symbols of his faith, within separately defined sections of Bahá'u'lláh's Universal House of Worship. Far from the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar offering such a spectacle of incoherent and confused sectarian observances and rites, a condition wholly incompatible with the provisions of the Aqdas and irreconcilable with the spirit it inculcates, the central House of Bahá'í worship, enshrined within the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, will gather within its chastened walls, in a serenely spiritual atmosphere, only those who, discarding forever the trappings of elaborate and ostentatious ceremony, are willing worshipers of the one true God, as manifested in this age in the Person of Bahá'u'lláh. **To them will the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar symbolize the fundamental verity underlying the Bahá'í Faith, that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is not final but progressive.** Theirs will be the conviction that an all-loving and ever-watchful Father Who, in the past, and at various stages in the evolution of mankind, has sent forth His Prophets as the Bearers of His Message and the Manifestations of His Light to mankind, cannot at this critical period of their civilization withhold from His children the Guidance which they sorely need amid the darkness which has beset them, and which neither the light of science nor that of human intellect and wisdom can succeed in dissipating. And thus having recognized in Bahá'u'lláh the source whence this celestial light proceeds, they will irresistibly feel attracted to seek the shelter of His House, and congregate therein, unhampered by ceremonials and unfettered by creed, to render homage to the one true God, the Essence and Orb of eternal Truth, and to exalt and magnify the name of His Messengers and Prophets Who, from time immemorial even unto our day, have, under divers circumstances and in varying measure, mirrored forth to a dark and wayward world the light of heavenly Guidance. (Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, pp. 184-185)

Let no one, however, mistake my purpose. The Revelation, of which Bahá'u'lláh is the source and center, abrogates none of the religions that have preceded it, nor does it attempt, in the slightest degree, to distort their features or to belittle their value. It disclaims any intention of dwarfing any of the Prophets of the past, or of whittling down the eternal verity of their teachings. It can, in no wise, conflict with the spirit that animates their claims, nor does it seek to undermine the basis of any man's allegiance to their cause. Its declared, its primary purpose is to enable every adherent of these Faiths to obtain a fuller understanding of the religion with which he stands identified, and to acquire a clearer apprehension of its purpose. It is neither eclectic in the presentation of its truths, nor arrogant in the affirmation of its claims. **Its teachings revolve around the fundamental principle that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is progressive, not final.** 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.

"All the Prophets of God," asserts Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Íqán, "abide in the same tabernacle, soar in the same heaven, are seated upon the same throne, utter the same speech, and proclaim the same Faith." From the "beginning that hath no beginning," these Exponents of the Unity of God and Channels of His incessant utterance have shed the light of the invisible Beauty upon mankind, and will continue, to the "end that hath no end," to vouchsafe fresh revelations of His might and additional experiences of His inconceivable glory. To contend that any particular religion is final, that "all Revelation is ended, that the portals of Divine mercy are closed, that from the daysprings of eternal holiness no sun shall rise again, that the ocean of everlasting bounty is forever stilled, and that out of the Tabernacle of ancient glory the Messengers of God have ceased to be made manifest" would indeed be nothing less than sheer blasphemy.

"They differ," explains Bahá'u'lláh in that same epistle, "only in the intensity of their revelation and the comparative potency of their light." And this, not by reason of any inherent incapacity of any one of them to reveal in a fuller measure the glory of the Message with which He has been entrusted, but rather because of the immaturity and unpreparedness of the age He lived in to apprehend and absorb the full potentialities latent in that Faith.

"Know of a certainty," explains Bahá'u'lláh, "that in every Dispensation the light of Divine Revelation has been vouchsafed to men in direct proportion to their spiritual capacity. Consider the sun. How feeble its rays the moment it appears above the horizon. How gradually its warmth and potency increase as it approaches its zenith, enabling meanwhile all created things to adapt themselves to the growing intensity of its light. How steadily it declines until it reaches its setting point. Were it, all of a sudden, to manifest the energies latent within it, it would, no doubt, cause injury to all created things.... In like manner, if the Sun of Truth were suddenly to reveal, at the earliest stages of its manifestation, the full measure of the potencies which the providence of the Almighty has bestowed upon it, the earth of human understanding would waste away and be consumed; for men's hearts would neither sustain the intensity of its revelation, nor be able to mirror forth the radiance of its light. Dismayed and overpowered, they would cease to exist."

It is for this reason, and this reason only, that those who have recognized the Light of God in this age, claim no finality for the Revelation with which they stand identified, nor arrogate to the Faith they have embraced powers and attributes intrinsically superior to, or essentially different from, those which have characterized any of the religious systems that preceded it.

Does not Bahá'u'lláh Himself allude to the progressiveness of Divine Revelation and to the limitations which an inscrutable Wisdom has chosen to impose upon Him? What else can this passage of the Hidden Words imply, if not that He Who revealed it disclaimed finality for the Revelation entrusted to Him by the Almighty? "O Son of Justice! In the night-season the beauty of the immortal Being hath repaired from the emerald height of fidelity unto the Sadratu'l-Muntaha, and wept with such a weeping that the concourse on high and the dwellers of the realms above wailed at His lamenting. Whereupon there was asked, Why the wailing and weeping? He made reply: As bidden I waited expectant upon the hill of faithfulness, yet inhaled not from them that dwell on earth the fragrance of fidelity. Then summoned to return I beheld, and lo! certain doves of holiness were sore tried within the claws of the dogs of earth. Thereupon the Maid of Heaven hastened forth, unveiled, and resplendent, from Her mystic mansion, and asked of their names, and all were told but one. And when urged, the first Letter thereof was uttered, whereupon the dwellers of the celestial chambers rushed forth out of their habitation of glory. And whilst the second letter was pronounced they fell down, one and all, upon the dust. At that moment a Voice was heard from the inmost shrine: 'Thus far and no farther.' Verily we bear witness to that which they have done and now are doing."

"The Revelation of which I am the bearer," Bahá'u'lláh explicitly declares, "is adapted to humanity's spiritual receptiveness and capacity; otherwise, the Light that shines within me can neither wax nor wane. Whatever I manifest is nothing more or less than the measure of the Divine glory which God has bidden me reveal."

If the Light that is now streaming forth upon an increasingly responsive humanity with a radiance that bids fair to eclipse the splendor of such triumphs as the forces of religion have achieved in days past; if the signs and tokens which proclaimed its advent have been, in many respects, unique in the annals of past Revelations; if its votaries have evinced traits and qualities unexampled in the spiritual history of mankind; these should be attributed not to a superior merit which the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, as a Revelation isolated and alien from any previous Dispensation, might possess, but rather **should be viewed and explained as the inevitable outcome of the forces that have made of this present age an age infinitely more advanced, more receptive, and more insistent to receive an ampler measure of Divine Guidance than has hitherto been vouchsafed to mankind.** (Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'llah*, pp. 57-60)

Shoghi Effendi takes this one step further, asserting that Bahá'u'llah represents the culmination of this process of progressive revelation:

The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, whose supreme mission is none other but the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations, should, if we be faithful to its implications, be regarded as signaling through its advent the coming of age of the entire human race. It should be viewed not merely as yet another spiritual revival in the ever-changing fortunes of mankind, not only as a further stage in a **chain of progressive Revelations**, nor even as the culmination of one of a series of recurrent prophetic cycles, but rather as marking the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man's collective life on this planet. The emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture -- all of which must synchronize with the initial stages in the unfoldment of the Golden Age of the Bahá'í Era -- should, by their very nature, be regarded, as far as this planetary life is concerned, as the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society, though man, as an individual, will, nay must indeed as a result of such a consummation, continue indefinitely to progress and develop. (Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'llah*, p. 163)

Shoghi Effendi also depicts progressive revelation as extending into the Bahá'í cycle, beyond the Bahá'í Dispensation:

The fundamental principle enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh ... is that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that **Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process**, that all the great religions of the world are divine in origin, that their basic principles are in complete harmony, that their aims and purposes are one and the same, that their teachings are but facets of one truth, that their functions are complementary, that they differ only in the nonessential aspects of their doctrines, and that **their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society....**

...His mission is to proclaim that the ages of the infancy and of the childhood of the human race are past, that the convulsions associated with the present stage of its adolescence are slowly and painfully preparing it to attain the stage of manhood, and are heralding the approach of that Age of Ages when swords will be beaten into plowshares, when the Kingdom promised by Jesus Christ will have been established, and the peace of the planet definitely and permanently ensured. **Nor does Bahá'u'lláh claim finality for His own Revelation, but rather stipulates that a fuller measure of the truth He has been commissioned by the Almighty to vouchsafe to humanity, at so critical a juncture in its fortunes, must needs be disclosed at future stages in the constant and limitless evolution of mankind.** (Shoghi Effendi, Preface, *The Promised Day is Come*)

The fundamental principle enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh, the followers of His Faith firmly believe, is that Religious truth is not absolute but relative, that **Divine Revelation is a continuous and**

progressive process, that all the great religions of the world are divine in origin, that their basic principles are in complete harmony, that their aims and purposes are one and the same, that their teachings are but facets of one truth, that their functions are complementary, that they differ only in the non-essential aspects of their doctrines and that their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society.

The aim of Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet of this new and great age which humanity has entered upon -- He whose advent fulfils the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments as well as those of the Qur'án regarding the coming of the Promised One in the end of time, on the Day of Judgment -- is not to destroy but to fulfill the Revelations of the past, to reconcile rather than accentuate the divergences of the conflicting creeds which disrupt present-day society.

His purpose, far from belittling the station of the Prophets gone before Him or of whittling down their teachings, is to restate the basic truths which these teachings enshrine in a manner that would conform to the needs, and be in consonance with the capacity, and be applicable to the problems, the ills and perplexities, of the age in which we live. His mission is to proclaim that the ages of the infancy and of the childhood of the human race are past, that the convulsions associated with the present stage of its adolescence are slowly and painfully preparing it to attain the stage of manhood, and are heralding the approach of that Age of Ages when swords will be beaten into plowshares, when the Kingdom promised by Jesus Christ will have been established, and the peace of the planet definitely and permanently ensured. **Nor does Bahá'u'lláh claim finality for His own Revelation, but rather stipulates that a fuller measure of the truth He has been commissioned by the Almighty to vouchsafe to humanity, at so critical a juncture in its fortunes, must needs be disclosed at future stages in the constant and limitless evolution of mankind.** (Shoghi Effendi, Summary Statement - 1947, Special UN Committee on Palestine)

Lastly the Holy Seed of infinite preciousness, holding within itself incalculable potentialities representing **the culmination of the centuries-old process of the evolution of humanity through the energies released by the series of progressive Revelations starting with Adam and concluded by the Revelation of the Seal of the Prophets**, marked by the successive appearance of the branches, leaves, buds, blossoms and plucked, after six brief years by the hand of destiny, ground in the mill of martyrdom and oppression but yielding the oil whose first flickering light cast upon the somber, subterranean walls of the Siyah-Chal of Tíhran, whose fire gathered brilliance in Baghdad and shone in full resplendency in its crystal globe in Adrianople, whose rays warmed and illuminated the fringes of the American, European, Australian continents through the tender ministrings of the Center of the Covenant, whose radiance is now overspreading the surface of the globe during the present Formative Age,

whose full splendor is destined in the course of future milleniums to suffuse the entire planet. (Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 82)

So vast, so momentous and challenging a crusade [Ten Year Crusade, 1953-1963] that will, God willing, illuminate the annals of the second epoch of the Formative Age of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and immortalize the second decade of the second Bahá'í century, and the termination of which will mark the closing of the first epoch in the evolution of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan, will, in itself, pave the way for, and constitute the prelude to, the initiation of the laborious and tremendously long process of establishing in the course of subsequent crusades in all the newly opened sovereign states, dependencies and islands of the planet, as well as in all the remaining territories of the globe, the framework of the Administrative Order of the Faith, with all its attendant agencies, and of eventually erecting in these territories still more pillars to share in sustaining the weight and in broadening the foundation of the Universal House of Justice.

Then, and only then, will the vast, the majestic process, set in motion at the dawn of the Adamic cycle, attain its consummation -- a process which commenced six thousand years ago, with the planting, in the soil of the divine will, of the tree of divine revelation, and which has already passed through certain stages and must needs pass through still others ere it attains its final consummation. The first part of this process was the slow and steady growth of this tree of divine revelation, successively putting forth its branches, shoots and offshoots, and revealing its leaves, buds and blossoms, as a direct consequence of the light and warmth imparted to it by a series of progressive dispensations associated with Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad and other Prophets, and of the vernal showers of blood shed by countless martyrs in their path. The second part of this process was the fruition of this tree, "that belongeth neither to the East nor to the West," when the Báb appeared as the perfect fruit and declared His mission in the Year Sixty in the city of Shiraz. The third part was the grinding of this sacred seed, of infinite preciousness and potency, in the mill of adversity, causing it to yield its oil, six years later, in the city of Tabriz. The fourth part was the ignition of this oil by the hand of Providence in the depths and amidst the darkness of the Siyah-Chal of Tihiran a hundred years ago. The fifth, was the clothing of that flickering light, which had scarcely penetrated the adjoining territory of Iraq, in the lamp of revelation, after an eclipse lasting no less than ten years, in the city of Baghdad. The sixth, was the spread of the radiance of that light, shining with added brilliancy in its crystal globe in Adrianople, and later on in the fortress town of 'Akká, to thirteen countries in the Asiatic and African continents. The seventh was its projection, from the Most Great Prison, in the course of the ministry of the Center of the Covenant, across the seas and the shedding of its illumination upon twenty sovereign states and dependencies in the American, the European, and Australian

continents. The eighth part of that process was the diffusion of that same light in the course of the first, and the opening years of the second, epoch of the Formative Age of the Faith, over ninety-four sovereign states, dependencies and islands of the planet, as a result of the prosecution of a series of national plans, initiated by eleven national spiritual assemblies throughout the Bahá'í world, utilizing the agencies of a newly emerged, divinely appointed Administrative Order, and which has now culminated in the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Bahá'u'lláh's Mission. The ninth part of this process -- the stage we are now entering -- is the further diffusion of that same light over one hundred and thirty-one additional territories and islands in both the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, through the operation of a decade-long world spiritual crusade whose termination will, God willing, coincide with the Most Great Jubilee commemorating the centenary of the declaration of Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdad. And finally the tenth part of this mighty process must be the penetration of that light, in the course of numerous crusades and of successive epochs of both the Formative and Golden Ages of the Faith, into all the remaining territories of the globe through the erection of the entire machinery of Bahá'u'lláh's Administrative Order in all territories, both East and West, the stage at which the light of God's triumphant Faith shining in all its power and glory will have suffused and enveloped the entire planet. (Shoghi Effendi, *Messsages to the Bahá'í World* - 1950-1957, pp. 153-155)

Bahá'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have set forth this principle of progressive revelation in clear and unequivocal language. Some of the passages upon which Shoghi Effendi must have based his formulation of Bahá'í doctrine in the foregoing excerpts are cited below:

Contemplate with thine inward eye **the chain of successive Revelations that hath linked the Manifestation of Adam with that of the Báb**. I testify before God that each one of these Manifestations hath been sent down through the operation of the Divine Will and Purpose, that each hath been the bearer of a specific Message, that each hath been entrusted with a divinely-revealed Book and been commissioned to unravel the mysteries of a mighty Tablet. The measure of the Revelation with which every one of them hath been identified had been definitely fore-ordained. This, verily, is a token of Our favor unto them, if ye be of those that comprehend this truth...**And when this process of progressive Revelation culminated in the stage at which His peerless, His most sacred, and exalted Countenance was to be unveiled to men's eyes, He chose to hide His own Self behind a thousand veils, lest profane and mortal eyes discover His glory.** This He did at a time when the signs and tokens of a divinely-appointed Revelation were being showered upon Him -- signs and tokens which none can reckon except the Lord, your God, the Lord of all worlds. And when the set time of concealment was fulfilled, We sent forth, whilst still wrapt within a myriad veils, an infinitesimal glimmer of the effulgent Glory enveloping the Face of the Youth, and lo, the entire company of the dwellers of the Realms above were seized with violent commotion and the

avored of God fell down in adoration before Him. He hath, verily, manifested a glory such as none in the whole creation hath witnessed, inasmuch as He hath arisen to proclaim in person His Cause unto all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth. (Bahá'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'llah*, XXXI, pp. 74-75)

And now regarding thy question, "How is it that no records are to be found concerning the Prophets that have preceded Adam, the Father of Mankind, or of the kings that lived in the days of those Prophets?" Know thou that the absence of any reference to them is no proof that they did not actually exist. That no records concerning them are now available, should be attributed to their extreme remoteness, as well as to the vast changes which the earth hath undergone since their time...

Mention hath been made in certain books of a deluge which caused all that existed on earth, historical records as well as other things, to be destroyed. Moreover, many cataclysms have occurred which have effaced the traces of many events. Furthermore, among existing historical records differences are to be found, and each of the various peoples of the world hath its own account of the age of the earth and of its history. Some trace their history as far back as eight thousand years, others as far as twelve thousand years. To any one that hath read the book of Juk it is clear and evident how much the accounts given by the various books have differed. **Please God thou wilt turn thine eyes towards the Most Great Revelation, and entirely disregard these conflicting tales and traditions.** (Bahá'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'llah*, LXXXVII, p. 172, pp. 174-175)

Heard it ye ever reported by your fathers of old, or by the generations that preceded them, even unto the first Adam, that any one coming in the clouds of revelation, being invested with manifest and transcendent sovereignty, having on his right hand the Kingdom of God and on his left all the power and glory of His everlasting dominion, any one preceded by the hosts of God, the Almighty, the All-Compelling, the Most Powerful, and uttering continually verses whose import the minds of the most learned and wisest of men are powerless to fathom, should yet be the bearer of a message that is not of God? Be discerning, then, and speak ye the truth, the very truth, if ye claim to be honest and high-minded. (Bahá'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'llah*, CXXI, pp. 258-259)

In the days of Moses it was the Pentateuch; in the days of Jesus the Gospel; in the days of Muhammad the Messenger of God the Qur'án; in this day the Bayan; and in the dispensation of Him Whom God [Bahá'u'llah] will make manifest His own Book -- the Book unto which all the Books of former Dispensations must needs be referred, the Book which standeth amongst them all transcendent and supreme. (Bahá'u'llah, *The Kítáb-i-Iqán*, pp. 199-200)

Bahá'u'llah refers to the Báb and His Revelation in comparison with previous Dispensations:

No understanding can grasp the nature of His Revelation, nor can any knowledge comprehend the full measure of His Faith. All sayings are dependent upon His sanction, and all things stand in need of His Cause. All else save Him are created by His command, and move and have their being through His law. He is the Revealer of the divine mysteries, and the Expounder of the hidden and ancient wisdom. Thus it is related in the "Biharu'l-Anvar," the "Avalim," and the "Yanbu" of Sadiq, son of Muhammad, that he spoke these words: "Knowledge is twenty and seven letters. All that the Prophets have revealed are two letters thereof. No man thus far hath known more than these two letters. But when the Qá'im shall arise, He will cause the remaining twenty and five letters to be made manifest." Consider; He hath declared Knowledge to consist of twenty and seven letters, and regarded all the Prophets, from Adam even unto the "Seal," as Expounders of only two letters thereof and of having been sent down with these two letters. He also saith that the Qá'im will reveal all the remaining twenty and five letters. Behold from this utterance how great and lofty is His station! His rank excelleth that of all the Prophets, and His Revelation transcendeth the comprehension and understanding of all their chosen ones. A Revelation, of which the Prophets of God, His saints and chosen ones, have either not been informed, or which, in pursuance of God's inscrutable Decree, they have not disclosed, -- such a Revelation these mean and depraved people have sought to measure with their own deficient minds, their own deficient learning and understanding. Should it fail to conform to their standards, they straightway reject it. "Thinkest thou that the greater part of them hear or understand? They are even like unto the brutes! yea, they stray even further from the path!" [Qur'án 25:44] (Bahá'u'llah, *The Kítáb-i-Iqán*, pp. 243-244)

Thus it is recorded: "Every knowledge hath seventy meanings, of which one only is known amongst the people. And when the Qá'im shall arise, He shall reveal unto men all that which remaineth." (Bahá'u'llah, *The Kítáb-i-Iqán*, p. 255)

Bahá'u'llah cites some passages from the Báb's Writings that indicate that His successor reveals yet a greater share of the truth than Himself:

In like manner, the Primal Point saith: "Behold ye Him with His own eyes. Were ye to behold Him with the eyes of another, ye would never recognize and know Him." This referreth to naught else except this Most Great Revelation. Well is it with them that judge fairly. And likewise, He saith: "The year-old germ that holdeth within itself the potentialities of the Revelation that is to come is endowed with a potency superior to the combined forces of the whole of the Bayan." These glad-tidings of the Bayan and of the Books of former times have been repeatedly mentioned under divers names in numerous books, that perchance men might judge

equitably that which hath arisen and shone forth above the horizon of the will of God, the Lord of the Mighty Throne.

O Shaykh! Tell the people of the Bayan: "Ponder ye these blessed words. He saith: 'The whole of the Bayan is only a leaf amongst the leaves of His Paradise.' Be fair, O people, and be not of such as are accounted as lost in the Book of God, the Lord of the worlds." The blessed Lote-Tree standeth, in this day, before thy face, laden with heavenly, with new and wondrous fruits. Gaze on it, detached from all else save it. Thus hath the Tongue of might and power spoken at this Spot which God hath adorned with the footsteps of His Most Great Name and Mighty Announcement.

And likewise, He saith: "Ere nine will have elapsed from the inception of this Cause, the realities of the created things will not be made manifest. All that thou hast as yet seen is but the stage from the moist germ until We clothed it with flesh. Be patient, until thou beholdest a new creation. Say: 'Blessed, therefore, be God, the most excellent of Makers!'" And likewise, He hath said regarding the power of this Revelation: "Lawful is it for Him Whom God will make manifest to reject him who is greatest on earth, inasmuch as such a one is but a creature in His grasp, and all things adore Him. After Him (68) a Cause shall be given unto you which ye shall come to know." And also He saith: "Know thou with absolute certainty, and through the firmly established and most irrevocable decree, that He -- exalted be His glory, and magnified be His might, and sanctified be His holiness, and glorified be His grandeur, and lauded be His ways, maketh each thing to be known through its own self; who then can know Him through any one except Himself?" And further, He saith -- exalted and glorified be He: "Beware, beware lest, in the days of His Revelation, the Vahid of the Bayan (eighteen Letters of the Living) shut thee not out as by a veil from Him, inasmuch as this Vahid is but a creature in His sight. And beware, beware that the words sent down in the Bayan shut thee not out as by a veil from Him." And again, He -- exalted be He -- saith: "Look not upon Him with any eye except His own. For whosoever looketh upon Him with His eye, will recognize Him; otherwise he will be veiled from Him. Shouldst thou seek God and His Presence, seek thou Him and gaze upon Him." And likewise, He saith: "Better is it for thee to recite but one of the verses of Him Whom God shall make manifest than to set down the whole of the Bayan, for on that Day that one verse can save thee, whereas the entire Bayan cannot save thee."

Say: O people of the Bayan! Be fair, be fair; and again, be fair, be fair. Be ye not of them who have made mention of the Manifestation of the Cause of God in the daytime and in the night season, and who, when He, through His grace, appeared, and when the Horizon of Revelation was illumined, pronounced against Him such a judgment as hath provoked the

lamentations of the inmates of the Kingdom and of the Realm of Glory, and of such as have circled about the will of God, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

Meditate upon these sublime words. He saith: "I, verily, am a believer in Him, and in His Faith, and in His Book, and in His Testimonies, and in His Ways, and in all that proceedeth from Him concerning them. I glory in My kinship with Him, and pride Myself on My belief in Him." And likewise, He saith: "O congregation of the Bayan and all who are therein! Recognize ye the limits imposed upon you, for such a One as the Point of the Bayan Himself hath believed in Him Whom God shall make manifest, before all things were created. Therein, verily, do I glory before all who are in the kingdom of heaven and earth." By God! All the atoms of the universe groan and lament at the cruelty perpetrated by the froward among the people of the Bayan. Whither are gone they who are endued with insight and hearing? We beseech God -- blessed and glorified be He -- to summon them and exhort them unto that which will profit them, and withhold them from that which will harm them. He, in truth, is the Strong, the All-Subduing, the Almighty.

And likewise, He saith: "Suffer not yourselves to be shut out as by a veil from God after He hath revealed Himself. For all that hath been exalted in the Bayan is but as a ring upon My hand, and I Myself am, verily, but a ring upon the hand of Him Whom God shall make manifest -- glorified be His mention! He turneth it as He pleaseth, for whatsoever He pleaseth, and through whatsoever He pleaseth. He, verily, is the Help in Peril, the Most High." And likewise, He saith: "Were He to make of every one on earth a Prophet, all would, in very truth, be accounted as Prophets in the sight of God." And likewise, He saith: "In the day of the revelation of Him Whom God shall make manifest all that dwell on earth will be equal in His estimation. Whomsoever He ordaineth as a Prophet, he, verily, hath been a Prophet from the beginning that hath no beginning, and will thus remain until the end that hath no end, inasmuch as this is an act of God. And whosoever is made a Vicegerent by Him, shall be a Vicegerent in all the worlds, for this is an act of God. For the will of God can in no wise be revealed except through His will, nor His wish be manifested save through His wish. He, verily, is the All-Conquering, the All-Powerful, the All-Highest." (Bahá'u'llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, pp. 151-155)

Bahá'u'llah also indicates that He has summarized the teachings that have been revealed by all the previous Prophets:

This is that which hath descended from the realm of glory, uttered by the tongue of power and might, and revealed unto the Prophets of old. We have taken the inner essence thereof and clothed it in the garment of brevity, as a token of grace unto the righteous, that they may stand

faithful unto the Covenant of God, may fulfill in their lives His trust, and in the realm of spirit obtain the gem of Divine virtue. (Bahá'u'llah, Prelude, The Arabic Hidden Words)

Finally, Bahá'u'llah affirms that all things, including all religious teachings are to be weighed in the divine balance revealed in His Book:

Say: O leaders of religion! Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men. In this most perfect Balance whatsoever the peoples and kindreds of the earth possess must be weighed, while the measure of its weight should be tested according to its own standard, did ye but know it. (Bahá'u'llah, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, K99, p. 56)

Say: This is the infallible Balance which the Hand of God is holding, in which all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth are weighed, and their fate determined, if ye be of them that believe and recognize this truth. Say: This is the Most Great Testimony, by which the validity of every proof throughout the ages hath been established, would that ye might be assured thereof. Say: Through it the poor have been enriched, the learned enlightened, and the seekers enabled to ascend unto the presence of God. Beware lest ye make it a cause of dissension amongst you. Be ye as firmly

settled as the immovable mountain in the Cause of your Lord, the Mighty, the Loving. (Bahá'u'llah, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, K183, p. 85)

‘Abdu'l-Bahá has confirmed the truth of this principle, and here are a few of the references to it:

Creation is the expression of motion. Motion is life. A moving object is a living object, whereas that which is motionless and inert is as dead. All created forms are progressive in their planes, or kingdoms of existence, under the stimulus of the power or spirit of life. The universal energy is dynamic. Nothing is stationary in the material world of outer phenomena or in the inner world of intellect and consciousness.

Religion is the outer expression of the divine reality. Therefore, it must be living, vitalized, moving and progressive. If it be without motion and nonprogressive, it is without the divine life; it is dead. **The divine institutes are continuously active and evolutionary; therefore, the revelation of them must be progressive and continuous.** (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 140)

Among the bounties of God is revelation. **Hence revelation is progressive and continuous.** It never ceases. It is necessary that the reality of Divinity with all its perfections and attributes should become resplendent in the human world. The reality of Divinity is like an endless ocean. Revelation may be likened to the rain. Can you imagine the cessation of rain? Ever on the face of the earth somewhere rain is pouring down. Briefly, the world of existence is progressive. It is subject to development and growth. Consider how great has been the progress in this radiant century. Civilization has unfolded. Nations have developed. Industrialism and jurisprudence have expanded. Sciences, inventions and discoveries have increased. All of these show that the world of existence is continuously progressing and developing; and therefore, assuredly, the virtues characterizing the maturity of man must, likewise, expand and grow. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 378)

In brief, the Scripture saith: 'And he that talked with me had a rod [reed] made out of gold, that is, a measure, wherewith he measured the city and the gates thereof and the towers thereof.' [Apocalypse 21:15] The meaning is that certain personages guided the people with a staff grown out of the earth, and shepherded them with a rod, like unto the rod of Moses. Others trained and shepherded the people with a rod of iron, as in the dispensation of Muhammad. And in this present cycle, because it is the mightiest of Dispensations, that rod grown out of the vegetable kingdom and that rod of iron will be transformed into a rod of purest gold, taken from out the endless treasure houses in the Kingdom of the Lord. By this rod will the people be trained.

Note well the difference: at one time the Teachings of God were as a staff, and by this means the Holy Scriptures were spread abroad, the Law of God was promulgated and His Faith established. Then followed a time when the staff of the true Shepherd was as iron. And today, in this new and splendid age, the rod is even as pure gold. How wide is the difference here! Know, then, how much ground hath been gained by the Law of God and His Teachings in this dispensation, how they have reached such heights that they far transcend the dispensations gone before: truly this rod is purest gold, while those of other days were of iron and wood. (*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 166-167)

CANONIZATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

THE ENVIRONMENT OF CANONIZATION

In one of his letters, Shoghi Effendi described the historical environment in which the New Testament came into existence. He began by comparing the situation of Christendom in his own time (circa 1935) with the “opening centuries of the Christian Era”:

So marked a decline in the strength and cohesion of the elements constituting Christian society has led, in its turn, as we might well anticipate, to the emergence of an increasing number of obscure cults, of strange and new worships, of ineffective philosophies, whose sophisticated doctrines have intensified the confusion of a troubled age. In their tenets and pursuits they may be said to reflect and bear witness to the revolt, the discontent, and the confused aspirations of the disillusioned masses that have deserted the cause of the Christian churches and seceded from their membership.

A parallel might almost be drawn between these confused and confusing systems of thought that are the direct outcome of the helplessness and confusion afflicting the Christian Faith and the great variety of popular cults, of fashionable and evasive philosophies which flourished in the opening centuries of the Christian Era, and which attempted to absorb and pervert the state religion of that Roman people. The pagan worshipers who constituted, at that time, the bulk of the population of the Western Roman Empire, found themselves surrounded, and in certain instances menaced, by the prevailing sect of the Neo-Platonists, by the followers of nature religions, by Gnostic philosophers, by Philonism, Mithraism, the adherents of the Alexandrian cult, and a multitude of kindred sects and beliefs, in much the same way as the defenders of the Christian Faith, the preponderating religion of the western world, are realizing, in the first century of the Bahá'í Era, how their influence is being undermined by a flood of conflicting beliefs, practices and tendencies which their own bankruptcy had helped to create. It was, however, this same Christian Religion, which has now fallen into such a state of impotence, that eventually proved itself capable of sweeping away the institutions of paganism and of swamping and suppressing the cults that had flourished in that age.⁴

*We will now examine the religious groups named by Shoghi Effendi in this passage, as a guide to what Christianity **was not**:*

⁴Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 184-185.

NEO-PLATONISM

Platonism and Neo-Platonism are described in a Wikipedia article⁵:

Platonism was originally expressed in the dialogues of Plato, in which the figure of Socrates is used to expound certain doctrines, that may or may not be similar to the thought of the historical Socrates, Plato's master. Plato delivered his lectures at the Academy, a precinct containing a sacred grove outside the walls of Athens. The school continued there long after...

In the 3rd century, Plotinus recast Plato's system, establishing Neoplatonism, in which Middle Platonism was fused with oriental mysticism. At the summit of existence stands the One or the Good, as the source of all things. It generates from itself, as if from the reflection of its own being, reason, the nous, - wherein is contained the infinite store of ideas. The world-soul, the copy of the nous, is generated by and contained in it, as the nous is in the One, and, by informing matter in itself nonexistent, constitutes bodies whose existence is contained in the world-soul. Nature therefore is a whole, endowed with life and soul. Soul, being chained to matter, longs to escape from the bondage of the body and return to its original source. In virtue and philosophical thought it has the power to elevate itself above the reason into a state of ecstasy, where it can behold, or ascend up to, that one good primary Being whom reason cannot know. To attain this union with the Good, or God, is the true function of human beings.

Plotinus' disciple, Porphyry, followed by Iamblichus, developed the system in conscious opposition to Christianity. The Platonic Academy was re-established during this period; its most renowned head was Proclus (died 485), a celebrated commentator on Plato's writings. The Academy persisted until Roman emperor Justinian closed it in 529...Many Western churchmen, including Augustine of Hippo, have been influenced by Platonism...Platonism influenced Christianity first through Clement of Alexandria and Origen.^[2] Augustine was heavily influenced by Platonism as well, mostly through Victorinus Afer.^[2] Platonism was considered authoritative in the Middle Ages, and many Platonic notions are now permanent elements of Catholic/Protestant Christianity.^[2] Like pagans had before them, Christians understood Platonic forms as God's thoughts.^[2] Platonism also influenced both Eastern and Western mysticism.^[2] Meanwhile, Platonism influenced various philosophers.^[2] When Aristotle became more renowned than Plato in the 13th century, Aquinas's philosophy was still fundamentally Platonic.^[2]

⁵<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Platonism>

Bahá'ís will be interested to know that Neo-Platonism was revived and amplified by Muslim philosophers, as described in this article⁶:

Islamic Neoplatonism developed in a milieu already saturated with the thought of Plotinus and Aristotle. The former studied in Alexandria, and the Alexandrine philosophical syllabus included such figures as Porphyry of Tyre and Proclus. Associated with these scholars were two major channels of Islamic Neoplatonism, the so-called Theology of Aristotle and the *Liber de Causis* (Book of Causes). Other cities beloved of the philosophers at the time of the rise of Islam in the first century ah (seventh century ad) included Gondeshapur and Harran.

Islamic Neoplatonism stressed one aspect of the Qur'anic God, the transcendent, and ignored another, the creative. For the Neoplatonists, all things emanated from the deity. Islamic philosophers were imbued to a greater or lesser degree with either Aristotelianism or Neoplatonism or, as was often the case, with both. Al-Kindi, the father of Islamic philosophy, has a Neoplatonic aspect, but the doctrine reaches its intellectual fruition in the complex emanationist hierarchies developed by al-Farabi and Ibn Sina. Their views are later developed (or metamorphosed) by later thinkers into an emanative hierarchy of lights, as with Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi, or the doctrine of the Unity of Being espoused by Ibn al-'Arabi. While al-Ghazali and Ibn Rushd both vigorously opposed Neoplatonic views, the latter attacked the former for his general opposition to the philosophers.

Neoplatonism itself had a major impact on that sectarian grouping of Muslims known as the Isma'ilis, and became the substratum for its theology. Historically, Neoplatonism in Islam achieved its climax with the Fatimid Isma'ili conquest of Egypt towards the end of the fourth century ah (tenth century ad). While Neoplatonism later declined in philosophical importance in the face of rampant Aristotelianism and Hanbalism, it may be said to have bequeathed an important religious, historical and cultural legacy to the Islamic world, which in the Isma'ili movement endures to this day.

NATURE RELIGIONS

The nature religions referred to by Shoghi Effendi were no doubt the worshippers of Cybele and of Venus, the Great Mother (Magna Mater) with ties to Aphrodite, Ishtar (Astarte), and Isis. The specific cult of Cybele is described⁷:

The most famous rite of Magna Mater introduced by the Romans was the taurobolium, the initiation ceremony in which a candidate took their place in a pit beneath a wooden floor. A bull

⁶<http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/rep/H003.htm>

⁷<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cybele>

was sacrificed on the wooden floor so that the blood would run through gaps in the slats and drench the initiate in a symbolic shower of blood. This act was thought to cleanse an initiate of sin as well as signify a 'rebirth' and re-energisation. A cheaper version, known as a criobolium, involved the sacrifice of a ram. The first recorded taurobolium took place at Puteoli in AD 134 in honour of Venus Caelestia.^[9]

In Roman mythology, Cybele was given the name Magna Mater deorum Idaea ("great Idaean mother of the gods"), in recognition of her Phrygian origins (although this title was given to Rhea also). Roman devotion to Cybele ran deeply. Not coincidentally, when a Christian basilica was built over the site of a temple to Cybele to occupy the site, the sanctuary was rededicated to the Mother of God, as the Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore. However, later, Roman citizens were forbidden to become priests of Cybele, who were eunuchs like those of their Asiatic Goddess.

GNOSTIC PHILOSOPHY

While the origins of Gnostic philosophy are traced to an earlier epoch than that which immediately followed the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, the impact of Gnosticism was far reaching and spanned several centuries⁸:

A collective name for a large number of greatly-varying and pantheistic-idealistic sects, which flourished from some time before the Christian Era down to the fifth century, and which, while borrowing the phraseology and some of the tenets of the chief religions of the day, and especially of Christianity, held matter to be a deterioration of spirit, and the whole universe a depravation of the Deity, and taught the ultimate end of all being to be the overcoming of the grossness of matter and the return to the Parent-Spirit, which return they held to be inaugurated and facilitated by the appearance of some God-sent Saviour... When Gnosticism came in touch with Christianity, which must have happened almost immediately on its appearance, Gnosticism threw herself with strange rapidity into Christian forms of thought, borrowed its nomenclature, acknowledged Jesus as Saviour of the world, simulated its sacraments, pretended to be an esoteric revelation of Christ and His Apostles, flooded the world with apocryphal Gospels, and Acts, and Apocalypses, to substantiate its claim. As Christianity grew within and without the Roman Empire, Gnosticism spread as a fungus at its root, and claimed to be the only true form of Christianity, unfit, indeed, for the vulgar crowd, but set apart for the gifted and the elect. So rank was its poisonous growth that there seemed danger of its stifling Christianity altogether, and the earliest Fathers devoted their energies to uprooting it. Though in reality the spirit of Gnosticism is utterly alien to that of Christianity, it then seemed to the unwary merely a modification or refinement thereof. When domiciled on Greek soil, Gnosticism, slightly changing its barbarous and Seminitic terminology and giving its "emanatons" and "syzygies" Greek names, sounded

⁸<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06592a.htm>

somewhat like neo-Platonism, thought it was strongly repudiated by Plotinus. In Egypt the national worship left its mark more on Gnostic practice than on its theories...In dealing with the origins of Gnosticism, one might be tempted to mention Manichaeism, as a number of Gnostic ideas seem to be borrowed from Manichaeism, where they are obviously at home. This, however, would hardly be correct. Manichaeism, as historically connected with Mani, its founder, could not have arisen much earlier than A.D. 250, when Gnosticism was already in rapid decline.

PHILONISM

Shoghi Effendi refers here to those who adopted the views of Philo Judaeus of Alexandria (20 BCE-50 CE):

Philo (20 BC - 50 AD), known also as Philo of Alexandria (gr. Φίλων ὁ Ἀλεξανδρεύς), Philo Judaeus, Philo Judaeus of Alexandria, Yedidia and Philo the Jew, was a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher born in Alexandria, Egypt.

Philo used allegory to fuse and harmonize Greek philosophy and Judaism. His method followed the practices of both Jewish exegesis and Stoic philosophy. His work was not widely accepted. "The sophists of literalness," as he calls them^[1], "opened their eyes superciliously" when he explained to them the marvels of his exegesis. Philo's works were enthusiastically received by the early Christians, some of whom saw in him a cryptic Christian. His concept of the Logos as God's creative principle apparently influenced early Christology. To him Logos was God's "blueprint for the world", a governing plan.

David T. Runia has closely studied the influence of Philonism on Christian theology...and his argument is found here¹⁰:

What impact, then, did Philo have on the beginnings of Christian thought? I propose to give no less than four answers to this question. As we shall see, all four are relevant, but we may in the end conclude that some are more relevant than others. It goes without saying that these answers can now only be formulated and discussed in the most general terms.

(1) Firstly, at the end of his most well-known work, [De opificio mundi](#), Philo names five dogmata (doctrines), knowledge of which is a guarantee for a pious and felicitous life: that God exists, that He is One, that he created the cosmos, that this cosmos is unique just like its Maker, and that He always exercises providence on what he has made. The great Philonist E. R. Goodenough once called this passage 'the first creed of history',^[7] and recently Alan Mendelson has ventured to speak of a 'concept of orthodoxy' that in Philo's view was essential for the

⁹<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philo>

¹⁰<http://www.torreys.org/bible/philo&beg.html>

preservation of Jewish identity.^[8] Might it not be legitimate to see Philo as the origin of a dogmatism that was to distinguish Christianity from subsequent (Rabbinic) Judaism and also from pagan thought? In my view a distinction needs to be made. Philo is not a dogmatician in the manner of an Athanasius or a Basil, or even of an Origen. He does not regard himself as subjected to something like an ecclesiastical tradition, a *regula fidei* which he has to defend with all the intellectual resources at his disposal. Philo's view of himself is rather different. He sees himself as standing in the tradition of interpretation and exposition of the Mosaic philosophy, a tradition in which he claims for himself no more than a modest role. But there can be no doubt that he does have a strong tendency towards an intellectual re-interpretation of his religious heritage. In a most intriguing passage Philo interprets the expulsion of certain classes of people from the congregation of Israel in Deuteronomy 23 in terms of directions of thought (Spec. 1.327-345). His model, clearly, is Plato, who in the *Laws* is prepared to take draconian measures against errors of thought (book X, esp. 885b). The praxis of being Jewish is important for Philo and most definitely not to be neglected, but it is less important than the *theoria*. Philo takes an initial step along the path that would lead to the construction of the mighty edifice of Christian dogma.

(2) For a second answer we take our cue from Photius, the learned ninth-century Patriarch of Constantinople. Photius tells us in his *Bibliotheca* that he read various Philonic treatises, very many of which contained interpretations that forced scripture into an allegorical mode. Starting from this man, he continues, the entire allegorical method of reading scripture began to pour into the church (§105). This observation is essentially correct, and even more so if we take into account the wider background of Hellenistic Judaism. The writings of Philo furnish the church fathers with numerous allegorical themes and schemes in the area of cosmological, psychological and moral exposition. Augustine too, as we saw, recognizes Philo's use of the allegorical method and is prepared to accept some of its results, until he finds a fatal flaw in the way Philo puts the method to use. We might even wish to broaden our approach here and include all the exegetical themes that Philo bequeathed to the church fathers, for it should not be thought that Philo furnishes only allegorical material. Naturally there is a heavy concentration of material focused on the books of Moses, because that is effectively where the Bible begins and ends for Philo, but in many cases the significance of the method goes far beyond its specific contents.

Photius is very negative in his evaluation of this Philonic influence, and since the Reformation reservations towards the allegorical method have only increased. But we should be careful not to overlook its attractive aspects. These are primarily two in number. The first is only

too well known: it allows the interpreter to connect up with and exploit significant philosophical and what we now would call spiritual ideas. The second is more subtle: it also allows the interpreter to preserve at least partly the narrative element of the biblical text, but then at the more general level of the quest of the soul for God.

(3) A third insight draws us closer to the epicentre of our question. We observe that Philo (together with others before and after him) has taken the crucial step of selecting the Platonic paradigm of being and becoming, immutability and change, knowledge and ignorance as the system of thought most suitable for the task of expounding and interpreting the truth revealed to Moses. In my dissertation more than a decade ago I defended the thesis that Philo is no Platonist. I argued that Philo is no Platonist in the full sense, because both the sense of loyalty and the feeling of obligation to take up as much as possible of the system are missing. I still believe this view is correct. But at the same time I added that Platonism remains for Philo a pillar of his thought which, if removed, would cause the whole edifice to totter and perhaps even collapse. This complex attitude also characterizes how Platonism would fare in early Christian thought. There is no sense of loyalty, indeed often one detects outright hostility. Yet Plato is often admired as the pagan thinker closest to the truth of biblical revelation. And time and time again there is demonstrable dependence on Platonic and Platonist ideas in the way that scripture is understood.

(4) But not all has yet been said. In my view a fourth and final aspect has yet to be discussed before we can get the Philonic contribution to early Christian thought in full perspective. So far we have noted a trend to dogmatism, the transmission of exegetical, and particularly allegorical, themes, the preference for Platonism as a philosophical paradigm. But there is still a last piece of the jigsaw puzzle missing. This can be made clear if we return to the striking case of Clement of Alexandria. Clement, as we saw, was the first Christian to refer to Philo by name. According to tradition he was born in Athens. We cannot be sure of this, but what it symbolizes is very probable, namely that he learnt his philosophy before he became a Christian. As we saw earlier, it was in Alexandria that he made acquaintance with the works of Philo. But what did he seek to learn from them? Not his Platonism, for that he already knew well enough. Certainly he obtained a good deal of exegetical material, but he also picked up something that was much more valuable. What he learnt was how a link could be made between Platonist ideas and the contents of scripture. It is this, I submit, that forms the greatest specific contribution that Philo made to the beginnings of Christian thought. He showed how insights from the Greek philosophical tradition could be localized in the authoritative words of scripture. In this process the philosophical paradigm of Platonism had a special, if not exclusive, place.

MITHRAISM

*The worship of Mithras was particularly popular in the Roman Empire in the first centuries of the Christian Era*¹¹:

The Mithraic Mysteries or Mysteries of Mithras (also Mithraism) was a mystery religion which became popular among the military in the Roman Empire, from the 1st to 4th centuries CE. It is best attested in the cities of Rome and Ostia and in the Roman provinces of Mauretania, Britain, and in the provinces along the Rhine and Danube frontier...

Mithraism was an initiatory order, passed from initiate to initiate, like the Eleusinian Mysteries. It was not based on a body of scripture, and hence very little written documentary evidence survives. Soldiers and the lower nobility appeared to be the most plentiful followers of Mithraism. Until recently, women were generally thought not to have been allowed to join, but it has now been suggested that "women were involved with Mithraic groups in at least some locations of the empire."^[1] Recently revealed discrepancies such as these suggest that Mithraic beliefs were (contra the older supposition) not internally consistent and monolithic,^{cf. [2]} but rather, varied from location to location.

No Mithraic scripture or first-hand account of its highly secret rituals survives, with the possible exception of a liturgy recorded in a 4th century papyrus, thought to be an atypical representation of the cult at best.^[3] Current knowledge of the mysteries is almost entirely limited to what can be deduced from the iconography in the mithraea that have survived...

By the third century, Mithraism was officially sanctioned by the Roman emperors.^[18] According to the fourth century *Historia Augusta*, Commodus participated in its mysteries: *Sacra Mithriaca homicidio vero polluit, cum illic aliquid ad speciem timoris vel dici vel fingi soleat* "He desecrated the rites of Mithras with actual murder, although it was customary in them merely to say or pretend something that would produce an impression of terror".^[19]

... There is very little information about the decline of the religion. The edict of Theodosius I in 394 made paganism illegal. Official recognition of Mithras in the army stopped at this time, but we have no information on what other effect the edict had. Mithraism may have survived in certain remote cantons of the Alps and Vosges into the fifth century.^[20]

¹¹<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mithraism>

ALEXANDRIAN CULT

There were many religious cults thriving in Alexandria closely following the advent of Christianity, including Neo-Platonism, Alexandrian Judaism, the worship of Cybele and Mithraism. Shoghi Effendi seems to be alluding to another community of belief, and this is what was discovered¹²:

Just south of the city of Alexandria, perched high upon a lofty plateau overlooking the blue waters of Lake Mareotis, there had lived for centuries before the Christian era, a group of men and women who passed their lives in study and meditation. They were a branch of the Pythagorean Essenes, and were known as the Therapeutae. Philo Judaeus has written a lengthy description of them in his essay, *On the Contemplative Life*. He says:

"These Essenes are called Therapeutae, either because they profess the art of healing superior to that in use in cities (for that only heals bodies, whereas the latter heals our souls as well), or else because they have been schooled by the sacred laws to serve that which is better than the Good, purer than the One and more ancient than the Monad."

"...The similarity, or rather identity, between the Essenes and the Christian Gnostics is an undisputed fact, and is admitted by many early Christian writers. Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis, writing in the second century, says:

"They who believe on Christ were called Iessaei (or Essenes) before they were called Christians. These derived their constitution from the significance of the name Iesus (Jesus), which in Hebrew signifies the same as Therapeutae, that is, saviour or physician."

In this same century, Eusebius of Caesarea, the "father of ecclesiastical history," came across the treatise of Philo Judaeus, *On the Contemplative Life*, which gave an obviously trustworthy account of a group of men and women who had divested themselves of all worldly possessions and lived a life of austerity and contemplation. Eusebius promptly seized upon Philo's story and declared it to be a description of the first Christian Church in Alexandria. He says: "The ancient Therapeutae were Christians, and their ancient writings were Gospels and Epistles."

GNOSTICISM REVISITED

Shoghi Effendi makes another reference to Gnosticism, this time in his interpretation of a text written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá¹³:

¹²<http://www.blavatsky.net/magazine/theosophy/ww/setting/thegnostics.html>

‘Abdu'l-Bahá says that the main difference between the gnostics and the religionists is that the gnostics maintain the existence of only two worlds, the world of God and the world of the creature. The prophets, however, maintained the existence of three worlds the world of God, the world of the Will or the Word, and the world of created things. The prophets, therefore, maintained that a knowledge of God was impossible. As ‘Abdu'l-Bahá says man can never know God or even imagine Him. If he does that object is not God but an imaginary idol.

The source document to which Shoghi Effendi appears to be referring, in which ‘Abdu'l-Bahá counters the philosophy of the “Gnostics” (in this case “Sufis”) with the theology of the Prophets, is Some Answered Questions¹⁴:

To recapitulate: the Sufis admit God and the creature, and say that God resolves Himself into the infinite forms of the creatures, and manifests like the sea, which appears in the infinite forms of the waves. These phenomenal and imperfect waves are the same thing as the Preexistent Sea, which is the sum of all the divine perfections. The Prophets, on the contrary, believe that there is the world of God, the world of the Kingdom, and the world of Creation: three things.

HISTORY OF CANONIZATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Now that we know what religious and philosophical movements were in existence and competing with the Christian teachings for the hearts and minds of humanity in the centuries immediately following the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth, we will consider the New Testament as it came into being. According to scholars, the selection of certain writings for inclusion in the New Testament and the exclusion of other writings did not begin immediately following the passing of Jesus¹⁵:

The *Catholic New Testament*, as defined by the *Council of Trent*, does not differ, as regards the books contained, from that of all *Christian* bodies at present. Like the *Old Testament*, the New has its deuterocanonical books and portions of books, their canonicity having formerly been a subject of some controversy in the *Church*. These are for the entire books: the Epistle to the Hebrews, that of James, the Second of St. Peter, the Second and Third of John, Jude, and Apocalypse; giving seven in all as the number of the *New Testament* contested books. The formerly disputed passages are three: the closing section of St. Mark's Gospel, xvi, 9-20 about the apparitions of Christ after the *Resurrection*; the verses in Luke about the bloody sweat of Jesus (22:43-44); the Pericope Adulteræ, or narrative of the woman taken in adultery (John 7:53-8:11). Since the *Council of Trent* it is not permitted for a *Catholic* to question the inspiration of these passages.

¹³From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, November 29, 1929; in Lights of Guidance, #1724, p. 510

¹⁴‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 295.

¹⁵<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03274a.htm>

The *idea* of a complete and clear-cut canon of the *New Testament* existing from the beginning, that is from Apostolic times, has no foundation in history. The Canon of the New Testament, like that of the Old, is the result of a development, of a process at once stimulated by disputes with doubters, both within and without the *Church*, and retarded by certain obscurities and natural hesitations, and which did not reach its final term until the *dogmatic definition* of the *Tridentine Council*.

...*Irenæus*, in his work "Against Heresies" (A.D. 182-88), testifies to the existence of a Tetramorph, or Quadriform Gospel, given by the Word and unified by one Spirit; to repudiate this Gospel or any part of it, as did the *Alogi* and *Marcionites*, was to *sin* against revelation and the *Spirit of God*. The saintly Doctor of *Lyons* explicitly states the names of the four Elements of this Gospel, and repeatedly cites all the *Evangelists* in a manner parallel to his citations from the *Old Testament*. From the testimony of *St. Irenæus* alone there can be no reasonable *doubt* that the Canon of the Gospel was inalterably fixed in the *Catholic Church* by the last quarter of the second century. Proofs might be multiplied that our canonical *Gospels* were then universally recognized in the *Church*, to the exclusion of any pretended *Evangels*. The magisterial statement of *Irenæus* may be corroborated by the very ancient catalogue known as the Muratorian Canon, and *St. Hippolytus*, representing Roman tradition; by *Tertullian* in *Africa*, by *Clement* in *Alexandria*; the works of the *Gnostic* *Valentinus*, and the Syrian *Tatian's* *Diatessaron*, a blending together of the *Evangelists'* writings, presuppose the authority enjoyed by the fourfold Gospel towards the middle of the second century. To this period or a little earlier belongs the pseudo-Clementine epistle in which we find, for the first time after *2 Peter 3:16*, the word *Scripture* applied to a *New Testament* book. But it is needless in the present article to array the full force of these and other witnesses, since even *rationalistic* scholars like *Harnack* admit the canonicity of the quadriform Gospel between the years 140-175.

Bahá'u'lláh attests to the existence of the four canonical Gospels having been composed after the passing of *Jesus*¹⁶:

The Four Gospels were written after Him [Christ]. John, Luke, Mark and Matthew these four wrote after Christ what they remembered of His utterances.

The numerous citations from these four canonical Gospels in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh are cited in "Jesus and the New Testament", the following essay.

*Shoghi Effendi confirmed the authenticity of selected quotations from these canonical Gospels*¹⁷:

¹⁶From a previously un-translated Tablet by Bahá'u'lláh: www.bahai-library.org/uhj/resurrection.bible.html

¹⁷From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated 23 January 1944 to an individual believer; in *Compilation* dated 14 September 1987 on the Resurrection of Christ.

...we cannot be sure how much or how little of the four Gospels are accurate and include the words of Christ and His undiluted teachings, all we can be sure of, as Bahá'ís, is that what has been quoted by Bahá'u'lláh and the Master must be absolutely authentic. As many times passages in the Gospel of St. John are quoted we may assume that it is his Gospel and much of it accurate.

But were these canonical Gospels the only Gospels? Or were there other authentic records related to the life and teachings of Jesus? A Bahá'í scholar who has studied this question has recently written¹⁸:

In one of His Tablets addressed to a Jewish convert to the Bahá'í religion named Hakim Hayyim, Bahá'u'lláh responded to his question about why, despite Qur'an 61:6, the name Ahmad is not found in the Gospels (Injil). In his reply the Bahá'í Prophet confirms the veracity of the Qur'anic verse referring to Jesus' promise of the advent of Ahmad (=Muhammad) but explains that this prophecy is not recorded in the extant (canonical) New Testament. The New Testament, He states, is only a partial, an incomplete expository record of the divine revelation to Jesus (the Injil).

This statement is confirmed in general and in the realm of principle, by an utterance attributed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá by Julia Grundy, a pilgrim to the Holy Land¹⁹:

Jesus was a dyer by trade. He also lived in Egypt. 'Out of Egypt have I called My Son' (Matt. 2:15; Hos. 11:1) was spoken of Jesus. The fifth Gospel which is considered non-canonical gave [an]other history of Jesus than is contained in the Gospels of the New Testament. There were fifty gospels, but only four were accepted as genuine by the priesthood.

Whether traces or fragments of the revelation to Jesus not preserved in the canonical Gospels have survived in some other form is not a question that is answered either by Bahá'u'lláh or 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Nevertheless, in Bahá'í source texts at least two references are found to non-canonical gospel traditions, the one paraphrased above of which Bahá'u'lláh is the author, and the following anecdote written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá²⁰:

It happened one day in the time of Christ--may the life of the world be a sacrifice unto Him--that He passed by the dead body of a dog, a carcass reeking, hideous, the limbs rotting away. One of

¹⁸Stephen N. Lambden, "Prophecy in the Johannine Farewell Discourse: The Advents of the Paraclete, Ahmad and the Comforter (Mu'azzi)," in *Scripture and Revelation*, ed., Moojan Momen; George Ronald, 1997, p. 89; citing Ishraq Khavari, ed., "Muhádirát," II:365f.

¹⁹Julia Margaret Kunkle Grundy (1874-?), *Ten Days In the Light Of Acca*, published in 1907; revised edition published by BPT-USA, 1979; in the section titled "From the Words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá":

<http://bahai-library.com/books/tendays/>

²⁰Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, #144, p. 169:

<http://www.ibiblio.org/Bahai/Texts/EN/SAB/SAB-144.html>

<http://bahai-library.com/writings/abdulbaha/swab/144.html>

those present said: 'How foul its stench!' And another said: 'How sickening! How loathsome!' To be brief, each one of them had something to add to the list. But then Christ Himself spoke, and He told them: 'Look at that dog's teeth! How gleaming white!'

While references to non-canonical gospel traditions in the Bahá'í texts are few and far between, there is no lack of readily available for our perusal and study. In fact, a vast non-canonical Christian literature often called the pseudepigrapha is in existence, and many of its documents are freely accessible on the internet²¹.

²¹<http://www.swartzentrover.com/cotor/Bible/Bible/A&P/NTA&P/NTA&P.htm>
<http://www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/Scriptures/www.innvista.com/scriptures/pseudep/default.htm>
http://wesley.nnu.edu/biblical_studies/noncanon/
<http://www.gnosis.org/library/cac.htm>
<http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/nhl.html>

JESUS AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

Say: The first and foremost testimony establishing His truth is His own Self. Next to this testimony is His Revelation. For whoso faileth to recognize either the one or the other He hath established the words He hath revealed as proof of His reality and truth. This is, verily, an evidence of His tender mercy unto men. He hath endowed every soul with the capacity to recognize the signs of God. How could He, otherwise, have fulfilled His testimony unto men, if ye be of them that ponder His Cause in their hearts. He will never deal unjustly with any one, neither will He task a soul beyond its power. He, verily, is the Compassionate, the All-Merciful.²²

Bahá'u'lláh attests to the "first and foremost testimony establishing" the prophetic station of the Manifestation of God, reiterated in:

He Who is everlastingly hidden from the eyes of men can never be known except through His Manifestation, and His Manifestation can adduce no greater proof of the truth of His Mission than the proof of His own Person.²³

Hence, one of the values of the New Testament is that it tells the story of the Person Who is its primary protagonist, Jesus of Nazareth. It also recounts the stories of those who came into intimate contact with Jesus, including that implacable enemy who was transformed by a mystical meeting with Him into His most influential advocate, Saul of Tarsus. But when the Manifestation leaves this world, He does not leave Himself as a testimony...He leaves the memory of His actions, and the record of His utterances. Bahá'u'lláh refers to the testimony of Muhammad as follows in Kitáb-i-Iqán:

Muhammad, Himself, as the end of His mission drew nigh, spoke these words: "Verily, I leave amongst you My twin weighty testimonies: The Book of God and My Family." Although many traditions had been revealed by that Source of Prophethood and Mine of divine Guidance, yet He mentioned only that Book, thereby appointing it as the mightiest instrument and surest testimony for the seekers; a guide for the people until the Day of Resurrection.

With unswerving vision, with pure heart, and sanctified spirit, consider attentively what God hath established as the testimony of guidance for His people in His Book, which is recognized as authentic by both the high and lowly. To this testimony we both, as well as all the peoples of the world, must cling, that through its light we may know and distinguish between truth and

²²Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 105-106

²³Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 49

falsehood, guidance and error. Inasmuch as Muhammad hath confined His testimonies to His Book and to His Family, and whereas the latter hath passed away, there remaineth His Book only as His one testimony amongst the people.²⁴

Consider, hath anything else besides the verses been established in the whole Book, as a standard for the recognition of the Manifestations of His Beauty, that the people might cling to, and reject the Manifestations of God? On the contrary, in every instance, He hath threatened with fire those that repudiate and scoff at the verses, as already shown.²⁵

When Jesus passed away, all that remained was “His one testimony amongst the people”, the Gospel, as testified by Bahá’u’lláh in His Writings:

Afterwards, the companions and disciples of Jesus asked Him concerning those signs that must needs signalize the return of His manifestation. When, they asked, shall these things be? Several times they questioned that peerless Beauty, and, every time He made reply, He set forth a special sign that should herald the advent of the promised Dispensation. To this testify the records of the four Gospels.²⁶

These are the melodies, sung by Jesus, Son of Mary, in accents of majestic power in the Ridvan of the Gospel, revealing those signs that must needs herald the advent of the Manifestation after Him. In the first Gospel according to Matthew it is recorded... Similarly, in the three other Gospels, according to Luke, Mark, and John, the same statements are recorded. As We have referred at length to these in Our Tablets revealed in the Arabic tongue, We have made no mention of them in these pages, and have confined Ourselves to but one reference.²⁷

Beside this passage, there is yet another verse in the Gospel wherein He saith: "Heaven and earth shall pass away: but My words shall not pass away."²⁸ Thus it is that the adherents of Jesus maintained that the law of the Gospel shall never be annulled, and that whensoever the promised Beauty is made manifest and all the signs are revealed, He must needs re-affirm and establish the law proclaimed in the Gospel, so that there may remain in the world no faith but His faith. This is their fundamental belief. And their conviction is such that were a person to be made manifest with all the promised signs and to promulgate that which is contrary to the letter

²⁴Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, pp. 201-202

²⁵Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, pp. 219-220

²⁶Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, p. 21

²⁷Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, pp. 24, 25-26

²⁸Gospel of Luke 21:33

of the law of the Gospel, they must assuredly renounce him, refuse to submit to his law, declare him an infidel, and laugh him to scorn.²⁹

Consider now, had the people of the Gospel recognized the meaning of the symbolic terms "sun" and "moon," had they sought, unlike the froward and perverse, enlightenment from Him Who is the Revealer of divine knowledge, they would have surely comprehended the purpose of these terms, and would not have become afflicted and oppressed by the darkness of their selfish desires. Yea, but since they have failed to acquire true knowledge from its very Source, they have perished in the perilous vale of waywardness and misbelief. They still have not awakened to perceive that all the signs foretold have been made manifest, that the promised Sun hath risen above the horizon of divine Revelation, and that the "sun" and "moon" of the teachings, the laws, and learning of a former Dispensation have darkened and set.³⁰

Judge fairly: Were the prophecies recorded in the Gospel to be literally fulfilled; were Jesus, Son of Mary, accompanied by angels, to descend from the visible heaven upon the clouds; who would dare to disbelieve, who would dare to reject the truth, and wax disdainful?³¹

Our purpose in relating these things is to warn you that were they to maintain that those verses wherein the signs referred to in the Gospel are mentioned have been perverted, were they to reject them, and cling instead to other verses and traditions, you should know that their words were utter falsehood and sheer calumny.³²

We have also heard a number of the foolish of the earth assert that the genuine text of the heavenly Gospel doth not exist amongst the Christians, that it hath ascended unto heaven. How grievously they have erred! How oblivious of the fact that such a statement imputeth the gravest injustice and tyranny to a gracious and loving Providence! How could God, when once the Day-star of the beauty of Jesus had disappeared from the sight of His people, and ascended unto the fourth heaven, cause His holy Book, His most great testimony amongst His creatures, to disappear also? What would be left to that people to cling to from the setting of the day-star of Jesus until the rise of the sun of the Muhammadan Dispensation? What law could be their stay and guide? How could such people be made the victims of the avenging wrath of God, the omnipotent Avenger? How could they be afflicted with the scourge of chastisement by the heavenly King? Above all, how could the flow of the grace of the All-Bountiful be stayed? How

²⁹Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán, pp. 27-28

³⁰Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán, pp. 41-42

³¹Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán, pp. 80-81

³²Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 88

could the ocean of His tender mercies be stilled? We take refuge with God, from that which His creatures have fancied about Him! Exalted is He above their comprehension!³³

In another passage of the Gospel it is written³⁴: "And it came to pass that on a certain day the father of one of the disciples of Jesus had died. That disciple reporting the death of his father unto Jesus, asked for leave to go and bury him. Whereupon, Jesus, that Essence of Detachment, answered and said: "Let the dead bury their dead."³⁵

It is also recorded in the Gospel according to St. Luke, that on a certain day Jesus passed by a Jew who was sick of the palsy, and lay upon a couch. When the Jew saw Him, he recognized Him, and cried out for His help. Jesus said unto him: "Arise from thy bed; thy sins are forgiven thee." Certain of the Jews, standing by, protested saying: "Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" And immediately He perceived their thoughts, Jesus answering said unto them: "Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, arise, and take up thy bed, and walk; or to say, thy sins are forgiven thee? that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins."³⁶ This is the real sovereignty, and such is the power of God's chosen Ones! All these things which We have repeatedly mentioned, and the details which We have cited from divers sources, have no other purpose but to enable thee to grasp the meaning of the allusions in the utterances of the chosen Ones of God, lest certain of these utterances cause thy feet to falter and thy heart to be dismayed.³⁷

Moreover, those whom they had formerly known were Moses, the Revealer of the Pentateuch, and Jesus, the Author of the Gospel. Notwithstanding, why did Muhammad say: "When He of Whom they had knowledge came unto them" -- that is Jesus or Moses -- "they disbelieved in Him?" Was not Muhammad to outward seeming called by a different name? Did He not come forth out of a different city? Did He not speak a different language, and reveal a different Law? How then can the truth of this verse be established, and its meaning be made clear?³⁸

Wherefore, O my friend, it behooveth Us to exert the highest endeavour to attain unto that City, and, by the grace of God and His loving-kindness, rend asunder the "veils of glory"; so that, with inflexible steadfastness, we may sacrifice our drooping souls in the path of the New Beloved. We should with tearful eyes, fervently and repeatedly, implore Him to grant us the favour of that grace. That city is none other than the Word of God revealed in every age and

³³Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán, pp. 89-90

³⁴Gospel of Luke 9:60

³⁵Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 119

³⁶Gospel of Luke 5:18-26

³⁷Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán, pp. 133-134

³⁸Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán, pp. 150-151

dispensation. In the days of Moses it was the Pentateuch; in the days of Jesus the Gospel; in the days of Muhammad the Messenger of God the Qur'án; in this day the Bayan; and in the dispensation of Him Whom God will make manifest His own Book -- the Book unto which all the Books of former Dispensations must needs be referred, the Book which standeth amongst them all transcendent and supreme. In these cities spiritual sustenance is bountifully provided, and incorruptible delights have been ordained. The food they bestow is the bread of heaven, and the Spirit they impart is God's imperishable blessing. Upon detached souls they bestow the gift of Unity, enrich the destitute, and offer the cup of knowledge unto them who wander in the wilderness of ignorance. All the guidance, the blessings, the learning, the understanding, the faith, and certitude, conferred upon all that is in heaven and on earth, are hidden and treasured within these Cities.³⁹

Even as the Christian divines who, holding fast to the verse of the Gospel to which We have already referred⁴⁰, have sought to explain that the law of the Gospel shall at no time be annulled, and that no independent Prophet shall again be made manifest, unless He confirmeth the law of the Gospel. Most of the people have become afflicted with the same spiritual disease.⁴¹

As alluded to above, Bahá'u'lláh cited other verses from the Gospels in a treatise revealed in Arabic, and entitled Jawahiru'l-Asrar⁴²:

This is the text of that which was revealed aforetime in the first Gospel, according to Matthew, regarding the signs that must needs herald the advent of the One Who shall come after Him. He saith: "And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days..."⁴³, until the mystic Dove, singing in the midmost heart of eternity, and the celestial Bird, warbling upon the Divine Lote-Tree, saith: "Immediately after the oppression of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet."⁴⁴

In the second Gospel, according to Mark, the Dove of holiness speaketh in such terms: "For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God

³⁹Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Iqán, pp. 199-200

⁴⁰"**Heaven and earth shall pass away: but My words shall not pass away.**" (Gospel of Matthew 24:35; Gospel of Mark 13:31; Gospel of Luke 21:33)

⁴¹Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Iqán, p. 212

⁴²Bahá'u'lláh, Gems of Divine Mysteries, pp. 8-10

⁴³Gospel of Matthew 24:19; Gospel of Mark 13:17; Gospel of Luke 21:23

⁴⁴Gospel of Matthew 24:31

created unto this time, neither shall be."⁴⁵ And it singeth later with the same melodies as before, without change or alteration. God, verily, is a witness unto the truth of My words.

And in the third Gospel, according to Luke, it is recorded: "There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars, and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; and the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, know that the kingdom of God hath drawn nigh."⁴⁶

And in the fourth Gospel, according to John, it is recorded: "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: and ye also shall bear witness."⁴⁷ And elsewhere He saith: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."⁴⁸ And: "But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? But because I have said these things unto you..."⁴⁹ And yet again: "Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."⁵⁰ And: "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come."⁵¹

And should they reply: "The Books that are in the hands of this people, which they call the Gospel and attribute to Jesus, the Son of Mary, have not been revealed by God and proceed not from the Manifestations of His Self", then this would imply a cessation in the abounding grace of Him Who is the Source of all grace. If so, God's testimony to His servants would have remained incomplete and His favour proven imperfect. His mercy would not have shone resplendent, nor would His grace have overshadowed all. For if at the ascension of Jesus His Book had likewise ascended unto heaven, then how could God reprove and chastise the people on the Day of Resurrection, as hath been written by the Imams of the Faith and affirmed by its illustrious divines?⁵²

⁴⁵Gospel of Mark 13:19

⁴⁶Gospel of Matthew 24:30; Gospel of Mark 13:26; Gospel of Luke 21:27

⁴⁷Gospel of John 15:26

⁴⁸Gospel of John 14:26

⁴⁹Gospel of John 16:5

⁵⁰Gospel of John 16:7

⁵¹Gospel of John 16:13

⁵²Bahá'u'lláh, Gems of Divine Mysteries, pp. 12-13

It is recorded in all the Books of the Gospel that He Who is the Spirit spoke in words of pure light unto His disciples, saying: "Know that heaven and earth may pass away, but my words shall never pass away."⁵³ As is clear and evident to thine eminence, these words outwardly mean that the Books of the Gospel will remain in the hands of people till the end of the world, that their laws shall not be abrogated, that their testimony shall not be abolished, and that all that hath been enjoined, prescribed, or ordained therein shall endure forever.

O My brother! Sanctify thy heart, illumine thy soul, and sharpen thy sight, that thou mayest perceive the sweet accents of the Birds of Heaven and the melodies of the Doves of Holiness warbling in the Kingdom of eternity, and perchance apprehend the inner meaning of these utterances and their hidden mysteries. For otherwise, wert thou to interpret these words according to their outward meaning, thou couldst never prove the truth of the Cause of Him Who came after Jesus, nor silence the opponents, nor prevail over the contending disbelievers. For the Christian divines use this verse to prove that the Gospel shall never be abrogated and that, even if all the signs recorded in their Books were fulfilled and the Promised One appeared, He would have no recourse but to rule the people according to the ordinances of the Gospel. They contend that if He were to manifest all the signs indicated in the Books, but decree aught besides that which Jesus had decreed, they would neither acknowledge nor follow Him, so clear and self-evident is this matter in their sight.⁵⁴

In other Writings Bahá'u'lláh likewise refers to the Gospel as the revelation to Jesus:

The followers of the Gospel, likewise, hold as impossible that the Bearer of a new Revelation should again shine forth from the dayspring of the Will of God after Jesus, Son of Mary -- peace be upon Him! In support of this contention, they adduce the following verse from the Gospel: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but the words of the Son of Man shall never pass away."⁵⁵ They maintain that neither the teachings nor the commandments of Jesus -- peace be upon Him! -- may ever be altered.

At one point in the Gospel, He saith: "I go away, and come again."⁵⁶ Again in the Gospel of John, He hath foretold the advent of a Comforter who shall come after Him.⁵⁷ In the Gospel of Luke, moreover, a number of signs and portents have been mentioned. Certain divines of that Faith, however, have interpreted these utterances after their own fancy, and have thus failed to grasp their true significance.

⁵³Gospel of Matthew 24:35; Gospel of Mark 13:31; Gospel of Luke 21:33

⁵⁴Bahá'u'lláh, *Gems of Divine Mysteries*, pp. 17-19

⁵⁵Gospel of Matthew 24:35; Gospel of Mark 13:31; Gospel of Luke 21:33

⁵⁶Gospel of John 14:28

⁵⁷Gospel of John 14:16, 14:26, 15:26, 16:7

O would that thou wouldst permit Me, O Shah, to send unto thee that which would cheer the eyes, and tranquillize the souls, and persuade every fair-minded person that with Him is the knowledge of the Book. Certain persons, incapable of answering the objections raised by their opponents, claim that the Torah and the Gospel have been corrupted, whereas in reality the references to such corruption pertain only to specific cases.⁵⁸⁵⁹

Again, heard ye not that which hath been recorded in the Gospel concerning those "which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"⁶⁰ - that is, those who have been made manifest through the power of God? Wherefore it becometh evident that one may well be manifested in the world of creation who is truly of God, the Almighty, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. How is it then that when word reached you of Our Cause, ye failed to inquire from Our own lips, that ye might distinguish truth from falsehood, discover Our aim and purpose, and learn of the afflictions which We have suffered at the hands of an evil and wayward generation?

O Minister of the King of Paris! Hast thou forgotten the pronouncement recorded in the Gospel according to John concerning the Word and those who are its Manifestations? And hast thou ignored the counsels of the Spirit [Jesus] concerning the Manifestations of the Word, and been numbered with the heedless?⁶¹

The revelation of the Gospel to Jesus of Nazareth is also attested by the Qur'an, the Book revealed to Muhammad:

In the Suratu'l-Imran⁶²:

It is He Who sent down to thee (step by step), in truth, the Book, confirming what went before it; and He sent down Law (of Moses) and the Gospel (of Jesus) before this, as a guide to mankind, and He sent down the Criterion (of judgment between right and wrong).⁶³

Behold! the angels said "O Mary! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a Word from Him: his name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honor in this world and the Hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to Allah.

⁵⁸Note in SLH: Qur'an 4:46; 5:13; 5:41; and 2:75; and the discussion in the Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 84 ff.

⁵⁹Bahá'u'lláh, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, pp. 125-126

⁶⁰Gospel of John 1:13

⁶¹Bahá'u'lláh, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, pp. 191-192

⁶²The Qur'an (Yusuf Ali tr), Surah 3:3; 45-65

⁶³The Qur'an (Yusuf Ali tr), Surah 3:3

"He shall speak to the people in childhood and in maturity, and he shall be (of the company) of the righteous."

She said: "O my Lord! how shall I have a son when no man hath touched me?" He said: "Even so: Allah createth what He willeth; when He hath decreed a plan, He but saith to it 'Be', and it is!

"And Allah will teach him the Book and Wisdom, the Law and the Gospel.

"And (appoint him) a Messenger to the Children of Israel, (with this message): I have come to you, with a sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by Allah's leave; and I heal those born blind, and the lepers, and I quicken the dead, by Allah's leave; and I declare to you what ye eat, and what ye store in your houses. Surely therein is a Sign for you if ye did believe.

"(I have come to you), to attest the Law which was before me, and to make lawful to you part of what was (before) forbidden to you; I have come to you with a Sign from your Lord. So fear Allah, and obey me.

"It is Allah who is my Lord and your Lord; then worship Him. This is a way that is straight."

When Jesus found unbelief on their part he said: "Who will be my helpers to (the work of) Allah?" Said the Disciples: "We are Allah's helpers, we believe in Allah, and do thou bear witness that we are Muslims.

"Our Lord! we believe in what thou hast revealed, and we follow the Messenger; then write us down among those who bear witness."

And (then unbelievers) plotted and planned, and Allah too planned, and the best of planners is Allah.

Behold! Allah said: "O Jesus! I will take thee and raise thee to Myself and clear thee (of the falsehoods) of those who blaspheme; I will make those who follow thee superior to those who reject Faith, to the Day of Resurrection; then shall ye all return unto Me, and I will judge between you of the matters wherein ye dispute.

"As to those who reject faith, I will punish them with terrible agony in this world and in the Hereafter, nor will they have anyone to help.

"As to those who believe and work righteousness, Allah will pay them (in full) their reward; but Allah loveth not those who do wrong.

"This is what We rehearse unto thee of the Signs and the Message of Wisdom."

This similitude of Jesus before Allah is as that of Adam: He created him from dust, then said to him: "Be", and he was.

The truth (comes) from Allah alone; so be not of those who doubt.

If anyone disputes in this matter with thee, now after (full) knowledge hath come to thee, say: "Come! let us gather together, our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves: then let us earnestly pray, and invoke the curse of Allah on those who lie!"

This is the true account: there is no god except Allah; and Allah -- He is indeed the Exalted in Power, the Wise.

But if they turn back, Allah hath full knowledge of those who do mischief.

Say: "O People of the Book! come to common terms as between us and you: that we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than Allah." If then they turn back, say: "Bear witness that we (at least) are Muslims (bowing to Allah's will)."

Ye People of the Book! why dispute ye about Abraham, when the Law and the Gospel were not revealed till after him? Have ye no understanding?

In the Suratu'l-Ma'idah⁶⁴:

And in their footsteps We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Law that had come before him: We sent him the Gospel: therein was guidance and light, and confirmation of the Law that had come before him: a guidance and an admonition to those who fear Allah.

Let the People of the Gospel judge by what Allah hath revealed therein. If any do fail to judge by (the light of) what Allah hath revealed, they are (no better than) those who rebel.

⁶⁴The Qur'an (Yusuf Ali tr), Surah 5:46-47; 66-68; 110-112.

If only they had stood fast by the Law, the Gospel, and all the revelation that was sent to them from their Lord, they would have enjoyed happiness from every side. There is from among them a party on the right course; but many of them follow a course that is evil. O Messenger! proclaim the (Message) which hath been sent to thee from thy Lord. If thou didst not, thou wouldst not have fulfilled and proclaimed His mission: and Allah will defend thee from men (who mean mischief). For Allah guideth not those who reject Faith. Say: "O People of the Book! ye have no ground to stand upon unless ye stand fast by the Law, the Gospel, and all the revelation that has come to you from your Lord." It is the revelation that cometh to thee from thy Lord, that increaseth in most of them their obstinate rebellion and blasphemy. But sorrow thou not over (these) people without Faith.

Then will Allah say: "O Jesus the son of Mary! recount My favor to thee and to thy mother. Behold! I strengthened thee with the holy spirit, so that thou didst speak to the people in childhood and in maturity. Behold! I taught thee the Book and Wisdom, the Law and the Gospel. And behold! thou makest out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, by My leave, and thou breathest into it, and it becometh a bird by My leave, and thou healest those born blind, and the lepers by My leave. And behold! thou bringest forth the dead by My leave. And behold! I did restrain the Children of Israel from (violence to) thee when thou didst show them the Clear Signs, and the unbelievers among them, said: 'This is nothing but evident magic'.

"And behold! I inspired the Disciples to have faith in Me and My Messenger: they said, 'We have faith, and do thou bear witness that we bow to Allah as Muslims.'"

Behold! the disciples said: "O Jesus the son of Mary! can thy Lord send down to us a table set (with viands) from heaven?" Said Jesus: "Fear Allah, if ye have faith."

*In the Suratu'l-A'raf*⁶⁵:

"Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, whom they find mentioned in their own (Scriptures); in the law and the Gospel; for he commands them what is just and forbids them what is evil: he allows them as lawful what is good (and pure) and prohibits them from what is bad (and impure); He releases them from their heavy burdens and from the yokes that are upon them. So it is those who believe in him, honor him, help him, and follow the light which is sent down with him, it is they who will prosper."

*In the Suratu't-Tawbah*⁶⁶:

⁶⁵The Qur'an (Yusuf Ali tr), Surah 7:157

⁶⁶The Qur'an (Yusuf Ali tr), Surah 9:111

Allah hath purchased of the believers their persons and their good; for theirs (in return) is the garden (of Paradise): they fight in His cause, and slay and are slain: a promise binding on Him in truth, through the Law, the Gospel, and the Qur'án: and who is more faithful to his Covenant than Allah? Then rejoice in the bargain which ye have concluded: that is the achievement supreme.

In the Suratu Sad⁶⁷:

Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah; and those who are with him are strong against Unbelievers, (but) compassionate amongst each other. Thou wilt see them bow and prostrate themselves (in prayer), seeking Grace from Allah and (His) Good Pleasure. On their faces are their marks, (being) the traces of their prostration. This is their similitude in the Torah; and their similitude in the Gospel is: like a seed which sends forth its blade, then makes it strong; it then becomes thick, and it stands on its own stem, (filling) the sowers with wonder and delight. As a result, it fills the Unbelievers with rage at him. Allah has promised those among them who believe and do righteous deeds Forgiveness, and a great Reward.

In the Suratu'l-Hadid⁶⁸:

Then, in their wake, We followed them up with (others of) Our messengers: We sent after them Jesus the son of Mary, and bestowed on him the Gospel; and We ordained in the hearts of those who followed him Compassion and Mercy. But the monasticism which they invented for themselves, We did not prescribe for them: (We commanded) only the seeking for the Good pleasure of Allah; but that they did not foster as they should have done. Yet We bestowed, on those among them who believed, their (due) reward, but many of them are rebellious transgressors.

Finally, in the New Testament itself, apart from the titles of the four canonical Gospels, there are references to the Gospel revealed to Jesus of Nazareth --

In the Gospel of Matthew:

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.⁶⁹

⁶⁷The Qur'an (Yusuf Ali tr), Surah 38:29

⁶⁸The Qur'an (Yusuf Ali tr), Surah 57:27

⁶⁹Gospel of Matthew 4:23

And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.⁷⁰

Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.⁷¹

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.⁷²

Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.⁷³

In the Gospel of Mark:

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.⁷⁴

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.⁷⁵

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.⁷⁶

And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.⁷⁷

⁷⁰Gospel of Matthew 9:35

⁷¹Gospel of Matthew 11:2-5

⁷²Gospel of Matthew 24:14

⁷³Gospel of Matthew 26:13

⁷⁴Gospel of Mark 1:1-2

⁷⁵Gospel of Mark 1:14-15

⁷⁶Gospel of Mark 8:35

⁷⁷Gospel of Mark 10:29-30

And the gospel must first be published among all nations.⁷⁸

Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.⁷⁹

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.⁸⁰

In the Gospel of Luke:

And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.⁸¹

Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached.⁸²

And they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel, and healing everywhere.⁸³

And it came to pass, that on one of those days, as he taught the people in the temple, and preached the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes came upon him with the elders, And spake unto him, saying, Tell us, by what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority?⁸⁴

*To summarize then, in the Gospels, as cited in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, and as denominated in the Qur'an and the canonical gospels, are set forth the utterances of Jesus of Nazareth, His divinely-revealed teachings, His "glad tidings". All of these sources refer to His teachings as the Gospel. Only the traditional titles of the canonical gospels denote them as such, with the sole exception of the Gospel according to St. Mark, which begins with these words: **"1:1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God..."** Many attempts have been made to compile the sayings of Jesus, separately from the accounts of His actions and the actions of those*

⁷⁸Gospel of Mark 13:10

⁷⁹Gospel of Mark 14:9

⁸⁰Gospel of Mark 16:15

⁸¹Gospel of Luke 4:17-19

⁸²Gospel of Luke 7:22

⁸³Gospel of Luke 9:6

⁸⁴Gospel of Luke 20:1-2

around Him. Possibly the earliest was the compilation of the **Gospel of Thomas** (attributed to Didymus/Thomas Judas and written, according to contemporary scholars, between 50 and 100 CE). The “logia” (Greek for “sayings”) ⁸⁵ of Jesus cited by early Christian writers including Papias (c. 60-135 CE⁸⁶), reported by Eusebius (c.263-339 CE⁸⁷) have been supposed by many scholars writing in the past century to be the source of the utterances of Jesus reported in the synoptic gospels. While the hypothesis suggesting the existence of “Q” (“Quelle” in German denoting “source”), an urtext collection of logia predating the composition of the synoptic gospels has been in increasing vogue since its first introduction in the 19th century, it has not been universally embraced by scholars. No manuscript copy of such a “Q” has been discovered as of yet. Published collections of logia include *The Complete Sayings of Jesus* (Arthur Hinds, 1927)⁸⁸ and various online lists generated in the past few years. Other compilers have sought to simplify the Gospels, including *The Philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth, extracted from the account of his life and doctrines, as given by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; being an abridgment of the New Testament for the use of the Indians, unembarrassed with matters of fact or faith beyond the level of their comprehension* (Thomas Jefferson, 1803)⁸⁹ and Leo Tolstoy’s *The Gospel in Brief* (Leo Tolstoy, 1883)⁹⁰ Another similar genre were the harmonies of the gospels compiled from the very earliest times, the first of which was probably the **Diatessaron** (c. 150-160 CE⁹¹) of Tatian (c. 120-180 CE⁹²), adopted by the Syriac Church until the 5th century CE. Since the discovery of a nearly complete text of the **Gospel of Thomas** at Nag Hammadi in 1945, and its publication in English translation in 1977⁹³, numerous collections of the sayings of Jesus have appeared, in print and online, including versions with parallel sayings from the canonical gospels, parallel sayings from canonical and non-canonical gospels (including the **Gospel of Thomas**), and parallel sayings from the gospels and the utterances attributed to Lao-Tsu, Buddha and Muhammad.

⁸⁵http://oce.catholic.com/index.php?title=Logia_Jesu

⁸⁶<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papias>

⁸⁷http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eusebius_of_Caesarea

⁸⁸<http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/csj/index.htm>

⁸⁹Published in 1902 under the title *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, and subsequently known as “The Jefferson Bible”.

⁹⁰<http://www.geocities.com/cmcarpenter28/Works/gospel.txt>

⁹¹<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diatessaron>

⁹²<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tatian>

⁹³http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_Thomas

JESUS THE PROMISED ONE – PROPHECIES FULFILLED

The earliest proof that we come into contact with for every new Prophet of God are the prophecies of previous, preceding Prophets which are fulfilled in the manifestation of succeeding Prophets. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stated: "One of the proofs is through the fulfillment of former prophecies...The prophecies deal with dates and symbols which proclaim the end of each dispensation. In former books the conditions are explained concerning subsequent manifestors of the divine plan."⁹⁴ On another occasion He asserted categorically that every Prophet predicted His successor and acknowledged the truth of His predecessor.⁹⁵ Bahá'u'llah in Kitab-i-Iqan (KI) makes several references to this theme which are quoted in full here:

KI:13: ...all the Prophets of God, whenever made manifest unto the peoples of the world, have invariably foretold the coming of yet another Prophet after them, and have established such signs as would herald the advent of the future Dispensation. To this the records of all sacred books bear witness.

KI:17: Those words uttered by the Revealers of the beauty of the one true God, setting forth the signs that should herald the advent of the Manifestation to come...

KI:237: For whatsoever hath come to pass, hath been prophesied by them who are the Mines of divine knowledge, and Recipients of God's eternal law.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá acknowledges however that "those who do not follow closely these things will not be convinced by proofs such as these. This then is not a final proof."⁹⁶ Many people do not pay much attention to prophecies in the Holy Books, let alone to the fine points of their interpretation, and their fulfillment in actual historically-verifiable events and personalities. As real and infallible even as this proof may be, it will not be convincing to many of those who are not familiar with the prophecies. This is a pragmatic statement, and one which might inspire religionists to reconsider the age-old practice of repeating arguments 'ad nauseum' when they obviously are not convincing to many of their listeners simply because they believe them to be true and they want others to believe as they believe.

⁹⁴‘Abdu’l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy (ABDP), p. 43.

⁹⁵‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Star of the West, volume XVI:2, p.434.

⁹⁶‘Abdu’l-Baha on Divine Philosophy, p. 43.

Furthermore, inasmuch as "religious traditions are the report and record of understanding and interpretation of the Book" PUP:22)⁹⁷ and as "this understanding, this interpretation" has been reached through "the analysis of human reason"(PUP:22), and as we have already learned from Him "that human reason is not to be relied upon as an infallible criterion"(PUP:21) then "Inasmuch as the source of traditions and interpretations is human reason, and human reason is faulty, how can we depend upon its findings for real knowledge?"(PUP:22)

What is intended as a proof of the Prophets of God is turned by many into a prime reason for denial of and opposition to the Prophets of God. The essence of the Bahá'í teaching on this matter is this: the only reliable, infallible interpretations of the prophecies are those of the Prophets of God themselves and whomever they may appoint as their spokesmen after their ascension from this world.

PROPHECIES OF THE ZOROASTRIANS

In the Scriptures of the Jewish, Samaritan and Zoroastrian religions, there are prophecies which, according to the Gospels, were fulfilled in the advent of Jesus [Yeshu'a], the Messiah [ha-Mashiakh]. The Zoroastrian eschatology begins with Zarathushtra, continues with Oshetar after a millennium; then Oshetarmah after a second millennium; and finally, Saoshyans, the "Savior" after a third millennium and at the beginning of the fourth millennium. In this scheme, Oshetar seems to correspond to Jesus, who appeared during the first millennium after Zarathushtra. (This information is derived from the "Larousse World Mythology," 1965: pp. 197-198.) Did any Zoroastrians expect the advent of Jesus during His lifetime? We know, from the account preserved in the Gospel of Matthew (2:1-2,7-13), that three wise men (the Magi) made the pilgrimage to Bethlehem, confident that the star they had been following would lead them to the promised One. Who were the Magi? Either they were astrologers, as the text has been rendered in "The New English Bible" (Oxford University/Cambridge University, 1970, p. 4) and in "The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures" (Watch Tower Bible, 1984, p. 1177); or they were Zoroastrians. Neither the New Testament nor the Qur'an or the Bahá'í Writings contain any statement by Jesus or a subsequent Manifestation of God to the effect that Jesus was the promised Oshetar of the Zoroastrians, or that the Magi were Zoroastrians...we cannot be sure, but it seems likely.

PROPHECIES OF THE SAMARITANS

The Samaritan Scriptures are readily available to us--they consist of the five books (chumash or pentateuch) of Moses, called in Hebrew the Torah, in the Samaritan language. That these Scriptures contained prophecies of a Messiah to appear at the epoch of Jesus is attested by the

⁹⁷PUP=The Promulgation of Universal Peace.

existence of a Samaritan claimant to the Messianic station, whose forcible suppression by Pontius Pilatus, in 35 A.D. resulted in his recall to Rome and his retirement from public service. This claimant, called Taheb, and his followers among the Samaritans are described in Flavius Josephus' "The Antiquities of the Jews" (XVIII. iv. 1-2). While we do not know for sure which Scriptural verses this Samaritan claimant cited in support of his Messianic role, nevertheless, there are not many to be found in the Torah. Balaam's prophecy, that "there shall come a Star [כֹּכַב *kochav* in Hebrew; ἄστρον *astron* in Greek] out of Jacob" (Numbers 24:17) is not cited in the New Testament as being fulfilled by Jesus. Out of Jacob came twelve sons, and of these, the progeny ascribed to Menasseh and Ephraim and some of the descendants of Benjamin and Levi came to settle in Samaria after the return of the Israelites (children of Jacob) from Egypt, and also after the Bábylonian captivity under Nebuchadnezzar. Hence, this prophecy could have been fulfilled by a Samaritan, and hence the appeal of this Samaritan claimant for the surrounding population, as well as other claimants who appeared at other times. As a descendant of Judah, another son of Jacob and hence also "out of Jacob". There is a passage in the Gospel of John which seems to indicate that Balaam's prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus, and that at least one Samaritan recognized Him. In the 4th chapter of the Gospel of John we read: ³He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee. ⁴And he must needs go through Samaria. ⁵Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. ⁶Now Jacob's well [here is the specific reference to Jacob] was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour. ⁷There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. ⁸(For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.) ⁹Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. ¹⁰Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. ¹¹The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? ¹²Art thou greater than our father Jacob [*and here the Samaritan woman points to their common descendant, Jacob*], which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle? ¹³Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: ¹⁴But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. [*this passage recalls parallels in the Gospel of John 5:46 and 8:56-58 in which the sublimity of His prophetic station is depicted by Jesus with reference to previous holy men who were regarded, as the Samaritan woman regarded Jacob, as without peer*] ¹⁵The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw. ¹⁶Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. ¹⁷The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: ¹⁸For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly. ¹⁹The woman saith unto him, Sir, I

perceive that thou art a prophet. [*she says this because Jesus demonstrates His divinely endowed knowledge, which she recognizes as only endowed to prophets*] ²⁰ Our fathers worshipped in this mountain [*speaking of Mount Gerizim, which is one of two mountains which loom above Jacob's well, close to the ancient city of Shemchem*]; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. ²¹ Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. ²² Ye worship ye know not what [*Jesus speaks not of Judaic versus Samaritan worship, for otherwise this phrase would not immediately follow His prediction that "ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father...rather He is referring to all worship that does not recognize the Father in the Son Who has appeared, in Him*]: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. [*in Hebrew ha-yehudim, in which Jesus could be referring to Himself as a descendant of Yehudah, one of the sons of Jacob, who settled in the land called Judaea*] ²³ But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. [*Jesus refers to the worship which goes beyond ethnic or national loyalties*] ²⁴ God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. ²⁵ The woman saith unto him, I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. [*the woman knows of Messiah, because Messiah is promised in the Samaritan scriptures, as we shall see, even if few recognized Balaam's prophecy as referring to Messiah*] ²⁶ Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he. [*one of the most direct statements of Jesus that is recorded in which He declares Himself as Messiah*] ²⁷ And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why are You talking with her?" ²⁸ The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, ²⁹ "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" ³⁰ Then they went out of the city and came to Him. [*This story ends here, but presumably the Samaritan men came to Jesus after hearing about Him from the woman. She was the first Samaritan apostle, and, like Mary Magdalene, a woman with a less than sterling past, possessed of five husbands while Mary was possessed of seven demons.*]

While Balaam's prophecy is not cited in the New Testament, and was not recognized by most Christian commentators historically as fulfilled by Jesus, the remarkable correlations between the language of the prophecy and the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob are worthy of our considered examination.

The Messianic promise that is unmistakably found in the Samaritan Scriptures and would be known to the Samaritan woman is God's promise recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy (13:1-5; 18:15,18-22), in which He says "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee" (Deut 18:18). As the Samaritans were descendants of the children of Israel, and hence of their "brethren", this promise was as familiar to Samaritans as it was to Jews. The Samaritan woman whom Jesus met at the well of Jacob asked if He was the promised Messiah, and He replied that He

was. Hence, this can be regarded as a fulfillment of Samaritan prophetic tradition as well as of Jewish scriptural tradition.

PROPHECIES CITED BY JOHN THE BAPTIST

John the Baptist, according to two of the Gospel authors (Matthew and Luke), described signs of the one who was to follow him. Those signs may also indicate the fulfillment of prophecies found in the Hebrew Scriptures. In the Gospel of Matthew (3:11-12), and the Gospel of Luke (3:16-17), John states that "he that cometh after me" will "baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Not only are these prophecies in their own right, but they seem to refer to verses in the Hebrew Scriptures, which John indicated would be fulfilled by his successor. First, the baptism with the Holy Spirit and with fire is referred to in the book of Isaiah (4:4; 44:3), the book of Malachi (3:2-3), and the book of Zechariah (13:9-14:1). In Isaiah (4:4) we read: "When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof **by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning**"; and (44:3): "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour **my spirit upon thy seed**, and my blessing upon thine offspring". In Malachi (3:2-3) we read: "But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' sope: And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and **he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver**, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness." In Zechariah (13:9-14:1) we read: "13:9 And I will bring the third part through the fire, and **will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried**: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God. 14:1 Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee." Second, "gather his wheat into the garner" is found in the book of Micah (4:12): "for he shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor." Third, "he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" is also found in the book of Malachi (4:1): "For behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch."

Closely associated with these prophecies are other verses that are worthy of note. Just prior to the first cited prophetic verse in Isaiah (4:4) we read: "4:2 In that day shall the branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel." Also preceding the second prophetic verse cited in Malachi (3:2-3) we read: "3:1 Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the LORD, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in:

behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts." In Zechariah (14:4) we read: "14:4 And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south." Not surprisingly, Christian commentators through the centuries have identified Jesus as the "branch of the Lord" (also referred to in the book of Jeremiah 2:5-6), as "the Lord...the messenger of the covenant" and John the Baptist as the "messenger" of the Lord, who "shall prepare the way before me", and have noted that the feet of Jesus did indeed stand "upon the mount of Olives" and that an earthquake occurred upon His crucifixion.

PROPHECIES CITED BY JESUS

Did Jesus indicate that He fulfilled prophecies at all? In the Gospel of Matthew (13:17), Jesus is reported to have said: "That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." This verse is susceptible of at least two interpretations: it may indicate that prophets and righteous men have been endowed with foresight, and have thus wished to see and hear Jesus; it may affirm that prophets and righteous men would have wished to see and hear Jesus, but are unable to do so because they died prior to His advent--both meanings are possible, and perhaps both are intended. When He is arrested, Jesus indicates that He could save Himself "But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" (26:54) The author of the Gospel of Matthew states that "all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." (26:56) This recalls His statement, included in the famous sermon on the mount (5:17): "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill." Jesus comes to fulfill prophecy, not to destroy faith in the Prophets. Likewise, Jesus comes to spiritualize the law, not to destroy the divine commandments. He continues, in the same sermon (5:19-20): "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." In the Gospel of Mark (14:49), Jesus is reported to have said at His arrest: "I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the scriptures must be fulfilled." In the Gospel of Luke (24:27), Jesus is reported to have spoken of the prophecies of His own advent after His own resurrection: "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself...And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me." In the Gospel of John (1:45) it is written: "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of

Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Inasmuch as none of the Gospel authors have preserved any of references made by Jesus to specific prophecies "in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms" we can only guess. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus tells a story about a conversation between a rich man in hell and Abraham in heaven, in which the rich man asks Abraham to send a special messenger to his five brethren; Jesus continues (16:29-31): "Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." This refers as much to prophecies as to laws, for it indicates that the counsel of God is sufficient, in any age, to guide souls to holy conduct--if they will only listen, and obey. In the Gospel of John (5:39,45-47), Jesus refers in general fashion to His fulfillment of prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures: "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me...Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" In IV.(xx) we will consider where in the Torah, the books of Moses, reference is made to Jesus the Messiah.

As for the specific prophecies He is reported to have cited in support of His own claims, we will consider them in the order of their appearance in the Gospels, beginning with the Gospel of Matthew.

(1)First, in the Gospel of Matthew (16:21, 17:22-23, 20:18-19), Jesus said that He must fulfill certain conditions, including his persecution by the Jewish elders, his martyrdom, and his resurrection after three days. This same is found in the Gospel of Mark (8:31; 9:12; 9:31; 10:33-34; 15:1,16); Luke (9:22,44; 17:25; 18:31-33; 23:1; 24:6,7); John (18:28). It is not clear in the text of any of these Gospels whether or not these conditions were spelled out in the Hebrew Scriptures, whether they were found in some other traditional source, or whether they were simply conditions which He spoke of in connection with His ministry, prophecies of His own fate rather than fulfillments of the prophecies of earlier Prophets. In the Gospel of Matthew (12:38), Jesus is asked to give a "sign" of His station. He replies (12:39-40) making reference to His resurrection after three days, and comparing it to the three days and nights which the prophet Jonas (Jonah 1:17) spent "in the bowels of the fish". Later in the same Gospel (16:4), Jesus refers to the same "sign". After His death, according to the Gospel of Matthew (27:63), a group of priests and Pharisees, recalling Jesus' prophecy that He would rise after the third day of His entombment, asked that His tomb be sealed and that a guard be posted (27:64), and Pilate did as they requested (27:65-66). In the Gospel of Luke (11:29-32), Jesus states that "This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet." However, in in this case, "the sign of Jonas" seems to have an entirely different significance. He says (11:30) that "as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites,

so shall also the Son of man be to this generation." It was not anything that Jonas did which was a sign, as in the Gospel of Matthew, but rather Jonas himself is a sign of God to the Ninevites. Consequently (11:32), "The men of Nineve shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here."

(2)Second, in the Gospel of Matthew (11:3-6), two of the disciples of John encounter Jesus and ask Him "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" (11:3) To this question Jesus replied "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me." (11:4-6) Jesus knew that John would recognize His Messianic station from these signs. Would John recognize this by his knowledge of prophecy, or by his divinely-endowed direct knowledge? There were Scriptural prophecies which these actions would have fulfilled: a)"the blind shall receive their sight" fulfills Isaiah (29:18; 35:5); b)"the lame walk" fulfills Isaiah (35:6); c)"the lepers are cleansed" does not seem to have been specifically predicted by any prophet--however, Moses (Num 12:13-14) and Elijah (2 Kings 5:8-14) ask the Lord to effect the miraculous cure of leprosy, and, in both cases, cures are effected; d)"the deaf hear" fulfill Isaiah (29:18; 35:5); e)"the dead are raised up" was also not predicted by any prophet, but Elijah (1 Kings 17:21-22) prayed to the Lord to revive a widow's son and her son was brought back to life; and contact with Elisha's bones, after this prophet had died, caused a man to be resurrected from the dead (2 Kings 13:21)--hence, this is one of the signs of the Prophet of God; f)"the poor have the gospel preached to them" fulfills Isaiah (61:1). g)"Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me" recalls Isaiah (8:14-15), for it alludes to the fact that "he shall be for a sanctuary"--hence, "blessed is he"--"but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel" and hence "many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken" which is fulfilled by the reception of Jesus by the Jewish people of Palestine, and His comment in the Gospel of Matthew that "for many be called, but few chosen" (20:16) and "many are called, but few are chosen" (22:14). This same anecdote is reported in the Gospel of Luke (7:19-23), where it is indicated that John actually sent these two disciples to Jesus, as his emissaries. The author of this Gospel also follows this story (7:26-27) with that reported here in IV.(3).

(3)Third, while John may well have been acquainted, as were many other Jews of his time and of all times, with the Scriptural verses which must be fulfilled by the promised Messiah, even more significant is Jesus' statement regarding the station of John (11:9-10; also Luke 7:26-27): "But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee." It is evident that Jesus is quoting Malachi (3:1): "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he

shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant; behold, he shall come, said the Lord of hosts." In identifying John as "my messenger" and that "he shall prepare the way before me" Jesus is also clearly indicating that He is "the Lord, whom ye seek" and that He is also "the messenger of the covenant". In the Gospel of Mark (1:2) we find this same citation from the prophet Malachi (3:1), "As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee" followed by a citation from the prophet Isaiah (40:3). In the Gospel of Luke (1:17), an angel announced to Zacharias the birth of his son John, indicating that he is "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord"; this may be a reference to this same verse of the prophet Malachi. It may refer also to the verse of the prophet Isaiah (40:3). These citations are further discussed in V.(6), inasmuch as they are related by Gospel authors but not attributed to Jesus.

(4)Fourth, in the Gospel of Matthew (11:14), Jesus describes John in another manner, explaining "And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come." In a later chapter of the same Gospel (17:11-12), Jesus says "Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whosoever they listed." In the Gospel of Mark (9:11-13), we find the same story, but only in the Gospel of Matthew (17:13) does the author report that "Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist." In the Gospel of Luke (1:17), it is not Jesus but an angel speaking to Zacharias and announcing the birth of his son John, who says "he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias..." As in the citation regarding the "messenger" who must precede the "Lord," these references point to a prophetic verse in the book of the prophet Malachi (4:5): "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus punctuates this claim with these words (11:15), "He hath ears to hear, let him hear" which recalls Isaiah (29:18; 35:5). Hence, Jesus also alludes to His advent signaling "the great and dreadful day of the Lord".

(5)Fifth, Jesus indicates that the spiritual blindness and deafness of most of His generation is in fulfillment of Isaiah (6:9; recalling other verses cited above), indicating that "this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed" (13:13-15).

(6)Sixth, Jesus calls the scribes and Pharisees "hypocrites" and says "well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." (15:7-9) We find the same statement of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark (7:6-7). In doing so, Jesus is citing Isaiah (29:13-14), which reads as follows: "Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: Therefore, behold, I will

proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid."

(7)Seventh, Jesus cites a prophecy when confronted by angry priests and scribes in the Temple, who disapproved of His favoring children, the blind and the lame (21:14-15): "have ye never read, Out of the mouth of Babies and sucklings thou has perfected praise?" This may be a citation from Psalms (8:2): "Out of the mouth of Babies and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger." However, it may represent another text which has yet to be identified.

(8)Eighth, Jesus says to the priests and elders in the Temple, "Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?" (21:42) This same citation is attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of Mark (12:10-11), and the Gospel of Luke (20:17). The citation is a direct and exact quote from Psalms (118:22-23): "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes."

(9)Ninth, Jesus asks the Pharisees whose son the Messiah is, to which they answer that Messiah is the son of David; to which He asks why, if Messiah is his son, David refers to Messiah as "Lord" (22:41), citing from Psalms (110:1): "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." This same citation is noted in the Gospel of Mark (12:35-37). While many among the Jewish populace, according to the testimony of the Gospels, have identified Jesus as the son of David, He does not seem to have payed much attention to this designation. There were many prophecies which He fulfilled which had nothing to do with the promised Messiah son of David.

(10)Tenth, at the last supper, on the first day of Passover, Jesus said "The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born." (26:24) An almost identical story is found in the Gospel of Mark (14:21) and the Gospel of Luke (22:22). In the first part of this statement, Jesus makes reference to a prophecy. This may be a reference to that prophecy which has been described in III.(1). The entirety of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah seems to be fulfilled by Jesus, and He may have been making reference to this chapter here. However, there is another prophecy which is much more specific, in the book of the prophet Daniel. Daniel writes (9:25-26): "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the

sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate." Many commentators indicate that these verses predict the time of the advent, and the time of the martyrdom of the Messiah, as well as the ceasing of the sacrifice and the oblation at the Temple, and the abomination and desolation of the Temple. According to this prophecy, the Messiah was to be cut off (killed), then another people was to destroy the city and sanctuary of Jerusalem, and the end of the war was to be desolation. Jesus was martyred c. 33 C.E., the Roman legions destroyed the city and sanctuary of Jerusalem c. 70 C.E., and at the end of its war with the Jewish Zealots, thousands of Judaeans, Galileans and other Israelites had been killed, villages destroyed, a nation uprooted. When Jews in the diaspora rebelled against the Roman government c. 115-117 C.E., they were ruthlessly suppressed, in Cyprus and Egypt. Shim'on bar Kochba led another revolt, in c. 132-135 C.E., and once more the Jewish forces were vanquished by the Roman legions. This time, the Emperor Hadrian rebuilt Jerusalem as a pagan city, prohibited Jews from coming near this new city, forbade circumcision, the observance of the Sabbath, the meeting of the elders, and study and teaching of the Torah. A more literal fulfillment of the prophetic verses of Daniel is hard to imagine.

(11)Eleventh, at the last supper Jesus cited another prophecy, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." (26:31) This same verse is found in the Gospel of Mark (14:27). This is a clear reference to Zechariah (13:7): "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones. And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the Lord, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein." This seems to apply to the immediate followers of Jesus--that after His martyrdom, two thirds would fall away, and only one third would remain firm in their faith. When Peter states that he will never backslide (26:33,35), Jesus assures Peter that he will deny his Lord three times on that very night, before the cock crows at daybreak (26:34); and this prophecy is fulfilled (26:69-75), demonstrating that no one knows what his own end will be, no one but God and whomsoever He informs.

(12)Twelfth, when arrested, Jesus orders one of His disciples, who has taken up a sword to protect Him, to cease and desist (26:51-53), indicating that He can call down divine protection, "But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" This seems to be a reference to the prophecies in the books of Isaiah and Daniel, cited earlier.

(13)Thirteenth, in the Gospel of Luke (4:17-21), it is reported that Jesus entered a synagogue, read a passage from the book of Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (4:18-19) and that He then stated to the assembled, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." The passage cited is indeed from the book of Isaiah (61:1-2): "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn". The expression "acceptable year of the Lord" refers to the jubilee year, the fiftieth year, described in the book of Leviticus (25:10-15), which proclaims "liberty throughout all the land" (Lev 25:10). In the book of Jeremiah reference is made to "a covenant with all the people which were at Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty unto them" (34:8) which is related to the "covenant" which the Lord made "with your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (34:13), which "covenant" this generation renewed "before me in the house which is called by my name" (34:15) but which was violated, when they "caused every man his servant, and every man his handmaid, whom he had set at liberty at their pleasure, to return, and brought them into subjection..." Hence, this "covenant" of the jubilee year was renewed by the prophet Jeremiah. The "day of the vengeance of our God" is also found in two other chapters and verses of the book of Isaiah (34:8): "For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion"; and (63:4): "For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come." This "day" is also called "the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Malachi 4:5); "the great and terrible day of the Lord" (Joel 2:31); "the day of the Lord" (Amos 5:18; Obadiah 15; Zechariah 14:1); "the great day of the Lord" (Zephaniah 1:14); "the day of the Lord's wrath" (Zephaniah 1:18); "the day of the Lord's anger" (Zephaniah 2:2).

(14)Fourteenth, in the Gospel of Luke (10:1), it is reported that Jesus appointed seventy apostles, and that they returned to Him, saying (10:17), "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name." Jesus replied to them with what seems to be a verse from the Hebrew Scriptures (10:18): "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." He then continued, saying (10:19), "Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you." This seems to be a reference to Isaiah (14:12): "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!" In the book of Isaiah, this is addressed to "the king of Bábylon" (14:4), and it continues as follows (14:13-15): "For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou

shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit." If Jesus refers to this verse, then it seems that He points to worldly powers rather than supernatural spirits. If He does not refer to this verse, then it is not found among the canonical Hebrew Scriptures. In the Gospel of John, "the prince of this world" (12:31; 16:11) may be the same as "Satan" in the Gospel of Luke. In the Gospel of John, "now shall the prince of this world be cast out" (12:31), and "the prince of this world is judged" (16:11).

(15)Fifteenth, in the Gospel of Luke (12:49-50), Jesus states the purpose of His coming: "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? but I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" He seems to be referring to His fulfillment of the prophecies of John, His predecessor, discussed in III.(1). But, as we have noted earlier, the prophecies of John seem to have referred to signs of the Messianic advent in the Hebrew Scriptures. Please refer to III.(1) for the specific references in those Scriptures. Jesus continues (12:51-52) with: "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law." This most likely refers to the book of the prophet Micah (7:6): "For the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter in law against her mother in law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house." That Jesus taught His disciples that His message would inevitably cause division is reported also in the Gospel of Matthew (10:21,35) and the Gospel of Luke (21:16). In the Gospel of John (7:43; 9:16; 10:19), three instances are reported, in which it is said that Jesus caused division among His associates. Many other divisive incidents could be found in the Gospels.

(16)Sixteenth, in the Gospel of Luke (18:31), Jesus said to the twelve disciples: "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished." There are many prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures to which He must have been making reference here. Among them are, perhaps, those found in the twenty-second Psalm, and the fifty-third chapter of the book of Isaiah.

(17)Seventeenth, as we have read earlier, in the Gospel of John (5:46) Jesus says: "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me." Where in the Torah is there a verse which could have been fulfilled by Jesus? It appears that this verse is found in the Book of Deuteronomy:

"The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken..."I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren,

like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.

"And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him. "But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not command him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. "And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? "When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him." (Deuteronomy 18:15,18-22)

PROPHECIES CITED BY THE AUTHORS OF THE GOSPELS

We will now turn, in the second place, to the prophecies cited by the authors of the Gospels to have been fulfilled by Jesus. Sometimes the authors cite their sources, sometimes not; usually they quote the versions of the verses which are available to them, but sometimes they make allusion to such verses, and seem to assume that their readers are familiar with the appropriate citations.

(1)First, the author refers to the miraculous birth of Jesus (1:22-23), "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." This is a verse from the book of Isaiah (7:14): "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." Just preceding this are verses which this being a sign of the Lord to the house of David (7:13-14): "Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign..." It seems likely, in the textual context of this citation, that the author regards this verse as predicting the advent of Jesus, "God with us," and also as predicting His miraculous birth from a virgin mother.

(2)Second, a verse is cited by this author (2:5-6) which is stated to have been "written by the prophet" but the prophet is not named, and the citation has not been identified by editors and translators; it pertains to the place of Jesus' birth: "And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes, of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel." Inasmuch as this verse has not been discovered either in the Hebrew Masoretic text or in the Greek Septuagint text, it seems likely that the author of this Gospel had access to a text which preserved a prophetic statement lost to posterity.

(3)Third, the next citation (2:15) pertains to the sojourn of Jesus and His parents in Egypt, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called

my son." This is clearly a citation from Hosea (11:1): "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." In the context of the verses which follow this, it is clear that Hosea was referring to the children of Israel as a whole, not to a specific son of God who called called out of Egypt.

(4)Fourth, the author then writes (2:17-18) that Herod's order to kill the newborn boys in Bethlehem fulfilled "that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not." This verse in Jeremiah (31:15) indicates that the children of Israel are mourning, while the Lord calls them to (31:16,17) "Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord...there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border." It seems then that Rachel is not bemoaning the killing of her children, but their exile from the land of Israel; and that the Lord promises her that her children will return from their exile.

(5)Fifth, this author claims (2:23) that Jesus dwelt in Nazareth, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene." The verses which the editors have cited (Judges 13:5; 1 Sam 1:11) refer to Samson the Nazirite, and not to a Nazarene. Inasmuch as the Hebrew for Nazarene is "Notsri"--which is probably from the root "netser" (sprout)--this may be a reference to a verse from Isaiah (11:1): "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch [netser] shall grow out [yifreh] of his roots [misharashaiv]"; however, this verse makes not reference to a resident of the town named Nazareth [Natsereh]. Perhaps this prophecy is also missing in the Masoretic and Septuagint texts.

(6)Sixth, the author cites a prophecy fulfilled by John, and in so doing he points to its fulfillment also by Jesus. Speaking of John (3:3, "For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." This is Isaiah (40:3): "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." For even as John was to prepare "the way of the Lord" so also Jesus was, according to His own indications, the "Lord" whose way was being prepared by John. This same verse is cited in the Gospel of Mark (1:3), the Gospel of Luke (3:4-6), and the Gospel of John (1:23). Also, there seems to be a reference to this verse in the promise of the angel to Zacharias, that his son John will "make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Gospel of Luke 1:17).

(7)Seventh, in the Gospel of Matthew (4:6), and in the Gospel of Luke (4:9-11), the author reports that Satan quoted Scripture, "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time

thou dash thy foot against a stone." This is a citation from the Psalms (91:11-12): "For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone."

(8)Eighth, the travels of Jesus in Israel are regarded (4:14-16) as prophesied in Isaiah (9:1,2). The portion of Isaiah cited--"The land of Zebulun, and the land of Naphtholim, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up"--seems to fit Jesus; but when we include the verses immediately preceding and following this citation (Isaiah 9:1-4), it seems to have an entirely different meaning: "Nevertheless, the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did he more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian."

(8)Eighth, Jesus "cast out devils with his word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." (8:16-17) In Isaiah (53:4) this verse reads "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did not esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." This makes no mention of healing sicknesses or casting out demons. Indeed, this portrait seems to be generalized to all the Prophets of God. Furthermore, rather than identifying Jesus with the "Branch" or "shoot" [netzer] (Isaiah 11:1, cited earlier), this verse would associate Him with "root" [shoresh], inasmuch as the second verse of the same chapter (53:2), referring to the same person, states "he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root [vekashoresh] out of a dry ground" making it the less likely that this prophecy relates specifically to Jesus.

(9)Ninth, according to the author of this Gospel, Jesus asked those who received His teachings and His healing not to make this public (12:17-21), "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust." This citation is from book of Isaiah (Isaiah 42:1-4). Beginning with the third verse (42:3-7), we cite the following passage, which will give an expanded context to the citation found in the Gospel: "A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench:

he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law. Thus saith God the Lord, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out: he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein: I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house." It was evident to the author of the Gospel of Matthew, that Jesus fulfilled all of these verses. In the Gospel of Luke (2:32), Simeon sees Jesus in the Temple and recognizes Him as "A light to lighten the Gentiles..." The phrase "a light to lighten the Gentiles" is found in three separate verses of the book of Isaiah (42:6; 49:6; 60:3). There is an allusion to the same theme in a fourth verse of the book of Isaiah (9:2), cited above, in III.(7).

(10)Tenth, Jesus spoke in parables to the masses (13:35), "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world." It is not clear which Prophet the author is citing. The verse which bears the greatest similarity to this citation is from Psalms (78:2): "I will open my mouth in parable: I will utter dark sayings of old" which continues (78:4) "Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done." This next verse entirely contradicts the second half of the verse cited by the author.

(11)Eleventh, Jesus sent two of His disciples to fetch an ass and a colt (21:4-5), and "all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass." This appears to be a quotation from Zechariah (9:9), which reads: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." The context of this verse in the ninth chapter of Zechariah seems to be appropriate for such a citation to apply to a Messianic contender.

(12)Twelfth, Judas returned the thirty pieces of silver to the priests, and they purchased a potter's field therewith. "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; And gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me." There is apparently no such verse in the book of Jeremiah, but, in the book of Zechariah (11:12-13), we read: "And I said

unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord."

(13)Thirteenth, when Jesus is crucified, the Roman soldiers (27:35) "parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots." The same is recorded in the Gospel of John (19:23-24). The citation is from Psalms (22:18): "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture." It is not clear why the author of the Gospel of Matthew should have chosen this verse until we come to his account of the last words of Jesus, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (27:46). This is a direct quote from the first verse of the same Psalm (22:1): "Eli, Eli, lama 'azavTanii." In the Gospel of Mark (15:24) and the Gospel of Luke (23:34), the casting of lots for the garments of Jesus is reported, but without either of these authors indicating that this action fulfilled a specific prophecy. The Gospel of Mark (15:34) reports these as the final words of Jesus. However, the Gospel of Luke (23:46) indicates that His last words were "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" while the Gospel of John indicates that His last words were "It is finished" (19:30).

(14)Fourteenth, in the Gospel of Mark (15:27-28), it is alleged that Jesus was crucified with "two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors." In the Gospel of Luke (22:37) we find a similar citation, but in a completely different context. In both cases it seems to refer to the book of Isaiah (53:12): "and he was numbered with the transgressors" which continues "and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

(15)Fifteenth, in a number of cases (Gospel of Matthew 9:27; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9,15; Gospel of Mark 11:47-48; Gospel of Luke 1:32; 2:4; 18:38,39), Jesus is called "son of David" and these seem to be references to "Mashiakh ben David"--promised in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the Aramaic Talmud. His lineage, through His adopted father, Joseph, back to King David, is depicted in the Gospel of Matthew (1:1-17) and the Gospel of Luke (3:23-38). In the Gospel of Luke (1:32, 69), it is reported that an angel promised Mary that her son would be given "the throne of his father David"; and that Zacharias, upon the birth of his son John, was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied of Jesus, calling him "an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David". Both are references to Mashiakh ben David. Mashiakh ben David is mentioned in 2 Samuel 7:11; Psalms 132:11; Isaiah 9:6-7, 16:5; Jeremiah 23:5. In another context, in the Gospel of Matthew (22:42), Jesus asks a group of Pharisees whose son the Messiah is, and they reply that the Messiah is the son of David; He then cites a passage from the Psalms (110:1), and asks them why David calls the Messiah "Lord" if He is his son (22:43-45). This is further discussed above, in III.(9).

(16)Sixteenth, in the Gospel of Luke (1:32-33), the angel who announces to Mary the birth of her son Jesus states that "the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." This statement would have no meaning were it not in fulfillment of specific prophecies to be found in the Hebrew Scriptures. Such prophecies may be found in the books of Daniel (2:44; 7:14,27), Obadiah (21), and Micah (4:7). While they are not cited here either by name or by text, it is assumed that the reader is familiar with these prophecies, and others of a similar character.

PRECEPT BY PRECEPT:
THE TEACHINGS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

THE PREACHING OF JOHN

The preaching of John is described in all of the canonical Gospels: the Gospel of Matthew (3:1-14), the Gospel of Mark (1:4-8), the Gospel of Luke (3:1-18), and the Gospel of John (1:15-35). We will examine each of His precepts individually and as interpreted in Bahá'í texts. Both Bahá'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Bahá refer to the preaching of John the Baptist:

Moreover, in the heavenly Scriptures it is written: "John the Baptist was preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye: for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand." By John is meant Yahya.⁹⁸

John, son of Zacharias, said what My Forerunner hath said: "Saying, repent ye, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand..."⁹⁹

The principle of baptism is purification by repentance. John admonished and exhorted the people, and caused them to repent; then he baptized them. Therefore, it is apparent that this baptism is a symbol of repentance from all sin: its meaning is expressed in these words: "O God! as my body has become purified and cleansed from physical impurities, in the same way purify and sanctify my spirit from the impurities of the world of nature, which are not worthy of the Threshold of Thy Unity!" Repentance is the return from disobedience to obedience. Man, after remoteness and deprivation from God, repents and undergoes purification: and this is a symbol signifying "O God! make my heart good and pure, freed and sanctified from all save Thy love."¹⁰⁰

Reflect, also, that baptism in the days of John the Baptist was used to awaken and admonish the people to repent from all sin, and to watch for the appearance of the Kingdom of Christ. But at present in Asia, the Catholics and the Orthodox Church plunge newly born children into water mixed with olive oil, and many of them become ill from the shock; at the time of baptism they struggle and become agitated. In other places, the clergy sprinkle the water of baptism on the forehead. But neither from the first form nor from the second do the children derive any spiritual benefit. Then what result is obtained from this form? Other peoples are amazed and wonder why

⁹⁸Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitab-i-Iqan*, pp. 64-65

⁹⁹Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 158

¹⁰⁰'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 91

the infant is plunged into the water, since this is neither the cause of the spiritual awakening of the child, nor of its faith or conversion, but it is only a custom which is followed. In the time of John the Baptist it was not so; no, at first John used to exhort the people, and to guide them to repentance from sin, and to fill them with the desire to await the manifestation of Christ. Whoever received the ablution of baptism, and repented of sins in absolute humility and meekness, would also purify and cleanse his body from outward impurities. With perfect yearning, night and day, he would constantly wait for the manifestation of Christ, and the entrance to the Kingdom of the Spirit of God.¹⁰¹

The first words attributed to John in the canonical Gospels are cited here, in the order of their placement in the New Testament:

3:1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, 3:2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. 3:3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 3:4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. 3:5 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, 3:6 And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. 3:7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 3:8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: 3:9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. 3:10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. 3:11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance. but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: 3:12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. 3:13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. 3:14 But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? 3:15 And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. 3:16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove,

¹⁰¹Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 94-95

and lighting upon him: 3:17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, **This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.** (Gospel of Matthew)

1:4 John did baptize in the wilderness, and **preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.** 1:5 And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. 1:6 And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey; 1:7 And preached, saying, **There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose.** 1:8 **I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.** 1:9 And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. 1:10 And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: 1:11 And there came a voice from heaven, saying, **Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.** (Gospel of Mark)

3:3 And he came into all the country about Jordan, **preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;** 3:4 As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 3:5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; 3:6 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God. 3:7 Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, **O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 3:8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.** 3:9 **And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.** 3:10 And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? 3:11 He answereth and saith unto them, **He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.** 3:12 Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? 3:13 And he said unto them, **Exact no more than that which is appointed you.** 3:14 And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, **Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.** 3:15 And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not; 3:16 John answered, saying unto them all, **I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of**

wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. 1:24 And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. 1:25 And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet? 1:26 John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; 1:27 He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. 1:28 These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing. 1:29 The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. 1:30 This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. 1:31 And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. 1:32 And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. 1:33 And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. 1:34 And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God. 1:35 Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; 1:36 And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! 1:37 And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. (Gospel of John)

In the Gospel of Matthew (3:3), and the Gospel of John (1:23), John the Baptist refers to Himself as “**he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias**” and “**as said the prophet Esaias**”. This correlation is reiterated as well in the Gospel of Mark (3:4-6). It refers to the following passage from the Book of Isaiah [Esaias in Greek]:

40:1 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. 40:2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins. 40:3 **The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.** 40:4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: 40:5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

In K̄itab-i-Iqan, referring to the principle that every Manifestation of God is heralded by a human being, and citing the herald of Jesus:

Moreover, in the heavenly Scriptures it is written: "John the Baptist was preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye: for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand." [Matthew 3:1-2] By John is meant Yahya. (Bahá'u'llah, *The Kitáb-i-Iqán*, pp. 64-65)

In the Lawh-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'llah refers to the Báb alluding to these verses from the Book of Isaiah and to the fulfillment thereof by John the Baptist, whom He compares to His forerunner:

Say, did ye not hearken to the **Voice of the Crier, calling aloud in the wilderness of the Bayan**, bearing unto you the glad-tidings of the coming of your Lord, the All-Merciful? Lo! He is come in the sheltering shadow of Testimony, invested with conclusive proof and evidence, and those who truly believe in Him regard His presence as the embodiment of the Kingdom of God. Blessed is the man who turneth towards Him, and woe betide such as deny or doubt Him. (Bahá'u'llah, *Tablets of Bahá'u'llah*, p. 12)

In the Tablet entitled Ishraqat He likewise alludes to these two texts:

Verily, the **Crier hath cried out, when the promised time came, and they that have recognized the splendours of Sinai have swooned away in the wilderness of hesitation**, before the awful majesty of thy Lord, the Lord of creation. (Bahá'u'llah, *Tablets of Bahá'u'llah*, p. 118)

Bahá'u'llah refers to "wilderness" in two different ways—one to denote a place that is not settled and tamed and domesticated by humans, and the other to refer to a state of human consciousness that is oblivious of the divine teachings and which is consequently "lost" and "heedless". In The Kitáb-i-Iqán He refers to the first of these meanings, whilst in the other citations He refers to the other meaning.

John the Baptist compares Himself to the one He heralds: he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: (Matthew 3:11); There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. (Mark 1:7); I one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: (Luke 3:16); There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. (John 1:7)

Bahá'u'llah refers to the fulfillment of this prophecy in Epistle to the Son of the Wolf:

John, son of Zacharias, said what My Forerunner hath said: "Saying, repent ye, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He that cometh after Me is mightier than I, Whose shoes I am not worthy to bear." Wherefore, hath My Forerunner, as a sign of submissiveness and humility, said: "The whole of the Bayan is only a leaf amongst the leaves of His Paradise." And likewise, He saith: "I am the first to adore Him, and pride Myself on My kinship

with Him." And yet, O men, the people of the Bayan¹⁰² have acted in such a manner that Dhi'l-Jawshan¹⁰³, and Ibn-i-Anas¹⁰⁴, and Asbahi¹⁰⁵ have sought and still seek refuge with God against such deeds. This Wronged One hath, in the face of all religions, busied Himself day and night with the things that are conducive unto the exaltation of the Cause of God, whereas those men have clung unto that which is the cause of humiliation and injury.¹⁰⁶

In the Gospel of John (3:25-36), John speaks more freely about the theological significance of His successor:

3:25 Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying.
 3:26 And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him. 3:27 John answered and said, **A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.** 3:28 **Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him.** 3:29 **He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.** 3:30 **He must increase, but I must decrease.** 3:31 **He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all.** 3:32 **And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony.** 3:33 **He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true.** 3:34 **For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.** 3:35 **The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.** 3:36 **He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.**

Bahá'u'llah expresses the same principle—"He must increase, but I must decrease"—citing the words of the Báb:

And likewise, He saith: "Suffer not yourselves to be shut out as by a veil from God after He hath revealed Himself. For all that hath been exalted in the Bayan is but as a ring upon My hand, and I Myself am, verily, but a ring upon the hand of Him Whom God shall make manifest -- glorified be

¹⁰²Bahá'u'lláh is referring here to the followers of Mirza Yahya, instigated by Siyyid Muhammad Isfahani, who opposed Him when He made His claim to be "Him Whom God shall make manifest", the Promised One of the Bab.

¹⁰³Dhi'l-Jawshan: Samir bin Dhi al-Jawshan, led the cavalry and archers arrayed against the Imam Husayn: <http://www.islamfrominside.com/Pages/Articles/Ashura.html>

¹⁰⁴Ibn-i-Anas: Sinan bin Anas al-Nakha'i, stabbed the Imam Husayn with a spear and killed him: <http://www.islamfrominside.com/Pages/Articles/Ashura.html>

¹⁰⁵Asbahi: Khawali bin Yazid al-Asbahi, intended to cut off the head of the Imam Husayn but this was actually accomplished by Samir bin Dhi al-Jawshan: <http://www.islamfrominside.com/Pages/Articles/Ashura.html>

¹⁰⁶Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, pp. 158-159

His mention! He turneth it as He pleaseth, for whatsoever He pleaseth, and through whatsoever He pleaseth. He, verily, is the Help in Peril, the Most High."¹⁰⁷

Whereas John baptizes with water—I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance (Matthew 3:11); I indeed have baptized you with water: (Mark 1:8); I indeed baptize you with water (Luke 3:16); I indeed have baptized you with water: (John 1:8)—the one He heralds will baptize with the spirit of God: I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:7-8; Luke 3:16), and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. (Matthew 3:11-12; Luke 3:17)

These are prophetic verses, and one might wonder if they have a precursor in the Tanakh. Here are the closest equivalents, all from the Book of Isaiah:

5:24 Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.

33:10 Now will I rise, saith the LORD; now will I be exalted; now will I lift up myself. 33:11 Ye shall conceive chaff, ye shall bring forth stubble: your breath, as fire, shall devour you. 33:12 And the people shall be as the burnings of lime: as thorns cut up shall they be burned in the fire. 33:13 Hear, ye that are far off, what I have done; and, ye that are near, acknowledge my might. 33:14 The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?

47:13 Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee. 47:14 Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it.

66:15 For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. 66:16 For by fire and by his sword will the LORD plead with all flesh: and the slain of the LORD shall be many.

John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the one who will baptize with the Spirit (Holy Ghost) in the Gospel of John:

¹⁰⁷Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, pp. 154-155

1:33 And I knew him not: **but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.** (Gospel of John)

Jesus points to this prophecy in one of His discourses found in the Gospel of Luke:

12:49 **I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?**
12:50 **But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!** 12:51 Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: 12:52 For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. 12:53 The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. (Gospel of Luke)

In the Gospel of John (3:5), Jesus speaks about the baptism of fire and spirit:

3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, **Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.** 3:6 **That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.** 3:7 **Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.** 3:8 **The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.**

He speaks of the baptism of John and refers to His own baptism briefly in a discourse reported in all three synoptic Gospels:

21:25 **The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?** And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? 21:26 But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. 21:27 And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things. (Gospel of Matthew)

11:30 **The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men?** answer me. 11:31 And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then did ye not believe him? 11:32 But if we shall say, Of men; they feared the people: for all men counted John, that he was a prophet indeed. 11:33 And they answered and said unto Jesus, We cannot tell. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things. (Gospel of Mark)

20:4 **The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men?** 20:5 And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then believed ye him not? 20:6 But and if we say, Of men; all the people will stone us: for they be persuaded that John was a prophet. 20:7 And they answered, that they could not tell whence it was. 20:8 And Jesus said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things. (Gospel of Luke)

Jesus refers pointedly to His own baptism, and to the baptism He gives to those who follow Him in another conversation reported by two of the synoptic Gospels:

20:20 Then came to him the mother of Zebedees children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. 20:21 And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. 20:22 But Jesus answered and said, **Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.** 20:23 And he saith unto them, **Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.** 20:24 And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. 20:25 But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. 20:26 But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; 20:27 And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: 20:28 Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. (Gospel of Matthew)

10:35 And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. 10:36 And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? 10:37 They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. 10:38 But Jesus said unto them, **Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?** 10:39 And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, **Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized:** 10:40 **But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.** 10:41 And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John. 10:42 But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. 10:43 But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: 10:44

And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. 10:45 For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. (Gospel of Mark)

Bahá'u'lláh confirms the water baptism of John and the baptism by fire and the Holy Spirit of Jesus:

Give ear unto that which the Dove of Eternity warbleth upon the twigs of the Divine Lote-Tree: O peoples of the earth! **We sent forth him who was named John to baptize you with water, that your bodies might be cleansed for the appearance of the Messiah. He, in turn, purified you with the fire of love and the water of the spirit in anticipation of these Days whereon the All-Merciful hath purposed to cleanse you with the water of life at the hands of His loving providence.** This is the Father foretold by Isaiah, and the Comforter concerning Whom the Spirit had covenanted with you. Open your eyes, O concourse of bishops, that ye may behold your Lord seated upon the Throne of might and glory.¹⁰⁸

‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained the meaning of baptism by fire and the Holy Spirit (Holy Ghost), and spiritual rebirth in a number of Tablets and talks, including:

Today, all the peoples of the world are indulging in self-interest and exert the utmost effort and endeavour to promote their own material interests. They are worshipping themselves and not the divine reality, nor the world of mankind. They seek diligently their own benefit and not the common weal. This is because they are captives of the world of nature and unaware of the divine teachings, of the bounty of the Kingdom and of the Sun of Truth. But ye, praise be to God, are at present especially favoured with this bounty, have become of the chosen, have been informed of the heavenly instructions, have gained admittance into the Kingdom of God, have become the recipients of unbounded blessings and **have been baptized with the Water of Life, with the fire of the love of God and with the Holy Spirit.**¹⁰⁹

Therefore, the believers of God throughout all the republics of America, through the divine power, must become the cause of the promotion of heavenly teachings and the establishment of the oneness of humanity. Every one of the important souls must arise, blowing over all parts of America the breath of life, conferring upon the people a new spirit, baptizing them with the fire of the love of God, the water of life, and the breaths of the Holy Spirit so that the second birth may become realized. For it is written in the Gospel: **"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."**[John 3:6.]¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸Bahá'u'lláh, *Suriy-i-Haykal*, in *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p. 63

¹⁰⁹‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp. 103-104

¹¹⁰‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, pp. 103-104

Christ was not in need of baptism; but as at that time it was an acceptable and praiseworthy action, and a sign of the glad tidings of the Kingdom, therefore, He confirmed it. However, afterward He said the true baptism is not with material water, but it must be with spirit and with water. In this case water does not signify material water, for elsewhere it is explicitly said baptism is with spirit and with fire, from which it is clear that the reference is not to material fire and material water, for baptism with fire is impossible.

Therefore, the spirit is the bounty of God, the water is knowledge and life, and the fire is the love of God. For material water does not purify the heart of man; no, it cleanses his body. But the heavenly water and spirit, which are knowledge and life, make the human heart good and pure; the heart which receives a portion of the bounty of the Spirit becomes sanctified, good and pure -- that is to say, the reality of man becomes purified and sanctified from the impurities of the world of nature. These natural impurities are evil qualities: anger, lust, worldliness, pride, lying, hypocrisy, fraud, self-love, etc.

Man cannot free himself from the rage of the carnal passions except by the help of the Holy Spirit. That is why He says **baptism with the spirit, with water and with fire is necessary**, and that it is essential -- that is to say, the spirit of divine bounty, the water of knowledge and life, and the fire of the love of God. **Man must be baptized with this spirit, this water and this fire so as to become filled with the eternal bounty.** Otherwise, what is the use of baptizing with material water? No, this baptism with water was a symbol of repentance, and of seeking forgiveness of sins.

But in the cycle of Bahá'u'lláh there is no longer need of this symbol; for its reality, which is to be baptized with the spirit and love of God, is understood and established.¹¹¹

The immortality of the spirit is mentioned in the Holy Books; it is the fundamental basis of the divine religions. Now punishments and rewards are said to be of two kinds: first, the rewards and punishments of this life; second, those of the other world. But the paradise and hell of existence are found in all the worlds of God, whether in this world or in the spiritual heavenly worlds. Gaining these rewards is the gaining of eternal life. That is why Christ said, "Act in such a way that you may find eternal life, and that **you may be born of water and the spirit, so that you may enter into the Kingdom.**" [John 3:5]

The rewards of this life are the virtues and perfections which adorn the reality of man. For example, he was dark and becomes luminous; he was ignorant and becomes wise; he was neglectful and becomes vigilant; he was asleep and becomes awakened; he was dead and becomes living; he was

¹¹¹Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, pp. 91-92

blind and becomes a seer; he was deaf and becomes a hearer; he was earthly and becomes heavenly; he was material and becomes spiritual. Through these rewards he gains spiritual birth and becomes a new creature. He becomes the manifestation of the verse in the Gospel where it is said of the disciples that they **"were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"** [John 1:13] -- that is to say, they were delivered from the animal characteristics and qualities which are the characteristics of human nature, and they became qualified with the divine characteristics, which are the bounty of God. This is the meaning of the second birth. For such people there is no greater torture than being veiled from God, and no more severe punishment than sensual vices, dark qualities, lowness of nature, engrossment in carnal desires. When they are delivered through the light of faith from the darkness of these vices, and become illuminated with the radiance of the sun of reality, and ennobled with all the virtues, they esteem this the greatest reward, and they know it to be the true paradise. In the same way they consider that the spiritual punishment -- that is to say, the torture and punishment of existence -- is to be subjected to the world of nature; to be veiled from God; to be brutal and ignorant; to fall into carnal lusts; to be absorbed in animal frailties; to be characterized with dark qualities, such as falsehood, tyranny, cruelty, attachment to the affairs of the world, and being immersed in satanic ideas. For them, these are the greatest punishments and tortures.¹¹²

The second birth of which Jesus has spoken refers to the appearance of this heavenly nature in man. **It is expressed in the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and he who is baptized by the Holy Spirit is a veritable manifestation of divine mercy** to mankind. Then he becomes just and kind to all humanity; he entertains prejudice and ill will toward none; he shuns no nation or people.¹¹³

There is, however, another Spirit, which may be termed the Divine, to which Jesus Christ refers when He declares that man must be born of its quickening and baptized with its living fire. Souls deprived of that Spirit are accounted as dead, though they are possessed of the human spirit. Jesus Christ has pronounced them dead inasmuch as they have no portion of the Divine Spirit. He says, **"Let the dead bury their dead."** [Matthew 8:22; Luke 9:60] In another instance He declares, **"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."** [John 3:6] By this He means that souls, though alive in the human kingdom, are nevertheless dead if devoid of this particular spirit of divine quickening. They have not partaken of the divine life of the higher Kingdom, for the soul which partakes of the power of the Divine Spirit is, verily, living.

¹¹²cAbdu'l-Bahá, *Ibid.*, pp. 223-224

¹¹³cAbdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 41

This quickening spirit emanates spontaneously from the Sun of Truth, from the reality of Divinity, and is not a revelation or a manifestation. It is like the rays of the sun. The rays are emanations from the sun. This does not mean that the sun has become divisible, that a part of the sun has come out into space.¹¹⁴

You were asleep; you are awakened. Your ears are attentive; your hearts are informed. You have acquired the love of God. You have attained to the knowledge of God. This is the most great bestowal of God. This is the breath of the Holy Spirit, and this consists of faith and assurance. **This eternal life is the second birth; this is the baptism of the Holy Spirit.**¹¹⁵

Every soul who believed in Jesus Christ became revived and resuscitated through this spirit, attained to the zenith of eternal glory, realized the everlasting life, experienced **the second birth** and rose to the acme of good fortune.¹¹⁶

Therefore, I exhort you to be devoted to your spiritual development. Just as you have striven along material lines and have attained to high degrees of worldly advancement, may you likewise become strengthened and proficient in the knowledge of God. May divine susceptibilities be increased and awakened; may your devotion to the heavenly Kingdom become intense. May you be the recipients of the impulses of the Holy Spirit, be assisted in the world of morality and attain ideal power so that the sublimity of the world of mankind may become apparent in you. Thus may you attain the highest happiness, the eternal life, the everlasting glory, **the second birth**, and become manifestations of the bestowals of God.¹¹⁷

By what means can man acquire these things? How shall he obtain these merciful gifts and powers? First, through the knowledge of God. Second, through the love of God. Third, through faith. Fourth, through philanthropic deeds. Fifth, through self-sacrifice. Sixth, through severance from this world. Seventh, through sanctity and holiness. Unless he acquires these forces and attains to these requirements, he will surely be deprived of the life that is eternal. But if he possesses the knowledge of God, becomes ignited through the fire of the love of God, witnesses the great and mighty signs of the Kingdom, becomes the cause of love among mankind and lives in the utmost state of sanctity and holiness, he shall surely **attain to second birth, be baptized by the Holy Spirit** and enjoy everlasting existence.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴cAbdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 58-59

¹¹⁵cAbdu'l-Bahá, *Ibid.*, p. 188

¹¹⁶cAbdu'l-Bahá, *Ibid.*, p. 192

¹¹⁷cAbdu'l-Bahá, *Ibid.*, p. 206

¹¹⁸cAbdu'l-Bahá, *Ibid.*, p. 226

The station of man is great, very great. God has created man after His own image and likeness. He has endowed him with a mighty power which is capable of discovering the mysteries of phenomena. Through its use man is able to arrive at ideal conclusions instead of being restricted to the mere plane of sense impressions. As he possesses sense endowment in common with the animals, it is evident that he is distinguished above them by his conscious power of penetrating abstract realities. He acquires divine wisdom; he searches out the mysteries of creation; he witnesses the radiance of omnipotence; he attains the **second birth** -- that is to say, he is born out of the material world just as he is born of the mother; he attains to everlasting life; he draws nearer to God; his heart is replete with the love of God. This is the foundation of the world of humanity; this is the image and likeness of God; this is the reality of man; otherwise, he is an animal. Verily, God has created the animal in the image and likeness of man, for though man outwardly is human, yet in nature he possesses animal tendencies.¹¹⁹

In this century of the latter times Bahá'u'lláh has appeared and so resuscitated spirits that they have manifested powers more than human. Thousands of His followers have given their lives; and while under the sword, shedding their blood, they have proclaimed, "Ya Bahá'u'l-Abha!" Such resuscitation is impossible except through a heavenly potency, a supernatural power, the divine power of the Holy Spirit. Through a natural and mere human power this is impossible. Therefore, the question arises: How is this resuscitation to be accomplished?

There are certain means for its accomplishment by which mankind is regenerated and quickened with a **new birth. This is the second birth mentioned in the heavenly Books.** Its accomplishment is through **the baptism of the Holy Spirit.**¹²⁰

Children, for instance, no matter how good and pure, no matter how healthy their bodies, are, nevertheless, considered imperfect because the power of intellect is not fully manifest in them. When the intellectual power fully displays its influences and they attain to the age of maturity, they are considered as perfect. Likewise, man, no matter how much he may advance in worldly affairs and make progress in material civilization, is imperfect unless he is quickened by the bounties of the Holy Spirit; for it is evident that until he receives that divine impetus he is ignorant and deprived. For this reason Jesus Christ said, **"Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."** [John 3:5] By this Christ meant that unless man is released from the material world, freed from the captivity of materialism and receiving a portion of the bounties of the spiritual world, he shall be deprived of the bestowals and favors of the Kingdom of God, and the utmost we can say of him is that he is a perfect animal. No one can rightly call him a man. In another place He said, **"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is**

^{119c}Abdu'l-Bahá, Ibid., pp. 262-263

^{120c}Abdu'l-Bahá, Ibid., p. 277

born of the Spirit is spirit." [John 3:6] The meaning of this is that if man is a captive of nature, he is like unto an animal because he is only a body physically born -- that is, he belongs to the world of matter and remains subject to the law and control of nature. **But if he is baptized with the Holy Spirit**, if he is freed from the bondage of nature, released from animalistic tendencies and advanced in the human realm, he is fitted to enter into the divine Kingdom. The world of the Kingdom is the realm of divine bestowals and the bounties of God. It is attainment of the highest virtues of humanity; it is nearness to God; it is capacity to receive the bounties of the ancient Lord. When man advances to this station, he attains the second birth. Before his first or physical birth man was in the world of the matrix. He had no knowledge of this world; his eyes could not see; his ears could not hear. When he was born from the world of the matrix, he beheld another world. The sun was shining with its splendors, the moon radiant in the heavens, the stars twinkling in the expansive firmament, the seas surging, trees verdant and green, all kinds of creatures enjoying life here, infinite bounties prepared for him. In the world of the matrix none of these things existed. In that world he had no knowledge of this vast range of existence; nay, rather, he would have denied the reality of this world. But after his birth he began to open his eyes and behold the wonders of this illimitable universe. Similarly, as long as man is in the matrix of the human world, as long as he is the captive of nature, he is out of touch and without knowledge of the universe of the Kingdom. If he attains rebirth while in the world of nature, he will become informed of the divine world. He will observe that another and a higher world exists. Wonderful bounties descend; eternal life awaits; everlasting glory surrounds him. All the signs of reality and greatness are there. He will see the lights of God. All these experiences will be his when he is born out of the world of nature into the divine world. Therefore, for the perfect man there are two kinds of birth: the first, physical birth, is from the matrix of the mother; the second, or spiritual birth, is from the world of nature. In both he is without knowledge of the new world of existence he is entering. Therefore, rebirth means his release from the captivity of nature, freedom from attachment to this mortal and material life. **This is the second, or spiritual, birth of which Jesus Christ spoke in the Gospels.**¹²¹

It is clearly evident that while man possesses powers in common with the animal, he is distinguished from the animal by intellectual attainment, spiritual perception, the acquisition of virtues, capacity to receive the bestowals of Divinity, lordly bounty and emanations of heavenly mercy. This is the adornment of man, his honor and sublimity. Humanity must strive toward this supreme station. Christ has interpreted this station as the second birth. Man is first born from a world of darkness, the matrix of the mother, into this physical world of light. In the dark world from whence he came he had no knowledge of the virtues of this existence. He has been liberated from a condition of darkness and brought into a new and spacious realm where there is sunlight, the stars are shining, the moon sheds its radiance, there are beautiful views, gardens of roses, fruits and all the blessings of the present world. How did he attain these blessings? Through the agency of birth from the mother.

¹²¹Abdu'l-Bahá, *Ibid.*, pp. 303-305

Just as man has been physically born into this world, he may be reborn from the realm and matrix of nature, for the realm of nature is a condition of animalism, darkness and defect. In this second birth he attains the world of the Kingdom. There he witnesses and realizes that the world of nature is a world of gloom, whereas the Kingdom is a world of radiance; the world of nature is a world of defects, the Kingdom is a realm of perfection; the world of nature is a world without enlightenment, the Kingdom of spiritual humanity is a heaven of illumination. Great discoveries and revelations are now possible for him; he has attained the reality of perception; his circle of understanding is illimitably widened; he views the realities of creation, comprehends the divine bounties and unseals the mystery of phenomena. **This is the station which Christ has interpreted as the second birth.** He says that just as ye were physically born from the mother into this world, ye must be born again from the mother world of nature into the life of the divine Kingdom. May you all attain this second, spiritual birth. **"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."**[John 3:6]¹²²

In the Gospel according to St John, Christ has said: **'Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.'**[John 3:5] The priests have interpreted this into meaning that baptism is necessary for salvation. In another Gospel it is said: **'He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire'**. [Matthew 3:11]

Thus the water of baptism and the fire are one! It cannot mean that the 'water' spoken of is physical water, for it is the direct opposite of 'fire', and one destroys the other. When in the Gospels, Christ speaks of 'water', He means that which causes life, for without water no worldly creature can live -- mineral, vegetable, animal and man, one and all, depend upon water for their very being. Yes, the latest scientific discoveries prove to us that even mineral has some form of life, and that it also needs water for its existence.

Water is the cause of life, and when Christ speaks of water, He is symbolizing that which is the cause of Everlasting Life.

This life-giving water of which He speaks is like unto fire, for it is none other than the Love of God, and this love means life to our souls.

By the fire of the Love of God the veil is burnt which separates us from the Heavenly Realities, and with clear vision we are enabled to struggle onward and upward, ever progressing in the paths of virtue and holiness, and becoming the means of light to the world.

¹²²cAbdu'l-Bahá, *Ibid.*, pp. 332-333

There is nothing greater or more blessed than the Love of God! It gives healing to the sick, balm to the wounded, joy and consolation to the whole world, and through it alone can man attain Life Everlasting. The essence of all religions is the Love of God, and it is the foundation of all the sacred teachings.

It was the Love of God that led Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that strengthened Joseph in Egypt and gave to Moses courage and patience.

Through the Love of God, Christ was sent into the world with His inspiring example of a perfect life of self-sacrifice and devotion, bringing to men the message of Eternal Life. It was the Love of God that gave Muhammad power to bring the Arabs from a state of animal degradation to a loftier state of existence.

God's Love it was that sustained the Báb and brought him to his supreme sacrifice, and made his bosom the willing target for a thousand bullets.

Finally, it was the Love of God that gave to the East Bahá'u'lláh, and is now sending the light of His teaching far into the West, and from Pole to Pole.

Thus I exhort each of you, realizing its power and beauty, to sacrifice all your thoughts, words and actions to bring the knowledge of the Love of God into every heart.¹²³

"The bird is a captive in the air and the fish a captive in the sea. Man alone stands apart and says to the elements, I will make you my servants! I can govern you! He takes electricity, and through his ingenuity imprisons it and makes of it a wonderful power for lighting, and a means of communication to a distance of thousands of miles. But man himself may become a captive to the things he has invented. **His true second birth occurs when he is freed from all material things:** for he only is free who is not a captive to his desires. **He has then as Jesus has said, become captive to the Holy Spirit.**"¹²⁴

The call of the Kingdom is heard in your midst. Glory be to God, **you have been born again, you have been baptized by the fire of the Love of God;** you have been plunged in the Sea of Life and regenerated by the Spirit of Love!¹²⁵

¹²³Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, pp. 81-83

¹²⁴Abdu'l-Bahá, 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London, pp. 87-88

¹²⁵Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 170

During the time Jesus Christ was upon the earth mankind sought nearness to God, but in that day no one attained it save a very few -- His disciples. Those blessed souls were confirmed with divine nearness through the love of God. Divine nearness is dependent upon attainment to the knowledge of God, upon severance from all else save God. It is contingent upon self-sacrifice and to be found only through forfeiting wealth and worldly possessions. **It is made possible through the baptism of water and fire revealed in the Gospels.** Water symbolizes the water of life, which is knowledge, and fire is the fire of the love of God; therefore, man must be baptized with the water of life, the Holy Spirit and the fire of the love of the Kingdom. Until he attains these three degrees, nearness to God is not possible. This is the process by which the Bahá'ís of Persia have attained it. They gave their lives for this station, sacrificed honor, comfort and possessions, hastened with the utmost joy to the place of martyrdom; their blood was spilled, their bodies were tortured and destroyed, their homes pillaged, their children carried into captivity. They endured all these conditions joyfully and willingly. Through such sacrifice nearness to God is made possible.¹²⁶

John's appellation for his countrymen of the generation in which He ministered—"generation of vipers"—recalls the words of two Psalms:

58:1 Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation? do ye judge uprightly, O ye sons of men?
58:2 Yea, in heart ye work wickedness; ye weigh the violence of your hands in the earth. 58:3 The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies. 58:4 **Their poison is like the poison of a serpent:** they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear;

140:1 Deliver me, O LORD, from the evil man; preserve me from the violent man; 140:2 Which imagine mischiefs in their heart; continually are they gathered together for war. 140:3 **They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips.**

The "generation of vipers" is a generation of wicked, evil men and women, who "work wickedness...go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies...imagine mischiefs in their heart; continually are they gathered together for war". These are the persecutors of the prophets, the enemies of the anointed ones, who poison the innocents and lead them out of the garden of paradise and into the desert of hardship and estrangement from God.

Jesus used the very same expression, as reported uniquely in the Gospel of Matthew, calling it "evil" and "adulterous", and calling it condemned by "the men of Nineveh" redeemed by Jonah and "the queen of the south" who beheld Solomon, and "killers" of the prophets:

¹²⁶Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 147

12:34 **O generation of vipers**, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. 12:35 A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and **an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things**. 12:36 But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. 12:37 For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned. 12:38 Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. 12:39 But he answered and said unto them, **An evil and adulterous generation** seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: 12:40 For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 12:41 **The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it:** because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. 12:42 **The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it:** for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.

23:29 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, 23:30 And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. 23:31 Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. 23:32 Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. 23:33 **Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers**, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? 23:34 Wherefore, behold, **I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city:** 23:35 That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. 23:36 Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. 23:37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, **thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee**, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! 23:38 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

Bahá'u'llah likewise refers to the inhabitants of the Holy Land as “a generation of vipers”:

This Holy Land hath been mentioned and extolled in all the sacred Scriptures. In it have appeared the Prophets of God and His chosen Ones. This is the wilderness in which all the Messengers of God have wandered, from which their cry, "Here am I, here am I, O my God" was raised. This is the promised Land in which He Who is the Revelation of God was destined to be made manifest. This is the Vale of God's unsearchable decree, the snow-white Spot, the Land of unfading splendor.

Whatever hath come to pass in this Day hath been foretold in the Scriptures of old. These same Scriptures, however, unanimously condemn the people that inhabit this land. They have, at one time, been stigmatized as the "**generation of vipers.**" Behold how this wronged One is now, whilst surrounded by a "**generation of vipers,**" calling aloud and summoning all men to Him Who is the world's Ultimate Desire, the Summit and Day Spring of Glory. Happy is the man that hath hearkened to the voice of Him Who is the Lord of the Kingdom of Utterance, and woe betide the heedless, they that have strayed far from His truth.¹²⁷

'Akká, the ancient Ptolemais, the St. Jean d'Acre of the Crusaders, that had successfully defied the siege of Napoleon, had sunk, under the Turks, to the level of a penal colony to which murderers, highway robbers and political agitators were consigned from all parts of the Turkish empire. It was girt about by a double system of ramparts; was inhabited by a people whom Bahá'u'lláh stigmatized as "**the generation of vipers**"; was devoid of any source of water within its gates; was flea-infested, damp and honey-combed with gloomy, filthy and tortuous lanes. "According to what they say," the Supreme Pen has recorded in the Lawh-i-Sultán, "it is the most desolate of the cities of the world, the most unsightly of them in appearance, the most detestable in climate, and the foulest in water. It is as though it were the metropolis of the owl." So putrid was its air that, according to a proverb, a bird when flying over it would drop dead.¹²⁸

And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answered and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none [Matt 25:36]; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise [Matt 25:35]. Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages." (Luke 3:10-14) And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people. (Luke 3:18)

There is no commentary on these verses in the Bahá'í source texts, but they recall this statement:

If thine eyes be turned towards mercy, forsake the things that profit thee and cleave unto that which will profit mankind. And if thine eyes be turned towards justice, choose thou for thy neighbour that which thou chooseth for thyself.¹²⁹

¹²⁷Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 344-345

¹²⁸Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, pp. 185-186

¹²⁹Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 64

The teachings of John the Baptist exemplify justice...they are fair, they are balanced, they are moderate, they represent a sharing of one's resources with others. The teachings of Jesus perfectly embody mercy...they are self-sacrificing, they are uncompromising, they are unilateral, and they represent a bestowal of one's all upon those, each according to his needs:

5:38 Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: 5:39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. 5:40 And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. 5:41 And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. 5:42 Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. 5:43 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. 5:44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; 5:45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. 5:46 For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? 5:47 And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? 5:48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

25:31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: 25:32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: 25:33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. 25:34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 25:35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: 25:36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. 25:37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? 25:38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? 25:39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? 25:40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. 25:41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: 25:42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: 25:43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. 25:44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? 25:45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. 25:46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

Now, at the last, we will turn our attention to the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus. While several references have already been made to that relationship, both with regard to the fulfillment of prophecies, the family tie between their mothers, and the similarities and dissimilarities between their teachings, we have waited until now to consider the story of their interactions during the years they both resided on planet earth. We might suppose that these sons of cousins, who are also some kind of cousins, had some contact before they are described as meeting, as if for the first time, by all of the canonical Gospels:

3:13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. 3:14 But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? 3:15 And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.¹³⁰

1:9 And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan.¹³¹

3:21 Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized...¹³²

1:29 The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. 1:30 This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. 1:31 And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.¹³³

What is particularly interesting about the account found in the Gospel of John is that John the Baptist is telling the story to one or more persons. As Jesus approaches, he says, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.” He must have baptized Jesus earlier, without this person or persons having witnessed the event, because the narrator goes on, “1:32 And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. 1:33 And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. 1:34 And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.” John is testifying to someone else that he has seen

¹³⁰Gospel of Matthew 3:13-15

¹³¹Gospel of Mark 1:9

¹³²Gospel of Luke 3:21

¹³³Gospel of John 1:29-31

and heard these things, and the one to whom he testifies is quoting him verbatim. Maybe there is a clue to who this person might have been...we know he accompanied John on this particular day, when John said, "Behold the Lamb of God" and we know that he must have been an intimate follower of John to be trusted with such precious revelations. The story continues:

1:35 Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; 1:36 And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! 1:37 And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. 1:38 Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? 1:39 He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour. 1:40 One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 1:41 He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.

Are these the same two disciples to whom John initially said, "Behold the Lamb of God"? It seems that they were, because otherwise how would the chronicler, who was one of the two, know what transpired on this second occasion, and afterwards? One of the two disciples of John is identified, and it is Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. Since Andrew promptly recruits his brother, we know the other disciple is not Peter. My speculation is that it is John, the supposed author of the Gospel of John, the Epistles of John, and the Apocalypse/Revelation. There are several reasons for this suggestion, but let us review the references to this disciple in the Gospel of John before we proceed:

13:23 Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. 13:24 Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake. 13:25 He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it? 13:26 Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon.

19:26 When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! 19:27 Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

20:1 The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. 20:2 Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the LORD out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.

21:6 And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. 21:7 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea.

21:17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep. 21:18 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. 21:19 This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me. 21:20 Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? 21:21 Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? 21:22 Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.

These words, urging Peter to follow Him into the fray, and to sacrifice his life for his Lord, for by the expression “signifying by what death he should glorify God” the traditional understanding of the passage is that Jesus predicted that Peter would die a martyr to his faith.¹³⁴ This statement was witnessed by “the disciple whom Jesus loved”, and of all the disciples, the only one who is reported to have lived a long enough life to know that Peter died a martyr was John¹³⁵. So typical of Peter was his concern about what another person would do--so he asks, “Lord, and what shall this man do?” Jesus answers in the only mode He could adopt with such a stubborn and simple man, a man who understood only straight talk, and some things only when they were repeated three times (either by himself as in the three denials or by Jesus as in these three repetitions of the same question): “If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?” According to tradition, John tarried, that is, he remained alive and cognizant in the physical world until Jesus revealed to him...the Book of Revelation: “1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: 1:2 Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.”

The Gospel of Matthew reports that John did not want to baptize Jesus, that He voiced His objection and that Jesus insisted and so He went ahead with it:

3:13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. 3:14 But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? 3:15 And Jesus

¹³⁴<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11744a.htm>

¹³⁵<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08492a.htm>

answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

'Abdu'l-Bahá was asked why John objected and He answered:

Question. -- It is said in the Gospel of St. Matthew, chapter 3, verses 13, 14, 15: "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbade Him, saying, I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered Him." What is the wisdom of this: since Christ possessed all essential perfection, why did He need baptism?

Answer. -- The principle of baptism is purification by repentance. John admonished and exhorted the people, and caused them to repent; then he baptized them. Therefore, it is apparent that this baptism is a symbol of repentance from all sin: its meaning is expressed in these words: "O God! as my body has become purified and cleansed from physical impurities, in the same way purify and sanctify my spirit from the impurities of the world of nature, which are not worthy of the Threshold of Thy Unity!" Repentance is the return from disobedience to obedience. Man, after remoteness and deprivation from God, repents and undergoes purification: and this is a symbol signifying "O God! make my heart good and pure, freed and sanctified from all save Thy love."

As Christ desired that this institution of John should be used at that time by all, He Himself conformed to it in order to awaken the people and to complete the law of the former religion. Although the ablution of repentance was the institution of John, it was in reality formerly practiced in the religion of God.

Christ was not in need of baptism; but as at that time it was an acceptable and praiseworthy action, and a sign of the glad tidings of the Kingdom, therefore, He confirmed it. However, afterward He said the true baptism is not with material water, but it must be with spirit and with water. In this case water does not signify material water, for elsewhere it is explicitly said baptism is with spirit and with fire, from which it is clear that the reference is not to material fire and material water, for baptism with fire is impossible.¹³⁶

During the baptism of Jesus, the canonical Gospels report a visitation of the Holy Spirit. This visitation must have been witnessed, because it is described by John the Baptist as well as by others in two other Gospels:

¹³⁶Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, pp. 91-92

3:16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: 3:17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.¹³⁷

1:10 And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: 1:11 And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.¹³⁸

3:21 Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, 3:22 And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.¹³⁹

1:32 **And John bare record, saying,** I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. 1:33 And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. 1:34 And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.¹⁴⁰

‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that the “dove” is a symbol, not a material form:

So the symbol of knowledge is light, and of ignorance, darkness; but reflect, is knowledge sensible light, or ignorance sensible darkness? No, they are merely symbols. These are only intellectual states, but when you desire to express them outwardly, you call knowledge light, and ignorance darkness. You say: "My heart was gloomy, and it became enlightened." Now, that light of knowledge, and that darkness of ignorance, are intellectual realities, not sensible ones; but when we seek for explanations in the external world, we are obliged to give them a sensible form.

Then it is evident that the dove which descended upon Christ was not a material dove, but it was a spiritual state, which, that it might be comprehensible, was expressed by a sensible figure. Thus in the Old Testament it is said that God appeared as a pillar of fire: this does not signify the material form; it is an intellectual reality which is expressed by a sensible image.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷Gospel of Matthew 3:16-17

¹³⁸Gospel of Mark 1:10-11

¹³⁹Gospel of Luke 3:21-22

¹⁴⁰Gospel of John 1:32-34

¹⁴¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, pp. 84-85

In the Gospel it is said, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." Then it is evident and clear that Christ did not reach to the station of Messiahship and its perfections at the time of baptism, when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the likeness of a dove. Nay, the Word of God from all eternity has always been, and will be, in the exaltation of sanctification.¹⁴²

Shoghi Effendi takes this explanation of the spiritual significance and symbolism of the "dove" representing the Holy Spirit in the baptism of Jesus, and relates it to the awakening into prophetic consciousness of Zarathushtra, of Moses, of Muhammad, and of Bahá'u'lláh:

...of Jesus when coming out of the waters of the Jordan He saw the heavens opened and the Holy Ghost descend like a dove and light upon Him...¹⁴³

...the "Most Great Spirit," as designated by Himself, and symbolized in the Zoroastrian, the Mosaic, the Christian, and Muhammadan Dispensations by the Sacred Fire, the Burning Bush, the Dove and the Angel Gabriel respectively, descended upon, and revealed itself, personated by a "Maiden," to the agonized soul of Bahá'u'lláh.¹⁴⁴

...the descent of the Dove upon Christ in the Jordan... It was on that occasion that the "Most Great Spirit," as designated by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, revealed itself to Him, in the form of a "Maiden," and bade Him "lift up" His "voice between earth and heaven" -- that same Spirit which, in the Zoroastrian, the Mosaic, the Christian, and Muhammadan Dispensations, had been respectively symbolized by the "Sacred Fire," the "Burning Bush," the "Dove," and the "Angel Gabriel."¹⁴⁵

Hence, what many Christians have understood to have been a miraculous physical manifestation of God's power, the appearance of the Holy Spirit as a "dove" alighting upon Jesus at the same time as the voice of God is heard speaking words reminiscent of a Psalm text, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that this "dove" is a symbol, that Jesus was a Manifestation of God prior to this event. Shoghi Effendi points out that other Manifestations of God have conveyed the experience of their prophetic call employing other symbols. What cannot be conveyed without symbolism is the reality of the Holy Spirit. We can know the effects of its influence, but not the thing in itself.

THE TEACHING OF JESUS ON THE PREACHING OF JOHN

Jesus commented in several discourses on the preaching and behavior of John. During their first recorded encounter, at the baptism of Jesus, we find the first conversation:

¹⁴²Abdu'l-Bahá, *Ibid.*, p. 153

¹⁴³Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 92

¹⁴⁴Shoghi Effendi, *Ibid.*, p. 100

¹⁴⁵Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, pp. 99-100

3:13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. 3:14 But John forbad him, saying, **I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?** 3:15 And Jesus answering said unto him, **Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.** Then he suffered him. (Gospel of Matthew)

Jesus then went into the wilderness, and when He came out, John had been imprisoned by Herod Antipas (Matthew 4:12; Mark 6:17; Luke 3:20). Jesus left Judea and went into Galilee, where He began to teach:

4:12 **Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison,** he departed into Galilee; 4:13 And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: 4:14 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, 4:15 The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; 4:16 The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. 4:17 **From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.** (Gospel of Matthew)

1:14 **Now after that John was put in prison,** Jesus came into Galilee, **preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,** 1:15 And saying, **The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.** (Gospel of Mark)

The Gospels of Luke and John do not say when John was imprisoned. Luke cites John's imprisonment before the baptism of Jesus:

3:19 But Herod the tetrarch, being reprov'd by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, 3:20 Added yet this above all, that **he shut up John in prison.** 3:21 Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that **Jesus also being baptized,** and praying, the heaven was opened, 3:22 And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.

Luke then notes that after His baptism:

4:1 And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, 4:2 Being forty days tempted of the devil.

He then reports that after Jesus returned from the wilderness He went into Galilee and there taught in the synagogues:

4:14 And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. 4:15 And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. (Gospel of Luke)

Hence, the sequence of events, while somewhat murky in the Gospel of Luke, is clear in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, and between the three of them they indicate that Jesus did not begin to preach until John was already in prison. The next interaction between John and Jesus is reported in the Gospel of Matthew and almost identically in the Gospel of Luke:

11:2 Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, 11:3 And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? 11:4 Jesus answered and said unto them, **Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: 11:5 The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. 11:6 And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me. 11:7** And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, **What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? 11:8 But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. 11:9 But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. 11:10 For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. [Malachi 3:1] 11:11 Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 11:12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. 11:13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. 11:14 And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. 11:15 He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. 11:16 But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, 11:17 And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. 11:18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. 11:19 The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.** (Gospel of Matthew)

7:19 And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another? 7:20 When the men were come unto him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another? 7:21

And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight. 7:22 Then Jesus answering said unto them, **Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached.** 7:23 **And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.** 7:24 And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to speak unto the people concerning John, **What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind?** 7:25 **But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they which are gorgeously appavelled, and live delicately, are in kings' courts.** 7:26 **But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet.** 7:27 **This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.** 7:28 **For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.** 7:29 **And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John.** 7:30 **But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.** 7:31 **And the Lord said, Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like?** 7:32 **They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept.** 7:33 **For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil.** 7:34 **The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!** 7:35 **But wisdom is justified of all her children.**

(Gospel of Luke)

Apparently not all of the followers of John were satisfied with the answers given by Jesus. While this is not reported in the New Testament, some of the followers of John did not recognize Jesus as the fulfillment of John's prophecies. Bahá'u'llah refers to them in Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, and compares them with the followers of the Báb who failed to recognize Him as the Promised One of the Báb:

Likewise, refuting certain disbelievers, He saith: "For none knoweth the time of the Revelation except God. Whenever it appeareth, all must acknowledge the Point of Truth, and render thanks unto God." They that have turned aside from Me have spoken even as the followers of John (the Baptist) spoke. For they, too, protested against Him Who was the Spirit (Jesus) saying: "The dispensation of John hath not yet ended; wherefore hast thou come?"¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 157

The incomparable exaltation of the station of this successor to John the Baptist is also noted for the relationship of Bahá'u'llah to the Báb:

And likewise, He¹⁴⁷ saith: "Were He to make of every one on earth a Prophet, all would, in very truth, be accounted as Prophets in the sight of God." And likewise, He saith: "In the day of the revelation of Him Whom God shall make manifest all that dwell on earth will be equal in His estimation. Whomsoever He ordaineth as a Prophet, he, verily, hath been a Prophet from the beginning that hath no beginning, and will thus remain until the end that hath no end, inasmuch as this is an act of God. And whosoever is made a Vicegerent by Him, shall be a Vicegerent in all the worlds, for this is an act of God. For the will of God can in no wise be revealed except through His will, nor His wish be manifested save through His wish. He, verily, is the All-Conquering, the All-Powerful, the All-Highest."¹⁴⁸

And likewise, He¹⁴⁹ saith: "Let not names shut you out as by a veil from Him Who is their Lord, even the name of Prophet, for such a name is but a creation of His utterance." And likewise, He, in the seventh chapter of the second Vahid, saith: "O people of the Bayan! Act not as the people of the Qur'án have acted, for if ye do so, the fruits of your night will come to naught." And further, He saith -- glorified be His mention: "If thou attainest unto His Revelation, and obeyest Him, thou wilt have revealed the fruit of the Bayan; if not, thou art unworthy of mention before God. Take pity upon thyself. If thou aidest not Him Who is the Manifestation of the Lordship of God, be not, then, a cause of sadness unto Him." And further He saith -- magnified be His station: "If thou attainest not unto the Presence of God, grieve not, then, the Sign of God. Ye will renounce that which can profit them that acknowledge the Bayan, if ye renounce that which can harm Him. I know, however, that ye will refuse to do so."¹⁵⁰

THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS CITED BY BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

The sayings, or LOGIA of Jesus have been collected, compared, analyzed, and, in recent years, they have also been published alongside similar sayings attributed to Lao-Tse, Buddha and Muhammad. Parallels between these logia and the Bahá'í teachings have not yet been attempted, except in specific and isolated cases, and even those are difficult to track down. Here is a collection of references to the logia by Bahá'u'llah in various of His Tablets.

These are the melodies, sung by Jesus, Son of Mary, in accents of majestic power in the Ridvan of the Gospel, revealing those signs that must needs herald the advent of the Manifestation after Him. In the first Gospel according to Matthew it is recorded... Similarly, in the three other

¹⁴⁷The Bab.

¹⁴⁸Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 154

¹⁴⁹The Bab.

¹⁵⁰Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 171

Gospels, according to Luke, Mark, and John, the same statements are recorded. As We have referred at length to these in Our Tablets revealed in the Arabic tongue¹⁵¹, We have made no mention of them in these pages, and have confined Ourselves to but one reference.¹⁵²

Beside this passage, there is yet another verse in the Gospel wherein He saith: "**Heaven and earth shall pass away: but My words shall not pass away.**"¹⁵³ Thus it is that the adherents of Jesus maintained that the law of the Gospel shall never be annulled, and that whensoever the promised Beauty is made manifest and all the signs are revealed, He must needs re-affirm and establish the law proclaimed in the Gospel, so that there may remain in the world no faith but His faith. This is their fundamental belief. And their conviction is such that were a person to be made manifest with all the promised signs and to promulgate that which is contrary to the letter of the law of the Gospel, they must assuredly renounce him, refuse to submit to his law, declare him an infidel, and laugh him to scorn.¹⁵⁴

Consider now, had the people of the Gospel recognized the meaning of the symbolic terms "sun" and "moon," had they sought, unlike the froward and perverse, enlightenment from Him Who is the Revealer of divine knowledge, they would have surely comprehended the purpose of these terms, and would not have become afflicted and oppressed by the darkness of their selfish desires. Yea, but since they have failed to acquire true knowledge from its very Source, they have perished in the perilous vale of waywardness and misbelief. They still have not awakened to perceive that all the signs foretold have been made manifest, that the promised Sun hath risen above the horizon of divine Revelation, and that the "sun" and "moon" of the teachings, the laws, and learning of a former Dispensation have darkened and set.¹⁵⁵

Judge fairly: Were the prophecies recorded in the Gospel to be literally fulfilled; were Jesus, Son of Mary, accompanied by angels, to descend from the visible heaven upon the clouds; who would dare to disbelieve, who would dare to reject the truth, and wax disdainful?¹⁵⁶

Our purpose in relating these things is to warn you that were they to maintain that those verses wherein the signs referred to in the Gospel are mentioned have been perverted, were they to reject them, and cling instead to other verses and traditions, you should know that their words were utter falsehood and sheer calumny.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵¹Reference to Gems of Divine Mysteries, which will be cited in the coming pages; and perhaps other unidentified Tablets.

¹⁵²Bahá'u'lláh, Kitab-i-Iqan, pp. 24, 25-26

¹⁵³Gospel of Luke 21:33

¹⁵⁴Bahá'u'lláh, Kitab-i-Iqan, pp. 27-28

¹⁵⁵Bahá'u'lláh, Ibid., pp. 41-42

¹⁵⁶Bahá'u'lláh, Ibid., pp. 80-81

¹⁵⁷Bahá'u'lláh, Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 88

We have also heard a number of the foolish of the earth assert that the genuine text of the heavenly Gospel doth not exist amongst the Christians, that it hath ascended unto heaven. How grievously they have erred! How oblivious of the fact that such a statement imputeth the gravest injustice and tyranny to a gracious and loving Providence! How could God, when once the Day-star of the beauty of Jesus had disappeared from the sight of His people, and ascended unto the fourth heaven, cause His holy Book, His most great testimony amongst His creatures, to disappear also? What would be left to that people to cling to from the setting of the day-star of Jesus until the rise of the sun of the Muhammadan Dispensation? What law could be their stay and guide? How could such people be made the victims of the avenging wrath of God, the omnipotent Avenger? How could they be afflicted with the scourge of chastisement by the heavenly King? Above all, how could the flow of the grace of the All-Bountiful be stayed? How could the ocean of His tender mercies be stilled? We take refuge with God, from that which His creatures have fancied about Him! Exalted is He above their comprehension!¹⁵⁸

In another passage of the Gospel it is written¹⁵⁹: "And it came to pass that on a certain day the father of one of the disciples of Jesus had died. That disciple reporting the death of his father unto Jesus, asked for leave to go and bury him. Whereupon, Jesus, that Essence of Detachment, answered and said: "**Let the dead bury their dead.**"¹⁶⁰

It is also recorded in the Gospel according to St. Luke, that on a certain day Jesus passed by a Jew who was sick of the palsy, and lay upon a couch. When the Jew saw Him, he recognized Him, and cried out for His help. Jesus said unto him: "**Arise from thy bed; thy sins are forgiven thee.**" Certain of the Jews, standing by, protested saying: "Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" And immediately He perceived their thoughts, Jesus answering said unto them: "**Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, arise, and take up thy bed, and walk; or to say, thy sins are forgiven thee? that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins.**"¹⁶¹ This is the real sovereignty, and such is the power of God's chosen Ones! All these things which We have repeatedly mentioned, and the details which We have cited from divers sources, have no other purpose but to enable thee to grasp the meaning of the allusions in the utterances of the chosen Ones of God, lest certain of these utterances cause thy feet to falter and thy heart to be dismayed.¹⁶²

Moreover, those whom they had formerly known were Moses, the Revealer of the Pentateuch, and Jesus, the Author of the Gospel. Notwithstanding, why did Muhammad say: "When He of

¹⁵⁸Bahá'u'lláh, *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90

¹⁵⁹Gospel of Luke 9:60

¹⁶⁰Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitab-i-Iqan*, p. 119

¹⁶¹Gospel of Luke 5:18-26

¹⁶²Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitab-i-Iqan*, pp. 133-134

Whom they had knowledge came unto them" -- that is Jesus or Moses -- "they disbelieved in Him?" Was not Muhammad to outward seeming called by a different name? Did He not come forth out of a different city? Did He not speak a different language, and reveal a different Law? How then can the truth of this verse be established, and its meaning be made clear?¹⁶³

Wherefore, O my friend, it behooveth Us to exert the highest endeavour to attain unto that City, and, by the grace of God and His loving-kindness, rend asunder the "veils of glory"; so that, with inflexible steadfastness, we may sacrifice our drooping souls in the path of the New Beloved. We should with tearful eyes, fervently and repeatedly, implore Him to grant us the favour of that grace. That city is none other than the Word of God revealed in every age and dispensation. In the days of Moses it was the Pentateuch; in the days of Jesus the Gospel; in the days of Muhammad the Messenger of God the Qur'án; in this day the Bayan; and in the dispensation of Him Whom God will make manifest His own Book -- the Book unto which all the Books of former Dispensations must needs be referred, the Book which standeth amongst them all transcendent and supreme. In these cities spiritual sustenance is bountifully provided, and incorruptible delights have been ordained. The food they bestow is the bread of heaven, and the Spirit they impart is God's imperishable blessing. Upon detached souls they bestow the gift of Unity, enrich the destitute, and offer the cup of knowledge unto them who wander in the wilderness of ignorance. All the guidance, the blessings, the learning, the understanding, the faith, and certitude, conferred upon all that is in heaven and on earth, are hidden and treasured within these Cities.¹⁶⁴

Even as the Christian divines who, holding fast to the verse of the Gospel to which We have already referred¹⁶⁵, have sought to explain that the law of the Gospel shall at no time be annulled, and that no independent Prophet shall again be made manifest, unless He confirmeth the law of the Gospel. Most of the people have become afflicted with the same spiritual disease.¹⁶⁶

As alluded to above, Bahá'u'lláh cited other verses from the Gospels in a treatise revealed in Arabic, and entitled Jawahiru'l-Asrar (Gems of Divine Mysteries)¹⁶⁷:

This is the text of that which was revealed aforetime in the first Gospel, according to Matthew, regarding the signs that must needs herald the advent of the One Who shall come after Him. He

¹⁶³Bahá'u'lláh, Kitab-i-Iqan, pp. 150-151

¹⁶⁴Bahá'u'lláh, Ibid., pp. 199-200

¹⁶⁵"**Heaven and earth shall pass away: but My words shall not pass away.**" (Gospel of Matthew 24:35; Gospel of Mark 13:31; Gospel of Luke 21:33)

¹⁶⁶Bahá'u'lláh, Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 212

¹⁶⁷Bahá'u'lláh, Gems of Divine Mysteries, pp. 8-10

saith: "And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days..."¹⁶⁸, until the mystic Dove, singing in the midmost heart of eternity, and the celestial Bird, warbling upon the Divine Lote-Tree, saith: "Immediately after the oppression of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet."¹⁶⁹

In the second Gospel, according to Mark, the Dove of holiness speaketh in such terms: "For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be."¹⁷⁰ And it singeth later with the same melodies as before, without change or alteration. God, verily, is a witness unto the truth of My words.

And in the third Gospel, according to Luke, it is recorded: "There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars, and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; and the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, know that the kingdom of God hath drawn nigh."¹⁷¹

And in the fourth Gospel, according to John, it is recorded: "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: and ye also shall bear witness."¹⁷² And elsewhere He saith: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."¹⁷³ And: "But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? But because I have said these things unto you..."¹⁷⁴ And yet again: "Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."¹⁷⁵ And: "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come."¹⁷⁶

¹⁶⁸Gospel of Matthew 24:19; Gospel of Mark 13:17; Gospel of Luke 21:23

¹⁶⁹Gospel of Matthew 24:31

¹⁷⁰Gospel of Mark 13:19

¹⁷¹Gospel of Matthew 24:30; Gospel of Mark 13:26; Gospel of Luke 21:27

¹⁷²Gospel of John 15:26

¹⁷³Gospel of John 14:26

¹⁷⁴Gospel of John 16:5

¹⁷⁵Gospel of John 16:7

¹⁷⁶Gospel of John 16:13

And should they reply: "The Books that are in the hands of this people, which they call the Gospel and attribute to Jesus, the Son of Mary, have not been revealed by God and proceed not from the Manifestations of His Self", then this would imply a cessation in the abounding grace of Him Who is the Source of all grace. If so, God's testimony to His servants would have remained incomplete and His favour proven imperfect. His mercy would not have shone resplendent, nor would His grace have overshadowed all. For if at the ascension of Jesus His Book had likewise ascended unto heaven, then how could God reprove and chastise the people on the Day of Resurrection, as hath been written by the Imams of the Faith and affirmed by its illustrious divines?¹⁷⁷

It is recorded in all the Books of the Gospel that He Who is the Spirit spoke in words of pure light unto His disciples, saying: "**Know that heaven and earth may pass away, but my words shall never pass away.**"¹⁷⁸ As is clear and evident to thine eminence, these words outwardly mean that the Books of the Gospel will remain in the hands of people till the end of the world, that their laws shall not be abrogated, that their testimony shall not be abolished, and that all that hath been enjoined, prescribed, or ordained therein shall endure forever. O My brother! Sanctify thy heart, illumine thy soul, and sharpen thy sight, that thou mayest perceive the sweet accents of the Birds of Heaven and the melodies of the Doves of Holiness warbling in the Kingdom of eternity, and perchance apprehend the inner meaning of these utterances and their hidden mysteries. For otherwise, wert thou to interpret these words according to their outward meaning, thou couldst never prove the truth of the Cause of Him Who came after Jesus, nor silence the opponents, nor prevail over the contending disbelievers. For the Christian divines use this verse to prove that the Gospel shall never be abrogated and that, even if all the signs recorded in their Books were fulfilled and the Promised One appeared, He would have no recourse but to rule the people according to the ordinances of the Gospel. They contend that if He were to manifest all the signs indicated in the Books, but decree aught besides that which Jesus had decreed, they would neither acknowledge nor follow Him, so clear and self-evident is this matter in their sight.¹⁷⁹

In other Writings Bahá'u'llah likewise refers to the Gospel as the revelation to Jesus:

The followers of the Gospel, likewise, hold as impossible that the Bearer of a new Revelation should again shine forth from the dayspring of the Will of God after Jesus, Son of Mary -- peace be upon Him! In support of this contention, they adduce the following verse from the Gospel: "**Heaven and earth shall pass away, but the words of the Son of Man shall never pass away.**"¹⁸⁰ They maintain that neither the teachings nor the commandments of Jesus -- peace be upon Him!

¹⁷⁷Bahá'u'lláh, *Gems of Divine Mysteries*, pp. 12-13

¹⁷⁸Gospel of Matthew 24:35; Gospel of Mark 13:31; Gospel of Luke 21:33

¹⁷⁹Bahá'u'lláh, *Gems of Divine Mysteries*, pp. 17-19

¹⁸⁰Gospel of Matthew 24:35; Gospel of Mark 13:31; Gospel of Luke 21:33

-- may ever be altered. At one point in the Gospel, He saith: "**I go away, and come again.**"¹⁸¹ Again in the Gospel of John, He hath foretold the advent of a Comforter who shall come after Him.¹⁸² In the Gospel of Luke, moreover, a number of signs and portents have been mentioned. Certain divines of that Faith, however, have interpreted these utterances after their own fancy, and have thus failed to grasp their true significance. O would that thou wouldst permit Me, O Shah, to send unto thee that which would cheer the eyes, and tranquillize the souls, and persuade every fair-minded person that with Him is the knowledge of the Book. Certain persons, incapable of answering the objections raised by their opponents, claim that the Torah and the Gospel have been corrupted¹⁸³, whereas in reality the references to such corruption pertain only to specific cases.¹⁸⁴

Say: O peoples of all faiths! Walk not in the ways of them that followed the Pharisees and thus veiled themselves from the Spirit. They truly have strayed and are in error. The Ancient Beauty is come in His Most Great Name, and He wisheth to admit all mankind into His most holy Kingdom. The pure in heart behold the Kingdom of God manifest before His Face. Make haste thereunto and follow not the infidel and the ungodly. **Should your eye be opposed thereto, pluck it out.**¹⁸⁵ Thus hath it been decreed by the Pen of the Ancient of Days, as bidden by Him Who is the Lord of the entire creation. He, verily, hath come again that ye might be redeemed, O peoples of the earth. Will ye slay Him Who desireth to grant you eternal life? Fear God, O ye who are endued with insight.¹⁸⁶

Again, heard ye not that which hath been recorded in the Gospel concerning those "**which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God**"¹⁸⁷ -- that is, those who have been made manifest through the power of God? Wherefore it becometh evident that one may well be manifested in the world of creation who is truly of God, the Almighty, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. How is it then that when word reached you of Our Cause, ye failed to inquire from Our own lips, that ye might distinguish truth from falsehood, discover Our aim and purpose, and learn of the afflictions which We have suffered at the hands of an evil and wayward generation?

O Minister of the King of Paris! Hast thou forgotten the pronouncement recorded in the Gospel according to John concerning the Word and those who are its Manifestations? And hast

¹⁸¹Gospel of John 14:28

¹⁸²Gospel of John 14:16, 14:26, 15:26, 16:7

¹⁸³Note in SLH: Qur'án 4:46; 5:13; 5:41; and 2:75; and the discussion in the Kitáb-i-Íqán, p. 84 ff.

¹⁸⁴Bahá'u'lláh, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, pp. 125-126

¹⁸⁵Gospel of Matthew 5:29, 18:9; Gospel of Mark 9:47

¹⁸⁶Bahá'u'lláh, Suriy-i-Haykal, in The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, pp. 63-64

¹⁸⁷Gospel of John 1:13

thou ignored the counsels of the Spirit [Jesus] concerning the Manifestations of the Word, and been numbered with the heedless?¹⁸⁸

The primacy of the apostle Peter is seemingly affirmed by these words in the Gospels:

16:15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? 16:16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. 16:17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. 16:19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Gospel of Matthew)

18:15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 18:16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 18:17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. 18:18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 18:19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. 18:20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. 18:21 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? 18:22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. (Gospel of Matthew)

One of the meanings of Matthew 16:18-19 is that the Christian sanctuary is founded upon the faith of Peter:

Jesus Christ, addressing Peter, said, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." This utterance was indicative of the faith of Peter, signifying: This faith of thine, O Peter, is the very cause and message of unity to the nations; it shall be the bond of union between the hearts of men and the foundation of the oneness of the world of humanity. In brief, the original purpose of temples and houses of worship is simply that of unity -- places of meeting where various peoples, different races and souls of every capacity may come together in order that love and agreement should be manifest between them. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 65)

¹⁸⁸Bahá'u'lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, pp. 191-192

Another of the meanings of Matthew 16:18-19 is that the house of worship, the physical church is a symbol of the church of God which is the divine law:

That is to say, the Manifestation of God is the real divine temple and Collective Center of which the outer church is but a symbol. Recall the statement of Jesus Christ in the Gospel. Addressing Peter, He said, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." It is evident, therefore, that the church of God is the law of God and that the actual edifice is but one symbol thereof. For the law of God is a collective center which unites various peoples, native lands, tongues and opinions. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 163-164)

'Abdu'l-Bahá indicates that this appointment of Peter as the foundation of the church is not comparable to His appointment by Bahá'u'llah in Kitáb-i-Aqdas and Kitáb-i-'Ahd:

Christ, for instance, did not appoint a center of authority and explanation. He did not say to His followers, "Obey the one whom I have chosen." Upon one occasion He asked His disciples, "Whom say ye that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Christ, wishing to make firm the faith of Peter, said, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church," meaning that the faith of Peter was the true faith. It was a sanction of Peter's faith. He did not say that all should turn to Peter. He did not say, "He is the branch extended from my ancient root." He did not say, "O God! Bless all who serve Peter. O God! Degrade those who are not obedient to him. Shun him who is a violator of the Covenant. O God! Thou knowest that I love all who are steadfast in the Covenant." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 385-386)

'Abdu'l-Bahá indicates that this statement in Matthew 16:18-19 indicates that Peter was singled out for a special honor:

Judas Iscariot was the greatest of the disciples, and he summoned the people to Christ. Then it seemed to him that Jesus was showing increasing regard to the Apostle Peter, and when Jesus said, **'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church,'** these words addressed to Peter, and this singling out of Peter for special honour, had a marked effect on the Apostle, and kindled envy within the heart of Judas. For this reason he who had once drawn nigh did turn aside, and he who had believed in the Faith denied it, and his love changed to hate, until he became a cause of the crucifixion of that glorious Lord, that manifest Splendour. Such is the outcome of envy, the chief reason why men turn aside from the Straight Path. So hath it occurred, and will occur, in this great Cause. But it doth not matter, for it engendereth loyalty in the rest, and maketh souls to arise who waver not, who are fixed and unshakeable as the

mountains in their love for the Manifest Light. (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 163)

Shoghi Effendi twice stated in one of his letters to the American Bahá'ís that the traditional Roman Catholic affirmation of the primacy of Peter is affirmed in the Bahá'í Revelation:

“...the primacy of Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, is upheld and defended.” (Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 109)

“...the legitimacy of the institution of the Imamate, and of the primacy of St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles...” [These are among] “the central, the solid, the incontrovertible principles that constitute the bedrock of Bahá'í belief, which the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh is proud to acknowledge, which its teachers proclaim, which its apologists defend, which its literature disseminates, which its summer schools expound, and which the rank and file of its followers attest by both word and deed.” (Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 110)

There is yet another interpretation of the meaning of Matthew 16:18-19, and it bears close examination:

Question. – “In the Gospel of St. Matthew it is said: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church." What is the meaning of this verse?

Answer. – “This utterance of Christ is a confirmation of the statement of Peter, when Christ asked: Whom do you believe Me to be? and Peter answered: I believe that "Thou art the Son of the living God." Then Christ said to him: "Thou art Peter" -- for Cephas in Aramaic means rock -- "and upon this rock I will build My church." For the others in answer to Christ said that He was Elias [Elijah/Eliahu], and some said John the Baptist, and some others Jeremias [Jeremiah/Yermiyahu] or one of the Prophets.

“Christ wished by suggestion, or an allusion, to confirm the words of Peter; so on account of the suitability of his name, Peter, He said: "and upon this rock I will build My church," meaning, thy belief that Christ is the Son of the living God will be the foundation of the Religion of God, and upon this belief the foundation of the church of God -- which is the Law of God -- shall be established.

“The existence of the tomb of Peter in Rome is doubtful; it is not authenticated. Some say it is in Antioch.

“Moreover, let us compare the lives of some of the Popes with the religion of Christ. Christ, hungry and without shelter, ate herbs in the wilderness, and was unwilling to hurt the feelings of anyone. The Pope sits in a carriage covered with gold and passes his time in the utmost splendor, amidst such pleasures and luxuries, such riches and adoration, as kings have never had.

“Christ hurt no one, but some of the Popes killed innocent people: refer to history. How much blood the Popes have shed merely to retain temporal power! For mere differences of opinion they arrested, imprisoned and slew thousands of the servants of the world of humanity and learned men who had discovered the secrets of nature. To what a degree they opposed the truth!

“Reflect upon the instructions of Christ, and investigate the habits and customs of the Popes. Consider: is there any resemblance between the instructions of Christ and the manner of government of the Popes? We do not like to criticize, but the history of the Vatican is very extraordinary. The purport of our argument is this, that the instructions of Christ are one thing, and the manner of the Papal government is quite another; they do not agree. See how many Protestants have been killed by the order of the Popes, how many tyrannies and oppressions have been countenanced, and how many punishments and tortures have been inflicted! Can any of the sweet fragrances of Christ be detected in these actions? No! in the name of God! These people did not obey Christ, while Saint Barbara, whose picture is before us, did obey Christ, and followed in His footsteps, and put His commands into practice. Among the Popes there are also some blessed souls who followed in the footsteps of Christ, particularly in the first centuries of the Christian era when temporal things were lacking and the tests of God were severe. But when they came into possession of governmental power, and worldly honor and prosperity were gained, the Papal government entirely forgot Christ and was occupied with temporal power, grandeur, comfort and luxuries. It killed people, opposed the diffusion of learning, tormented the men of science, obstructed the light of knowledge, and gave the order to slay and to pillage. Thousands of souls, men of science and learning, and sinless ones, perished in the prisons of Rome. With all these proceedings and actions, how can the Vicarship of Christ be believed in?

“The Papal See has constantly opposed knowledge; even in Europe it is admitted that religion is the opponent of science, and that science is the destroyer of the foundations of religion. While the religion of God is the promoter of truth, the founder of science and knowledge, it is full of goodwill for learned men; it is the civilizer of mankind, the discoverer of the secrets of nature, and the enlightener of the horizons of the world. Consequently, how can it be said to oppose knowledge? God forbid! Nay, for God, knowledge is the most glorious gift of man and the most noble of human perfections. To oppose knowledge is ignorant, and he who detests knowledge and science is not a man, but rather an animal without intelligence. For knowledge is light, life, felicity, perfection, beauty and the means of approaching the Threshold of Unity. It is the honor

and glory of the world of humanity, and the greatest bounty of God. Knowledge is identical with guidance, and ignorance is real error.

“Happy are those who spend their days in gaining knowledge, in discovering the secrets of nature, and in penetrating the subtleties of pure truth! Woe to those who are contented with ignorance, whose hearts are gladdened by thoughtless imitation, who have fallen into the lowest depths of ignorance and foolishness, and who have wasted their lives!”

(‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, pp. 135-137)

While the previously cited interpretations might well be taken to confirm Peter as the founder of the Christian church and therefore to confirm the long-established dogma of the Roman Catholic Church that the Papacy and the entirety of the ecclesiastical structure was established by Jesus Christ, and therefore unimpeachable in authority, even, as Catholic doctrine indicates, infallible. But this last passage undermines that dogma, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá pointed out that the Papacy was responsible for perpetrating horrendous of crimes against humanity. While the founder of the church was appointed by Jesus, that did not ensure that the church would remain faithful to the teachings of its Master. There are indications in the Gospel accounts that Peter himself was not above criticism, and hardly infallible. Jesus taught non-violence (Luke 6:27-29; Matthew 5:38-39,44-45), but Peter committed violence (John 18:10-11; Luke 22:49-51; Mark 14:47; Matthew 26:51-52); Jesus commanded obedience (John 10:27, 14:5-12), and Peter rebuked Him and was told “Get thee behind me Satan!” (Mark 8:32-33; Matthew 16:22-23); Jesus enjoined loyalty (Luke 12:8-9), and Peter denied Him three times (John 18:17,25-27; Luke 22:57-60; Mark 14:67-72; Matthew 26:69-74).

If Jesus had prophesied that Peter would be the founder of the church, and that thereby the authority and infallibility of Jesus Christ was conveyed by this first of the disciples to the entire line of Popes, and to the ecclesiastical order as a whole, then history tells us that this prophecy was not fulfilled. On the other hand, if He predicted that Peter, with his significant foibles, would be emblematic of the leadership of the Christian community, then this may have been more accurately realized than Christian tradition might wish to recognize. The most spiritually perceptive of the disciples was Mary Magdalene, who was the first to see and affirm the risen Christ. Here seven sins preceded her conversion. In contrast to her, Peter initially denied the resurrection (Mark 16:9-11), and his plentiful sins postdated his conversion...I speak of his violence, his disobedience, his disloyalty.

The most beloved of the disciples was John, as attested plentifully in the Gospel of John (13:23,25; 19:26-27; 20:2; 21:7,20) , and it was plain that Jesus preferred John over Peter, as indicated by these verses at the conclusion of his Gospel:

“21:20 Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? 21:21 Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? 21:22 Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he

tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me. 21:23 Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? 21:24 This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true.”

Hence, the special distinction of Peter is that he is the model for what will become of the church leadership—it will engage in and condone violence, it will be disobedient to the teachings of Jesus, and it will be disloyal to Him and follow after idols and false prophets. It began to turn violent shortly after the death of Jesus, as reported in the Book of Acts:

“4:36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, 4:37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet. 5:1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, 5:2 And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. 5:3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? 5:4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. 5:5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. 5:6 And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. 5:7 And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. 5:8 And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. 5:9 Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. 5:10 Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. 5:11 And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.”

Consider whether there is any record of Jesus condemning any man or woman to death for the commission of any sin? Did He not forgive and show mercy to every one? Was Peter stricken down when he disobeyed Jesus, when he was unfaithful to Jesus? Or was he pardoned, not once but multiple times? Why then was Peter, so soon after the passing of his Master, condemning and meting out capital punishment for the minor crime of misreporting income to the community of believers? This was precisely the model that centuries of church governance was to follow, so that the church ultimately became the exact opposite of the teachings of Jesus...to such a degree that millions of Christians risked death and indeed did meet their earthly end as a result of discovering this contradiction and refusing to adhere to the traditions in which they were raised and by which they were governed.

Cleanliness is a major theme of Jesus' teachings. But unlike Biblical injunction, which requires women to bathe in order to purify themselves after intercourse and during menstruation, and Jewish tradition, which required similar cleansing by men, Jesus put all the stress on spiritual purification.

15:16 And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding? 15:17 Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? 15:18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. 15:19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: 15:20 These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man. (Gospel of Matthew)

7:14 And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand: 7:15 There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man. 7:16 If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. 7:17 And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable. 7:18 And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him; 7:19 Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats? 7:20 And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. 7:21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, 7:22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: 7:23 All these evil things come from within, and defile the man. (Gospel of Mark)

Jesus critiques those among His compatriots, his coreligionists who put all the emphasis on outward rather than inward spirituality:

23:25 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. 23:26 Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. (Gospel of Matthew)

11:37 And as he spake, a certain Pharisee besought him to dine with him: and he went in, and sat down to meat. 11:38 And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed before dinner. 11:39 And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. 11:40 Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within also? 11:41 But rather give alms of such things as ye have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you. (Gospel of Luke)

Jesus exhorts His followers not to be overly concerned with what they eat and how they clothe themselves. They should put first things first, the matters of the spirit, and everything else will follow:

6:25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? 6:26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? 6:27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? 6:28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: 6:29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 6:30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? 6:31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? 6:32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek;) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. (Gospel of Matthew)

12:19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. 12:20 But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? 12:21 So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. 12:22 And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. 12:23 The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. 12:24 Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? 12:25 And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? 12:26 If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? 12:27 Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 12:28 If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? 12:29 And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. 12:30 For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. (Gospel of Luke)

The chief disciple Peter saw a vision, after the ascension of Jesus, not once but three times (as was the case with other counsels he had received during the lifetime of Jesus), as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles:

11:4 But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying, 11:5 I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel

descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: 11:6 Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. 11:7 And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. 11:8 But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. 11:9 But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. 11:10 And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven.

The apostle Paul concurred with this understanding, as indicated in the Epistle to the Romans:

14:13 Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. 14:14 I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean. 14:15 But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. 14:16 Let not then your good be evil spoken of: 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

He extended this principle to the company one keeps when one is eating:

5:29 And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. 5:30 But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? 5:31 And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. 5:32 I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. 5:33 And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink? 5:34 And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? 5:35 But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days. (Gospel of Matthew)

2:15 And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him. 2:16 And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners? 2:17 When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. (Gospel of Mark)

Then He points to the hypocrisy of His critics, who accuse His ascetic herald of being possessed by a devil, while regarding Him, probably in comparison with John, a glutton and wine and a friend of riffraff:

11:18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. 11:19 The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children. (Gospel of Matthew)

7:33 For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. 7:34 The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! 7:35 But wisdom is justified of all her children. 7:36 And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. (Gospel of Luke)

Consider that, of all religions, the most strict and detailed in its regulation of diet and clothing is probably Judaism. The rules that govern Zoroastrian priests, Hindu Brahmins, Buddhist monks are complicated and regarded by their practitioners as essential to spiritual order and advancement. But for Orthodox Jews, it is not just the religious professionals, the rabbis and cantors who are bound by hundreds of rules that govern food and raiment...it is every man and every woman, every boy and every girl. While it might be observed, and rightly so, that most of these rules may have come into existence subsequent to the lifetime of Jesus, it is certain that the Sadducees referred to in the Gospels were strict in their observant of Biblical laws and Temple traditions; that the Pharisees and scribes also spoken of in the Gospels were not only keepers of Biblical laws but also of layers of traditional elaboration of those injunctions that gave rise to the Mishnah, the Gemara and ultimately the great codes of halakhah.

However, Jesus does not actually reject laws and commandments, in fact, He insists they be obeyed by His followers:

5:17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. 5:18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. 5:19 Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 5:20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. (Gospel of Matthew)

19:16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? 19:17 And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. 19:18 He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery,

Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, 19:19 Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 19:20 The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? 19:21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. (Gospel of Matthew)

10:17 And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? 10:18 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. 10:19 Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. 10:20 And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. 10:21 Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. (Gospel of Mark)

18:18 And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? 18:19 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God. 18:20 Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother. 18:21 And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up. 18:22 Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. (Gospel of Luke)

13:34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. (Gospel of John)

14:15 If ye love me, keep my commandments. (Gospel of John)

14:21 He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. (Gospel of John)

15:10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. 15:11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. 15:12 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. (Gospel of John)

This same theme is recapitulated in the First Epistle of John:

2:3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. 2:4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 2:5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. 2:6 He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. 2:7 Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. (First Epistle of John)

3:21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. 3:22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. 3:23 And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. 3:24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us. (First Epistle of John)

4:20 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? 4:21 And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also. 5:1 Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. 5:2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous. (First Epistle of John)

Paul reiterates this principle in his First Epistle to Timothy:

1:5 Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: 1:6 From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; 1:7 Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm. 1:8 But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; 1:9 Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, 1:10 For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; 1:11 According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust. (Gospel of 1 Timothy)

And John cites it in the Apocalypse:

14:12 Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. (Gospel of Revelation)

22:14 Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. (Gospel of Revelation)

It is not the law itself but the interpretation of the law that is taken in another direction from the conventional by Jesus, as expressed in the Gospels:

5:20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. 5:21 Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: 5:22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. 5:23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; 5:24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. 5:25 Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. 5:26 Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing. 5:27 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: 5:28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. 5:29 And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. 5:30 And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. 5:31 It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: 5:32 But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery. 5:33 Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: 5:34 But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: 5:35 Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. 5:36 Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. 5:37 But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of

evil. 5:38 Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: 5:39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. 5:40 And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. 5:41 And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. 5:42 Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. 5:43 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. 5:44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; 5:45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. 5:46 For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? 5:47 And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? 5:48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. 6:1 Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. 6:2 Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. 6:3 But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: 6:4 That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. 6:5 And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. 6:6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. 6:7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. 6:8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. 6:9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. 6:10 Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. 6:11 Give us this day our daily bread. 6:12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. 6:13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. 6:14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: 6:15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. 6:16 Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. 6:17 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; 6:18 That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly. 6:19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: 6:20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves

do not break through nor steal: 6:21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. 6:22 The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

(Gospel of Matthew)

6:63 It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. (Gospel of John)

This is reiterated by the apostle Paul in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians:

3:1 Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? 3:2 Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: 3:3 Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. 3:4 And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: 3:5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; 3:6 Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. (Gospel of 2 Corinthians)

The law that Jesus does not approve of is the law of man, not the law of God:

15:1 Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, 15:2 Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. 15:3 But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? 15:4 For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. 15:5 But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; 15:6 And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. 15:7 Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, 15:8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. 15:9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. (Gospel of Matthew)

7:7 Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. 7:8 For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. 7:9 And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. (Gospel of Luke)

The apostle Paul likewise makes this distinction in his Epistle to Titus:

1:13 This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith;
1:14 Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth.
(Gospel of Titus)

In contrast to the teachings and life of Jesus, consider these details of Apollonius of Tyana, a contemporary¹⁸⁹:

And having said this he declined to live upon a flesh diet, on the ground that it was unclean, and also that it made the mind gross; so he partook only of dried fruits and vegetables, for he said that all the fruits of the earth are clean. And of wine he said that it was a clean drink because it is yielded to men by so well-domesticated a plant as the vine; but he declared that it endangered the mental balance and system and darkened, as with mud, the ether which is in the soul.

After then having thus purged his interior, he took to walking without shoes by way of adornment and clad himself in linen raiment, declining to wear any animal product; and he let his hair grow long and lived in the Temple. And the people round about the Temple were struck with admiration for him, and the god Asclepius one day said to the priest that he was delighted to have Apollonius as witness of his cures of the sick; and such was his reputation that the Cilicians themselves and the people all around flocked to Aegae to visit him. Hence the Cilician proverb: "Whither runnest thou? Is it to see the stripling?" Such was the saying that arose about him, and it gained the distinction of becoming a proverb.

These are a few of the references made by Bahá'u'llah to the verses of the Gospel. There are many others that refer to the epistles of the disciples and the Book of Revelation which are also included in the canonical New Testament. 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi have also cited such verses. On the contrary. Bahá'u'llah writes about this verse (Matthew 22:16-21; Mark 12:13-17 ; Luke 20:19-25):

Regard for the rank of sovereigns is divinely ordained, as is clearly attested by the words of the Prophets of God and His chosen ones. He Who is the Spirit (Jesus) -- may peace be upon Him -- was asked: "**O Spirit of God! Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?**" And He made reply: "**Yea, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.**" He forbade it not. These two sayings are, in the estimation of men of insight, one and the same, for if that which belonged to Caesar had not come from God, He would have forbidden it. (Bahá'u'llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, pp. 89-90)

¹⁸⁹http://www.livius.org/ap-ark/apollonius/life/va_1_06.html#1: Flavius Philostratus, The Life of Apollonius of Tyana, Book One

22:35 And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. 22:36 Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. 22:37 For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end. (Gospel of Matthew)

22:38 And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough. (Gospel of Luke 22:35-38)

One commentator suggests this is in fulfillment of this verse from the Book of Isaiah:

53:12 Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Another interpretation is suggested by what happened later in the Gospel account:

26:51 And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear. 26:52 Then said Jesus unto him, *Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.* 26:53 Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? 26:54 But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be? 26:55 In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me. (Gospel of Matthew)

14:47 And one of them that stood by drew a sword, and smote a servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. 14:48 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me? 14:49 I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the scriptures must be fulfilled. (Gospel of Mark)

22:49 When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? 22:50 And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear. 22:51 And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him. 22:52 Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to him, Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves? 22:53

When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness. (Gospel of Luke)

This recalls the prophecy related almost identically by two of the Hebrew prophets...they envisioned a time when the sword would be used no longer...and Jesus made it crystal clear according to the Gospel of Matthew, that this moment had arrived. Instead of calling Peter and his other followers to defend him and to overcome his enemies, he told him to lay down his weapon. When the religious authorities sought to apprehend him, he reprimanded them for bearing swords and staves, as if he was a common criminal.

2:4 And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Book of Isaiah)

4:3 And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Book of Micah)

Whereas Jewish tradition dichotomized the entirety of human society into male and female spheres, and Christian tradition has, until recently and under the powerful influence of secular factors rather than religious influences, done the very same, Jesus sets forth a vision of the kingdom of God, in which gender is simply not a factor. It is found in all three of the synoptic Gospels:

22:23 The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, 22:24 Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. 22:25 Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: 22:26 Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. 22:27 And last of all the woman died also. 22:28 Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her. 22:29 Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. 22:30 **For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.** (Gospel of Matthew)

12:18 Then come unto him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection; and they asked him, saying, 12:19 Master, Moses wrote unto us, If a man's brother die, and leave his wife behind him, and leave no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. 12:20 Now there were seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and dying left no seed. 12:21 And the second took her, and died, neither left he any seed: and the third likewise. 12:22 And the seven had her, and left no seed: last of all the woman died also. 12:23 In the resurrection

therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them? for the seven had her to wife. 12:24 And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God? 12:25 **For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven.** (Gospel of Mark)

20:27 Then came to him certain of the Sadducees, which deny that there is any resurrection; and they asked him, 20:28 Saying, Master, Moses wrote unto us, If any man's brother die, having a wife, and he die without children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. 20:29 There were therefore seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and died without children. 20:30 And the second took her to wife, and he died childless. 20:31 And the third took her; and in like manner the seven also: and they left no children, and died. 20:32 Last of all the woman died also. 20:33 Therefore in the resurrection whose wife of them is she? for seven had her to wife. 20:34 And Jesus answering said unto them, **The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: 20:35 But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: 20:36 Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.** (Gospel of Luke)

Jesus tells a different story which bears upon the same principle, in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke:

24:37 But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. 24:38 For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, 24:39 And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. 24:40 Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. 24:41 Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. (Gospel of Matthew)

We should note that there is no distinction between gender, but rather whether it be two men in the field or two women grinding at the mill, "the one shall be taken, and the other left".

24:42 Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. 24:43 But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. 24:44 Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. 24:45 Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? 24:46 Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. 24:47

Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. 24:48 But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; 24:49 And shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; 24:50 The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, 24:51 And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Gospel of Matthew)

He counsels that we live knowing that any day the Lord may arrive and witness our actions, not to imagine that “My lord delayeth his coming” and that therefore one has permission to do wickedness, “to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken”. (Gospel of Matthew)

17:26 And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. 17:27 They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. 17:28 Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; 17:29 But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. 17:30 Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. 17:31 In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. 17:32 Remember Lot's wife. 17:33 Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. 17:34 I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. 17:35 Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. 17:36 Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. 17:37 And they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together. 18:1 And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; 18:2 Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: 18:3 And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. 18:4 And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; 18:5 Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. 18:6 And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. 18:7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? 18:8 I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth? (Gospel of Luke)

The independence of this election to the true life from the daily events and concerns of the world, including gender and gender roles is reinforced by these counsels:

6:25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? 6:26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? 6:27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? 6:28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: 6:29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 6:30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? 6:31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? 6:32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (Gospel of Matthew)

Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven in many of His parables:

13:31 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: 13:32 Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. 13:33 Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. 13:34 All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: 13:35 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world. 13:36 Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. 13:37 He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; 13:38 The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; 13:39 The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. 13:40 As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. 13:41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; 13:42 And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. 13:43 Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. 13:44 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. 13:45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: 13:46 Who, when he had found one

pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it. 13:47 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: 13:48 Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. 13:49 So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, 13:50 And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. 13:51 Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord. 13:52 Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old. (Gospel of Matthew)

19:23 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. 19:24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. 19:25 When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? 19:26 But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. (Gospel of Matthew)

20:1 For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. 20:2 And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. 20:3 And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, 20:4 And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. 20:5 Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. 20:6 And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? 20:7 They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. 20:8 So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. 20:9 And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. 20:10 But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. 20:11 And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, 20:12 Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. 20:13 But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? 20:14 Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. 20:15 Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? 20:16 So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen. (Gospel of Matthew)

21:28 But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. 21:29 He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. 21:30 And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. 21:31 Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. 21:32 For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him. 21:42 Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? 21:43 Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. 21:44 And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. (Gospel of Matthew)

Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven in the Gospel of Luke:

13:18 Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? 13:19 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it. 13:20 And again he said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? 13:21 It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. 13:22 And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. 13:23 Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, 13:24 Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. 13:25 When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: 13:26 Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. 13:27 But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. 13:28 There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. 13:29 And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. 13:30 And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last. (Gospel of Luke)

In another story Jesus reiterates this principle, that it is not male or female, marriage or celibacy, or maturity that make one fit for the kingdom of heaven:

19:3 The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? 19:4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, 19:5 And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? 19:6 Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. 19:7 They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? 19:8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. 19:9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. 19:10 His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. 19:11 But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. 19:12 For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it. 19:13 Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. 19:14 But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. (Gospel of Matthew)

9:36 And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, 9:37 Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me. (Gospel of Mark)

10:13 And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. 10:14 But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. 10:15 Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. 10:16 And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them. (Gospel of Mark)

18:15 And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them. 18:16 But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. 18:17 Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein. (Gospel of Luke)

In other Gospel stories Jesus calls His disciples “little children” and reverses the conventional order of relations between parents and children:

13:33 Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you. 13:34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. 13:35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. (Gospel of John)

18:1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? 18:2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, 18:3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. 18:4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 18:5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. 18:6 But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. (Gospel of Matthew)

What is needed then is not marriage or celibacy, not maturity or learning, but one thing—to be born again of the Spirit:

3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. 3:4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 3:6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 3:7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. 3:8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. (Gospel of John)

Those who are born again, they are the “children of God, the children of the resurrection”:

20:35 But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: 20:36 Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection. (Gospel of Luke)

Who are the “children of God”? They are already identified in the Gospels:

5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. 5:10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Gospel of Matthew)

The children of God are not of one nation or race or religion...they are those who make peace and those who are persecuted because they have done what is righteous.

There is no hint in any of His discourses or actions that Jesus preferred men over women, or that He favored the loquaciousness of men and the silence of women. What He called for was a change of heart, and, the direct result of this change of heart, a change of behavior. This was indicative of salvation and redemption, of being one of the few who was chosen rather than one of the many who were called. We may conclude therefore that the counsels that Paul and Peter gave to their Christian brothers and sisters in faith pertaining to the conduct of women were not in fact derived from the teachings of Jesus.

STORY BY STORY: BAHÁ'Í INTERPRETATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

We will begin with the stories told in the Gospels, as explained in the Bahá'í source texts, including the talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the letters written on behalf of the Guardian, and the writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. The stories included here represent the start of a collection...and your assignment is to expand upon this collection, so please take note of the general method employed.

THE COSMIC JESUS

Rather than starting with the Gospel of Matthew or more generally with the synoptic Gospels, we will commence with the first verses of the Gospel of John...because they give a cosmic perspective on the appearance of Jesus Christ which is unique to the New Testament and which predates His birth and even the story of His human heritage. The verses are as follows¹⁹⁰:

1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 1:2 The same was in the beginning with God. 1:3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

The references to this first verse of the Gospel are numerous in Bahá'í source literature and they are all cited below in order that we might come to a overall understanding of its interpretation:

In the Gospel it is said, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." Then it is evident and clear that Christ did not reach to the station of Messiahship and its perfections at the time of baptism, when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the likeness of a dove. Nay, the Word of God from all eternity has always been, and will be, in the exaltation of sanctification.¹⁹¹

In the world of God there is no past, no future and no present; all are one. So when Christ said, "In the beginning was the Word" -- that means it was, is and shall be; for in the world of God there is no time. Time has sway over creatures but not over God. For example, in the prayer He says, "Hallowed be Thy name"¹⁹²; the meaning is that Thy name was, is and shall be hallowed.

¹⁹⁰Gospel of John 1:1-1:18

¹⁹¹'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 153

¹⁹²Gospel of Matthew 6:9; Gospel of Luke 11:2

Morning, noon and evening are related to this earth, but in the sun there is neither morning, noon nor evening.¹⁹³

In like manner, the Holy Manifestations of God are the centers of the light of reality, of the source of mysteries, and of the bounties of love. They are resplendent in the world of hearts and thoughts, and shower eternal graces upon the world of spirits; They give spiritual life and are shining with the light of realities and meanings. The enlightenment of the world of thought comes from these centers of light and sources of mysteries. Without the bounty of the splendor and the instructions of these Holy Beings the world of souls and thoughts would be opaque darkness. Without the irrefutable teachings of those sources of mysteries the human world would become the pasture of animal appetites and qualities, the existence of everything would be unreal, and there would be no true life. That is why it is said in the Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word," meaning that it became the cause of all life.¹⁹⁴

But the proceeding through manifestation (if by this is meant the divine appearance, and not division into parts), we have said, is the proceeding and the appearance of the Holy Spirit and the Word, which is from God. As it is said in the Gospel of John, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God"; then the Holy Spirit and the Word are the appearance of God. The Spirit and the Word mean the divine perfections that appeared in the Reality of Christ, and these perfections were with God; so the sun manifests all its glory in the mirror. For the Word does not signify the body of Christ, no, but the divine perfections manifested in Him. For Christ was like a clear mirror which was facing the Sun of Reality; and the perfections of the Sun of Reality -- that is to say, its light and heat -- were visible and apparent in this mirror. If we look into the mirror, we see the sun, and we say, "It is the sun." Therefore, the Word and the Holy Spirit, which signify the perfections of God, are the divine appearance. This is the meaning of the verse in the Gospel which says: "The Word was with God, and the Word was God"; for the divine perfections are not different from the Essence of Oneness. The perfections of Christ are called the Word because all the beings are in the condition of letters, and one letter has not a complete meaning, while the perfections of Christ have the power of the word because a complete meaning can be inferred from a word. As the Reality of Christ was the manifestation of the divine perfections, therefore, it was like the word. Why? because He is the sum of perfect meanings. This is why He is called the Word.

And know that the proceeding of the Word and the Holy Spirit from God, which is the proceeding and appearance of manifestation, must not be understood to mean that the Reality of Divinity had been divided into parts, or multiplied, or that it had descended from the exaltation

^{193c}Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 156

^{194c}Abdu'l-Bahá, Ibid., pp. 162-163

of holiness and purity. God forbid! If a pure, fine mirror faces the sun, the light and heat, the form and the image of the sun will be resplendent in it with such manifestation that if a beholder says of the sun, which is brilliant and visible in the mirror, "This is the sun," it is true. Nevertheless, the mirror is the mirror, and the sun is the sun. The One Sun, even if it appears in numerous mirrors, is one. This state is neither abiding nor entering, neither commingling nor descending; for entering, abiding, descending, issuing forth and commingling are the necessities and characteristics of bodies, not of spirits; then how much less do they belong to the sanctified and pure Reality of God. God is exempt from all that is not in accordance with His purity and His exalted and sublime sanctity.

The Sun of Reality, as we have said, has always been in one condition; it has no change, no alteration, no transformation and no vicissitude. It is eternal and everlasting. But the Holy Reality of the Word of God is in the condition of the pure, fine and shining mirror; the heat, the light, the image and likeness -- that is to say, the perfections of the Sun of Reality -- appear in it. That is why Christ says in the Gospel, "The Father is in the Son"¹⁹⁵ -- that is to say, the Sun of Reality appears in the mirror. Praise be to the One Who shone upon this Holy Reality, Who is sanctified among the beings!¹⁹⁶

The Christ was the word of God from the beginning - in the same way Mohammed says, "I was a prophet before the existence of Adam," and Bahá'u'llah says, "In the beginning which has no beginning I loved thee."

The sun is always the sun; if at a certain period it gave no light it would not at that period be called the sun, for the characteristics of the sun are light and heat. The great ones are from all time in their glorious station, their reality is luminous from the beginning, the reality that causes the qualities of God to appear, but the day of their manifestation is the day when they proclaim themselves of this earth.¹⁹⁷

Our belief in regard to Christ is exactly what is recorded in the New Testament [Hamán tawr kih dar Injíl madhkúr ast, lákin má sharh mídahím];¹⁹⁸ however, we elucidate this matter and do not speak literally [záhir] or in a manner based merely on blind belief. For instance, it is recorded in the Gospel of St. John, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God." The majority of Christians accept this as a matter of belief,¹⁹⁹ but we give an explanation which is accepted by reason, an explanation that no one need find occasion to reject.

¹⁹⁵Cf. Gospel of John 14:11; 17:21

¹⁹⁶Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 206-207

¹⁹⁷Abdu'l-Bahá *on Divine Philosophy*, p. 52

¹⁹⁸*Injíl* literally means the Evangel, the Gospel.

¹⁹⁹The original reads, "The Christians accept these assertions on mere hearing".

The Christians have made this statement the foundation of the trinity [Tathlíth], but philosophers deny it as mere superstition,²⁰⁰ stating that the trinity as regards the identity of divinity is impossible;²⁰¹ and, in turn, the Christians do not give a satisfactory explanation and interpretation that can be accepted by the philosophers, as the former base their whole exposition of this subject upon the authority of the holy scriptures;²⁰² the latter do not accept it, saying, "Is it possible to have three in one and one in three?"

We explain this subject as follows:²⁰³ By the "word" we mean that creation with its infinite forms is like unto letters,²⁰⁴ a letter individually has no meaning, no independent significance, but the station of Christ is the station of the word.²⁰⁵ That is why we say Christ is the word. By complete significance we mean that the universal bestowal of divinity²⁰⁶ is manifest in Christ. It is obvious that the evolution²⁰⁷ of other souls is approximate, or only a part of, the whole, but the perfections of the Christ are universal, or the whole. The reality of Christ is the collective centre of all the independent virtues and infinite significances.²⁰⁸

For example, this lamp sheds light, the moon also illumines the night with its silvery beams, but their light is not self created, they receive their light from another source; but His Holiness the Christ is like unto the sun; his light issued forth from his own identity. He has not received it through another person, therefore we give him the comprehensive title of the "word". By this we mean that the all-comprehending reality and the depository of the infinite divine virtues. ²⁰⁹ This "word" has an honorary beginning,²¹⁰ and not a beginning of [in] time. For instance, we say, this person has precedence over all. This precedence comes to him through the station and honour which he now holds in life, but it is not a precedence of [in] time. In reality the "word" has neither a beginning nor ending. It means those perfections which appeared in Christ and not his physical body. Those perfections were from God. It is similar to the rays of the sun which are reflected in a clear mirror. The perfections of Christ were the splendour and

²⁰⁰"Mere superstition" is not present in the original.

²⁰¹The original does not have "as regards the identity of Divinity".

²⁰²The original reads, "As this matter is only based on semantics and belief".

²⁰³ The original adds, "This priority and pre-existence is not in time for, if this priority were in time, the Word would become contingent on time not eternal and changeless."

²⁰⁴ The original reads, "The world of existent beings is like the letters and all human beings as individual letters."

²⁰⁵ The original adds, "which has a completely self-sufficient and independent meaning".

²⁰⁶ The original reads, "the bounties of divine perfections."

²⁰⁷The original reads, "The perfections of souls other than Christ are partial and are not derived from themselves but from another".

²⁰⁸Alternatively the original reads, "But the Reality of Christ possesses complete and self-sufficient perfections".

²⁰⁹The original reads, "That is an all-comprehending reality having all perfections".

²¹⁰The original reads, "This word has a priority in honour and rank".

bounty of divinity.²¹¹ It is evident that these qualities were ever with God, even at this time they are with him, they are inseparable from him, because divinity is not subject to division. Division is a sign of imperfection, and God is the perfect one.

It is clear that the perfections of divinity are co- equal and co-existent with the essence. In that station there is absolute unity. This in brief is the exposition of the station of Christ.²¹²

Consider the statement recorded in the first chapter of the book of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This statement is brief but replete with the greatest meanings. Its applications are illimitable and beyond the power of books or words to contain and express. Heretofore the doctors of theology have not expounded it but have restricted it to Jesus as "the Word made flesh," the separation of Jesus from God, the Father, and His descent upon the earth. In this way the individualized separation of the godhead came to be taught.

The essential oneness of Father, Son and Spirit has many meanings and constitutes the foundation of Christianity. Today we will merely give a synopsis of explanation. Why was Jesus the Word?

In the universe of creation all phenomenal beings are as letters. Letters in themselves are meaningless and express nothing of thought or ideal -- as, for instance, a, b, etc. Likewise, all phenomenal beings are without independent meaning. But a word is composed of letters and has independent sense and meaning. Therefore, as Christ conveyed the perfect meaning of divine reality and embodied independent significance, He was the Word. He was as the station of reality compared to the station of metaphor. There is no intrinsic meaning in the leaves of a book, but the thought they convey leads you to reflect upon reality. The reality of Jesus was the perfect meaning, the Christhood in Him which in the Holy Books is symbolized as the Word.

"The Word was with God." The Christhood means not the body of Jesus but the perfection of divine virtues manifest in Him. Therefore, it is written, "He is God." This does not imply separation from God, even as it is not possible to separate the rays of the sun from the sun. The reality of Christ was the embodiment of divine virtues and attributes of God. For in Divinity there is no duality. All adjectives, nouns and pronouns in that court of sanctity are one; there is neither multiplicity nor division. The intention of this explanation is to show that the Words of

²¹¹Or "effulgent from God".

²¹²The original adds at this point, "We do not postulate three hypostases (Persons, *Ocnoom*) in the Essence of Divinity by merely asserting that in the beginning was the Word and the Word was God and the Word was Christ. Rather we elaborate it."

God have innumerable significances and mysteries of meanings -- each one a thousand and more.²¹³

1:4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men. 1:5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. (Gospel of John)

The interpretation of this verse, while it is not specifically cited, is that the Spirit is the "light of men" and that it is revealed by the Manifestation of God, and that most men do not recognize it, on account of their lack of spiritual discernment, their spiritual ignorance:

As to thy question, "That 'Abdu'l-Bahá hath said to some of the believers that evil never exists, nay rather, it is a non-existent thing:"²¹⁴ This is but truth, inasmuch as the greatest evil is (man's) going astray and being veiled from Truth. Error is lack of guidance; darkness is absence of light; ignorance is lack of knowledge; falsehood is lack of truthfulness; blindness is lack of sight; and deafness is lack of hearing. Therefore, error, blindness, deafness and ignorance are non-existent

²¹³Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 154-155

²¹⁴Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, Chapter 74, pp. 263-265: The Nonexistence of Evil

The true explanation of this subject is very difficult. Know that beings are of two kinds: material and spiritual, those perceptible to the senses and those intellectual.

Things which are sensible are those which are perceived by the five exterior senses; thus those outward existences which the eyes see are called sensible. Intellectual things are those which have no outward existence but are conceptions of the mind. For example, mind itself is an intellectual thing which has no outward existence. All man's characteristics and qualities form an intellectual existence and are not sensible.

Briefly, the intellectual realities, such as all the qualities and admirable perfections of man, are purely good, and exist. Evil is simply their nonexistence. So ignorance is the want of knowledge; error is the want of guidance; forgetfulness is the want of memory; stupidity is the want of good sense. All these things have no real existence.

In the same way, the sensible realities are absolutely good, and evil is due to their nonexistence -- that is to say, blindness is the want of sight, deafness is the want of hearing, poverty is the want of wealth, illness is the want of health, death is the want of life, and weakness is the want of strength.

Nevertheless a doubt occurs to the mind -- that is, scorpions and serpents are poisonous. Are they good or evil, for they are existing beings? Yes, a scorpion is evil in relation to man; a serpent is evil in relation to man; but in relation to themselves they are not evil, for their poison is their weapon, and by their sting they defend themselves. But as the elements of their poison do not agree with our elements -- that is to say, as there is antagonism between these different elements, therefore, this antagonism is evil; but in reality as regards themselves they are good.

The epitome of this discourse is that it is possible that one thing in relation to another may be evil, and at the same time within the limits of its proper being it may not be evil. Then it is proved that there is no evil in existence; all that God created He created good. This evil is nothingness; so death is the absence of life. When man no longer receives life, he dies. Darkness is the absence of light: when there is no light, there is darkness. Light is an existing thing, but darkness is nonexistent. Wealth is an existing thing, but poverty is non-existing.

Then it is evident that all evils return to nonexistence. Good exists; evil is nonexistent.

things. If we say that according to the text of the Bible, "God hardened Pharaoh's heart"²¹⁵ that he might not believe in Moses, this signifies that, verily, He did not soften his heart. And when we wish to say that God hath not guided a certain one of His servants, this would be interpreted (by people) that God led him astray. The darkness spoken of in the Bible as being created by God²¹⁶, signifieth that, verily, God hath not caused light to shine; inasmuch as where there is no light, there will be darkness; when there is no sight, there will be blindness; when there is no life, there will be death; when there is no riches, there will be poverty; and when there is no knowledge, there will be ignorance.

Consequently, it is proven by indisputable argument and clear explanation that, verily, evils are non-existent, but people have not understood the meaning of the verses of the Bible.²¹⁷

1:6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 1:7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. 1:8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. 1:9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. (Gospel of John)

The Bahá'í interpretation of this verse, while not cited yet found in countless references, is that the "true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" is the Light of the Spirit. Here are some references to this Light of the Spirit, which is revealed by each of the Manifestations of God and Their chosen ones:

But this power of the Covenant shall heat every freezing soul, shall bestow light upon everything that is dark and shall secure for the captive in the hand of nature the true freedom of the Kingdom.²¹⁸

Well is it then with that countenance that reflecteth the splendour of the Light of the Beloved One! The Lord be praised, thou hast been illumined with this Light, hast acquired the pearl of true knowledge, and hast spoken the Word of Truth.²¹⁹

²¹⁵Book of Exodus 7:13f

²¹⁶Book of Genesis: 1:1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. 1:2 And the earth was without form, and void; and **darkness was upon the face of the deep**. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. 1:3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. 1:4 And God saw the light, that it was good: and God **divided the light from the darkness**. 1:5 And God called the light Day, and **the darkness he called Night**. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

²¹⁷Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha*, v3, pp. 609-610

²¹⁸Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 102-103

²¹⁹Abdu'l-Bahá, *Ibid.*, p. 203

Now if the illustrious people of the one true God, the recipients of His confirmations, the objects of His Divine assistance, should put forth all their strength, and with complete dedication, relying upon God and turning aside from all else but Him, should adopt procedures for spreading the Faith and should bend all their efforts to this end, it is certain that His Divine light would envelop the whole earth.²²⁰

Man is said to be the greatest representative of God, and he is the Book of Creation because all the mysteries of beings exist in him. If he comes under the shadow of the True Educator and is rightly trained, he becomes the essence of essences, the light of lights, the spirit of spirits; he becomes the center of the divine appearances, the source of spiritual qualities, the rising-place of heavenly lights, and the receptacle of divine inspirations. If he is deprived of this education, he becomes the manifestation of satanic qualities, the sum of animal vices, and the source of all dark conditions.²²¹

The principles of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh should be carefully studied, one by one, until they are realized and understood by mind and heart -- so will you become strong followers of the light, truly spiritual, heavenly soldiers of God, acquiring and spreading the true civilization in Persia, in Europe, and in the whole world.²²²

In the time of Jesus Christ there was an outpouring of the Light from East to West that brought the people under a heavenly banner and illumined them with divine insight. Western lands have been kindled by the Light of the Christ. I pray earnestly that the Light in this advanced age will so illumine the world that all may rally under the banner of Unity and receive Spiritual education.

Then those problems which cause difference among the peoples of the earth will be seen no more, for verily they are not. You are all waves of one sea, mirrors of one reflection.

This day the countries of Europe are at rest; Education has become widespread. The light of liberty is the light of the West, and the intention of government is to work for truth and justice in Western countries. But ever the light of spirituality shines from out of the East. In this age that light has become dimmed; religion has become a matter of form and ceremony and the desire for God's love has been lost.

²²⁰Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 43

²²¹Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 236

²²²Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 22

In very age of great spiritual darkness, a light is kindled in the East. So once again the light of the teachings of God has come unto you. Even as education and progress travel from West to East, so does the spiritual fire travel from East to West.

I hope that the people of the West may be illumined by the light of God; that the Kingdom may come to them, that they may find eternal Life, that the Spirit of God may spread like a fire among them, that they may be baptized with the Water of Life and may find a new birth.²²³

Hearken, and I will show you the meaning thereof. Although He came from Nazareth, which was a known place, He also came from Heaven. His body was born of Mary, but His Spirit came from Heaven. The sword He carried was the sword of His tongue, with which He divided the good from the evil, the true from the false, the faithful from the unfaithful, and the light from the darkness. His Word was indeed a sharp sword!²²⁴

Therefore strive that your actions day by day may be beautiful prayers. Turn towards God, and seek always to do that which is right and noble. Enrich the poor, raise the fallen, comfort the sorrowful, bring healing to the sick, reassure the fearful, rescue the oppressed, bring hope to the hopeless, shelter the destitute!

This is the work of a true Bahá'í, and this is what is expected of him. If we strive to do all this, then are we true Bahá'ís, but if we neglect it, we are not followers of the Light, and we have no right to the name.²²⁵

Our greatest efforts must be directed towards detachment from the things of the world; we must strive to become more spiritual, more luminous, to follow the counsel of the Divine Teaching, to serve the cause of unity and true equality, to be merciful, to reflect the love of the Highest on all men, so that the light of the Spirit shall be apparent in all our deeds, to the end that all humanity shall be united, the stormy sea thereof calmed, and all rough waves disappear from off the surface of life's ocean henceforth unruffled and peaceful.²²⁶

When perfect justice reigns in every country of the Eastern and Western World, then will the earth become a place of beauty. The dignity and equality of every servant of God will be

²²³Abdu'l-Bahá, 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London, pp. 48-49

²²⁴Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 56

²²⁵Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 80

²²⁶Abdu'l-Bahá, Ibid., p. 87

acknowledged; the ideal of the solidarity of the human race, the true brotherhood of man, will be realized; and the glorious light of the Sun of Truth will illumine the souls of all men.²²⁷

1:10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. 1:11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not. 1:12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: 1:13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (Gospel of John)

Again, heard ye not that which hath been recorded in the Gospel concerning those "which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" -- that is, those who have been made manifest through the power of God? Wherefore it becometh evident that one may well be manifested in the world of creation who is truly of God, the Almighty, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. How is it then that when word reached you of Our Cause, ye failed to inquire from Our own lips, that ye might distinguish truth from falsehood, discover Our aim and purpose, and learn of the afflictions which We have suffered at the hands of an evil and wayward generation?

O Minister of the King of Paris! Hast thou forgotten the pronouncement recorded in the Gospel according to John concerning the Word and those who are its Manifestations? And hast thou ignored the counsels of the Spirit [Jesus] concerning the Manifestations of the Word, and been numbered with the heedless? If not, wherefore then didst thou conspire with the Minister of Persia to inflict upon Us that which hath caused the hearts of men of insight and understanding to melt, the tears of the denizens of the Realm of eternity to flow, and the souls of them who are nigh unto God to mourn? And all this thou didst commit without seeking to examine Our Cause or to discern its truth. For is it not thy clear duty to investigate this Cause, to inform thyself of the things that have befallen Us, to judge with equity, and to cleave unto justice?²²⁸

Furthermore, in the first chapter of the Gospel of John, verses 12 and 13, it is said: "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believed on His name:

"Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

²²⁷Abdu'l-Bahá, *Ibid.*, p. 154

²²⁸Bahá'u'lláh, *Suriy-i-Muluk*, in *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, pp. 191-192

From these verses it is obvious that the being of a disciple also is not created by physical power, but by the spiritual reality. The honor and greatness of Christ is not due to the fact that He did not have a human father, but to His perfections, bounties and divine glory. If the greatness of Christ is His being fatherless, then Adam is greater than Christ, for He had neither father nor mother. It is said in the Old Testament, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."²²⁹ Observe that it is said that Adam came into existence from the Spirit of life. Moreover, the expression which John uses in regard to the disciples proves that they also are from the Heavenly Father. Hence it is evident that the holy reality, meaning the real existence of every great man, comes from God and owes its being to the breath of the Holy Spirit.

The purport is that, if to be without a father is the greatest human glory, then Adam is greater than all, for He had neither father nor mother. Is it better for a man to be created from a living substance or from earth? Certainly it is better if he be created from a living substance.²³⁰

The rewards of this life are the virtues and perfections which adorn the reality of man. For example, he was dark and becomes luminous; he was ignorant and becomes wise; he was neglectful and becomes vigilant; he was asleep and becomes awakened; he was dead and becomes living; he was blind and becomes a seer; he was deaf and becomes a hearer; he was earthly and becomes heavenly; he was material and becomes spiritual. Through these rewards he gains spiritual birth and becomes a new creature. He becomes the manifestation of the verse in the Gospel where it is said of the disciples that they "were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" -- that is to say, they were delivered from the animal characteristics and qualities which are the characteristics of human nature, and they became qualified with the divine characteristics, which are the bounty of God. This is the meaning of the second birth. For such people there is no greater torture than being veiled from God, and no more severe punishment than sensual vices, dark qualities, lowness of nature, engrossment in carnal desires. When they are delivered through the light of faith from the darkness of these vices, and become illuminated with the radiance of the sun of reality, and ennobled with all the virtues, they esteem this the greatest reward, and they know it to be the true paradise. In the same way they consider that the spiritual punishment -- that is to say, the torture and punishment of existence -- is to be subjected to the world of nature; to be veiled from God; to be brutal and ignorant; to fall into carnal lusts; to be absorbed in animal frailties; to be characterized with dark qualities, such as falsehood, tyranny, cruelty, attachment to the affairs of the world, and being immersed in satanic ideas. For them, these are the greatest punishments and tortures.

²²⁹Book of Genesis 2:7

²³⁰Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, pp. 89-90

Likewise, the rewards of the other world are the eternal life which is clearly mentioned in all the Holy Books, the divine perfections, the eternal bounties and everlasting felicity. The rewards of the other world are the perfections and the peace obtained in the spiritual worlds after leaving this world, while the rewards of this life are the real luminous perfections which are realized in this world, and which are the cause of eternal life, for they are the very progress of existence. It is like the man who passes from the embryonic world to the state of maturity and becomes the manifestation of these words: "Blessed, therefore, be God, the most excellent of Makers."²³¹ The rewards of the other world are peace, the spiritual graces, the various spiritual gifts in the Kingdom of God, the gaining of the desires of the heart and the soul, and the meeting of God in the world of eternity. In the same way the punishments of the other world -- that is to say, the torments of the other world -- consist in being deprived of the special divine blessings and the absolute bounties, and falling into the lowest degrees of existence. He who is deprived of these divine favors, although he continues after death, is considered as dead by the people of truth.²³²

The Bahá'í texts speak of being "born...of God" as being born "of the spirit", and, as we shall see presently (when we arrive at consideration of the appropriate verses), and echoing the words of Jesus reported in the Gospel of John, of the "second birth", and being "born again":

When the human soul soareth out of this transient heap of dust and riseth into the world of God, then veils will fall away, and verities will come to light, and all things unknown before will be made clear, and hidden truths be understood.

Consider how a being, in the world of the womb, was deaf of ear and blind of eye, and mute of tongue; how he was bereft of any perceptions at all. But once, out of that world of darkness, he passed into this world of light, then his eye saw, his ear heard, his tongue spoke. In the same way, once he hath hastened away from this mortal place into the Kingdom of God, then he will be born in the spirit; then the eye of his perception will open, the ear of his soul will hearken, and all the truths of which he was ignorant before will be made plain and clear.²³³

Now amidst all the peoples of the world must the beloved arise, with a heart even as the day-star, a strong inward urge, a shining brow, a musk-scented breath, a tongue speaking ever of God, an exposition crystal-clear, a high resolve, a power born of heaven, a spiritual character, a confirmation nothing short of the divine.²³⁴

²³¹Qur'án 23:14

²³²Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 223-225

²³³Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 176

²³⁴Abdu'l-Bahá, *Ibid.*, p. 231

Strive ye, therefore, with the help of God, with illumined minds and hearts and a strength born of heaven, to become a bestowal from God to man, and to call into being for all humankind, comfort and peace.²³⁵

Without the spirit the world of mankind is lifeless, and without this light the world of mankind is in utter darkness. For the world of nature is an animal world. Until man is born again from the world of nature, that is to say, becomes detached from the world of nature, he is essentially an animal, and it is the teachings of God which convert this animal into a human soul.²³⁶

1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. 1:15 John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. 1:16 And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. 1:17 For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. 1:18 No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. (Gospel of John)

Heretofore the doctors of theology have not expounded it but have restricted it to Jesus as "the Word made flesh," the separation of Jesus from God, the Father, and His descent upon the earth. In this way the individualized separation of the godhead came to be taught.²³⁷

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has written on “the individualized separation of the godhead”, namely, the orthodox Christian doctrine of the Trinity, and this topic will be addressed when it is provoked by Gospel verses that allude to it.

Shoghi Effendi distinguishes the doctrine of the incarnation of the names and attributes of God in His Manifestation from the doctrine of the incarnation of God Himself:

The divinity attributed to so great a Being and the complete **incarnation** of the names and attributes of God in so exalted a Person should, under no circumstances, be misconceived or misinterpreted. The human temple that has been made the vehicle of so overpowering a Revelation must, if we be faithful to the tenets of our Faith, ever remain entirely distinguished from that "innermost Spirit of Spirits"²³⁸ and "eternal Essence of Essences"²³⁹ -- that invisible yet rational God Who, however much we extol the divinity of His Manifestations on earth, can in no

²³⁵‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Ibid.*, p. 249

²³⁶‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Ibid.*, pp. 303-304

²³⁷‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 154

²³⁸Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitab-i-Iqan*, p. 179

²³⁹*Ibid.*

wise incarnate His infinite, His unknowable, His incorruptible and all-embracing Reality in the concrete and limited frame of a mortal being. Indeed, the God Who could so incarnate His own reality would, in the light of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, cease immediately to be God. So crude and fantastic a theory of Divine **incarnation** is as removed from, and incompatible with, **the essentials of Bahá'í belief as are the no less inadmissible pantheistic and anthropomorphic conceptions of God** -- both of which the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh emphatically repudiate and the fallacy of which they expose.

He Who in unnumbered passages claimed His utterance to be the "Voice of Divinity, the Call of God Himself"²⁴⁰ thus solemnly affirms in the Kitáb-i-Íqán: "To every discerning and illumined heart it is evident that God, the unknowable Essence, the Divine Being, is immeasurably exalted beyond every human attribute such as corporeal existence, ascent and descent, egress and regress²⁴¹... He is, and hath ever been, veiled in the ancient eternity of His Essence, and will remain in His Reality everlastingly hidden from the sight of men²⁴²... He standeth exalted beyond and above all separation and union, all proximity and remoteness²⁴³... 'God was alone; there was none else beside Him' is a sure testimony of this truth."²⁴⁴

"From time immemorial," Bahá'u'lláh, speaking of God, explains, "He, the Divine Being, hath been veiled in the ineffable sanctity of His exalted Self, and will everlasting continue to be wrapt in the impenetrable mystery of His unknowable Essence²⁴⁵... Ten thousand Prophets, each a Moses, are thunderstruck upon the Sinai of their search at God's forbidding voice, 'Thou shalt never behold Me!'; whilst a myriad Messengers, each as great as Jesus, stand dismayed upon their heavenly thrones by the interdiction 'Mine Essence thou shalt never apprehend!'"²⁴⁶ "How bewildering to me, insignificant as I am," Bahá'u'lláh in His communion with God affirms, "is the attempt to fathom the sacred depths of Thy knowledge! How futile my efforts to visualize the magnitude of the power inherent in Thine handiwork -- the revelation of Thy creative power!"²⁴⁷ "When I contemplate, O my God, the relationship that bindeth me to Thee," He, in yet another prayer revealed in His own handwriting, testifies, "I am moved to proclaim to all created things 'verily I am God!'; and when I consider my own self, lo, I find it coarser than clay!"²⁴⁸

²⁴⁰Bahá'u'lláh, *Ibid.*, p. 180

²⁴¹Bahá'u'lláh, *Ibid.*, p. 98

²⁴²*Ibid.*

²⁴³*Ibid.*

²⁴⁴Bahá'u'lláh, *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99

²⁴⁵Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 63

²⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 62

²⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 63

²⁴⁸See also Bahá'u'lláh, *Suriy-i-Haykal*, in The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p. 85:

Say: I, verily, have not sought to extol Mine own Self, but rather God Himself, were ye to judge fairly. Naught can be seen in Me except God and His Cause, could ye but perceive it. I am the One Whom the tongue of Isaiah hath extolled, the One with Whose name both the Torah and the Evangel were adorned.

"The door of the knowledge of the Ancient of Days," Bahá'u'lláh further states in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, "being thus closed in the face of all beings, He, the Source of infinite grace ... hath caused those luminous Gems of Holiness to appear out of the realm of the spirit, in the noble form of the human temple, and be made manifest unto all men, that they may impart unto the world the mysteries of the unchangeable Being and tell of the subtleties of His imperishable Essence²⁴⁹... All the Prophets of God, His well-favored, His holy and chosen Messengers are, without exception, the bearers of His names and the embodiments of His attributes²⁵⁰... These Tabernacles of Holiness, these primal Mirrors which reflect the Light of unfading glory, are but expressions of Him Who is the Invisible of the Invisibles."²⁵¹

That Bahá'u'lláh should, notwithstanding the overwhelming intensity of His Revelation, be regarded as essentially one of these Manifestations of God, never to be identified with that invisible Reality, the Essence of Divinity itself, is one of the major beliefs of our Faith -- a belief which should never be obscured and the integrity of which no one of its followers should allow to be compromised.²⁵²

One of the cherished doctrines of orthodox Christianity is that Jesus Christ was the "only begotten Son", and that this makes Him unique and superior to every other Being that has existed on earth or in the heavens, superior to all but God Himself. This belief is buttressed with the citation of several other passages in the Gospel of John:

3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.²⁵³

3:18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.²⁵⁴

4:9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.²⁵⁵

Thus hath it been decreed in the Scriptures of thy Lord, the Most Merciful. He, verily, hath borne witness unto Me, as I bear witness unto Him. And God testifieth to the truth of My words. Say: The Books have been sent down for naught but My remembrance. Whosoever is receptive to their call shall perceive therefrom the sweet fragrances of My name and My praise; and he who hath unstopped the ear of his inmost heart shall hear from every word thereof: "The True One is come! He indeed is the beloved of the worlds!"

²⁴⁹Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, p. 99

²⁵⁰Bahá'u'lláh, *Ibid.*, pp. 103-104

²⁵¹Bahá'u'lláh, *Ibid.*, p. 103

²⁵²Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 112-114

²⁵³Gospel of John 3:16

²⁵⁴Gospel of John 3:18

The problem with interpreting these verses in an exclusive manner is that in the first chapter of the Gospel of John, it is written:

1:12 But as many as received him, to them gave the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: 1:13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Furthermore, alongside the statements cited above are the following verses which seem to identify believers as “sons of God” and “children of God”:

3:8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

3:9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

3:10 In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.²⁵⁶

4:4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

4:5 They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.

4:6 We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

4:7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.²⁵⁷

5:1 Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

²⁵⁵First Epistle of John 4:9

²⁵⁶Gospel of John 3:8-10

²⁵⁷Gospel of John 4:4-7

5:2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.

5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

5:4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.²⁵⁸

Paul also referred to the “sons of God” and to the “children of God” repeatedly in his Epistle to the Romans:

8:14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

8:16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

8:17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

8:19 For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

8:21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Paul uses the same expression in his Epistle to the Galatians:

3:26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

Furthermore, Paul wrote of Isaac being the “only begotten son” of Abraham in his Epistle to the Hebrews:

11:17 By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, 11:18 Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: 11:19 Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸Gospel of John 5:1-4

²⁵⁹Paul, Epistle to the Hebrews, 11:17-11:19

We know that Paul was well-acquainted with the Torah, and he could not have meant that Abraham had no other sons, inasmuch as the First Book of Chronicles reports:

1:28 The sons of Abraham; Isaac, and Ishmael.

1:32 Now the sons of Keturah, Abraham's concubine: she bare Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah.

Hence, Abraham did not have one son...He had 8 sons. Nor was His first son Isaac...Ishmael was born before Isaac²⁶⁰:

16:15 And Hagar bare Abram a son: and Abram called his son's name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael.

16:16 And Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram.

21:3 And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.

21:4 And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him.

21:5 And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him.

*The meaning of the actual word “**only begotten**” is key to understanding the intentions of the author. The Greek word “monogenes” (mon-og-en-ace', Strong's 3439) and the Hebrew word “yachid” are translated "only begotten" in the New Testament. Neither one literally meanings "to be born." Both words mean "unique," "only," "one of a kind." If Jesus and Isaac are likewise called “unique”, then in what way are followers of Jesus “the sons of God” or the “children of God”? We simply cannot shrug off this expression, because it is used often in the Old Testament and the New Testament:*

6:1 And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, 6:2 That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. 6:4 There were giants in the earth in those

²⁶⁰Book of Genesis 16:15-16, 21:3-5

days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.²⁶¹

14:1 Ye are the children of the LORD your God: ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead. 14:2 For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth.²⁶²

1:10 Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.²⁶³

1:6 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them.²⁶⁴

38:7 When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?²⁶⁵

Most important is how Jesus used the expression “sons of God” or “children of God”:

5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.²⁶⁶

20:34 And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: 20:35 But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: 20:36 Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.²⁶⁷

The purpose in citing all of these Scriptural verses on the “sons” and “children” of God is to demonstrate that the expression that is so often translated as “only begotten son of God” could not possibly be meant to be understood literally, inasmuch as it would then conflict with the many references to other “sons” and “children” of God in the New and Old Testament. If it were to mean “unique” or “without equal” in the context in which John speaks in his Gospel and his Epistle, then it is consistent with Scriptural testimony, and is corroborated by the Bahá’í texts.

²⁶¹Book of Job 6:1-2, 6:4

²⁶²Book of Deuteronomy, 14:1-2

²⁶³Book of Hosea 1:10

²⁶⁴Book of Job 1:6, 2:1

²⁶⁵Book of Job 38:7

²⁶⁶Gospel of Matthew 5:9

²⁶⁷Gospel of Luke, 20:34-36

Shoghi Effendi indicated through his secretary:

As regards to your questions concerning the station of Jesus Christ, and His return as explained in the Gospel. It is true that Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of God, but this, as explained by Bahá'u'lláh in the 'Íqán, does not indicate any Physical relationship whatever. Its meaning is entirely spiritual and points to the close relationship existing between Him and the Almighty God. Nor does it necessarily indicate any inherent superiority in the station of Jesus over other Prophets and Messengers. As far as their spiritual nature is concerned all Prophets can be regarded as Sons of God, as they all reflect His light, though not in an equal measure, and this difference in reflection is due to the conditions and circumstances under which they appear.²⁶⁸

Regarding the passage you enclosed about the Qur'án: In reality there is no contradiction at all; when the Qur'án denies Christ is the Son of God it is not refuting His Words but the false interpretation of them made by the Christians who read into them a relationship of an almost corporeal nature, whereas Almighty God has no parents or offspring. What is meant by Christ, is His spirit's relation to the Infinite Spirit, and this the Qur'án does not deny. It is in a sense attributable -- this kind of Sonship -- to all the Prophets.²⁶⁹

Our perusal of the Gospel verses that refer to the “sons” and “children” of God, as well as to the “only begotten Son of God” in reference to Jesus indicates that the Bahá’í view is in harmony with the text. It is not in harmony with certain doctrines of particular Christian theologians and denominations, including traditional Roman Catholics and Protestants, who restrict the meaning of “son of God” to Jesus Christ.

THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS

The Gospel of Matthew²⁷⁰ opens with a genealogy of Jesus of Nazareth, and likewise the Gospel of Luke²⁷¹, with an alternative genealogy. Both genealogies trace the bloodline of Joseph, the stepfather, the adoptive father of Jesus, saying nothing about the forebears of Mary, His mother. Notwithstanding this, there is no statement from any of the Bahá’í authorities with regard to the ancestors of Joseph, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes the following statement²⁷²:

Besides this, an especial blessing is conferred on some families and some generations. Thus it is an especial blessing that from among the descendants of Abraham should have come all the

²⁶⁸From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, November 29, 1937; in Lights of Guidance, p. 491

²⁶⁹From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, May 19, 1945; in Lights of Guidance, pp. 492-493

²⁷⁰Gospel of Matthew, 1:1-17

²⁷¹Gospel of Luke, 3:23-3:38

²⁷²‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 213

Prophets of the children of Israel. This is a blessing that God has granted to this descent: to Moses from His father and mother, to Christ from His mother's line...

*Now how would 'Abdu'l-Bahá come to the conclusion that Mary, mother of Jesus was descended from Abraham? The First Book of Chronicles, Chapters 1:34 to 6:3 (reiterated 23:13) identifies Amram as the descendant of Abraham. According to the same book, verses 6:3 and 23:13, as well as Exodus 6:20 and Numbers 26:59, Amram was the father of Aaron (as well as Moses and Miriam). The Gospel of Luke 1:5 indicates that Elizabeth, the wife of Zacharias and mother of John the Baptist was **"of the daughters of Aaron"** and verse 1:36 has the angel speak to Mary saying **"behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren."***

*Was Mary likewise a descendant of Aaron, and hence of Amram and Abraham? This is not completely clear from the text of the Gospels. But not so in the Qur'an. There we read, in Surah 3:35-36, that Mary was the daughter of a "woman of Imran" and in Surah 66:12, Mary herself is called "the daughter of Imran". In one of the non-canonical gospels, the *Protoevangelium of James*²⁷³, Joachim is the name of the father of Mary, and he is said to have been of "the house of Amram". Hence, a Christian non-canonical gospel and the Qur'an both identify Mary as being a descendant of Amram, which would make her also among the progeny of Abraham. This identification of Mary rather than Joseph as the descendant of Abraham, and a bloodline through the maternal rather than the paternal line is harmonious with Christian and Islamic tradition. It is also in agreement with Jewish tradition. "All branches of Orthodox Judaism and Conservative Judaism today, maintain that the halakhic rules (ie. matrilineal descent) are valid and binding...rabbis have pointed to Deuteronomy 7:3-4 and Ezra 10:3 as implicit sources"²⁷⁴ and those sources read as follows:*

7:3 neither shalt thou make marriages with them [7:1 the Hittite, and the Gergashite, and the Amorite, and the Canaanite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite]: thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. 7:4 For he will turn away thy son from following Me, that they may serve other gods; so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and He will destroy thee quickly. (Deuteronomy)

10:2 And Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra: 'We have broken faith with our God, and have married foreign women of the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope for Israel concerning this thing. 10:3 Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of the LORD, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. 10:4 Arise; for the matter belongeth unto thee, and we are with thee; be of good courage, and do it.' (Ezra)

²⁷³Also called the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew

²⁷⁴http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Who_is_a_Jew%3F

While intermarriage of Israelites with other nations often occurred throughout the span of time reported in the Bible, and in the two millennia since the Biblical text has been "closed", nevertheless the rabbis sought to curtail this practice, which resulted in the assimilation of these families to the dominant culture and their loss to the Jewish community...and have continued to do so to this day. The determination of Jewish identity by matrilineal descent was thus a well-established phenomenon in the time of Jesus, and hence His descent from Abraham through His mother, as attested by the Protoevangelium of James and the Qur'an, and noted also by 'Abdu'l-Bahá is at least as likely as the paternal descent from Abraham through His step-father, particularly inasmuch as the two accounts of the latter differ in their details, and apply to a person with whom Jesus had in fact no biological relationship. Likewise, if Jesus was a "son of David", as was attested by some in His own time and reported in the Gospels, then, following the same principle, it was most likely through His maternal line.

The Gospel of Luke indicates that Joseph brought his pregnant wife to Jerusalem because he was of Davidic descent:

2:4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) 2:5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

It is reported Joseph was descended from David, but inasmuch as Jesus was not fathered by Joseph therefore Jesus was not a "son of David" because of Joseph's bloodline. This is further attested by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's indication that Bahá'u'llah rather than Jesus fulfilled the requirements of the expected Maschiach ben David, the Messianic descendant of King David promised by the Hebrew prophets:

In Isaiah, chapter 11, verses 1 to 10, it is said: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

But "they shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." These conditions did not prevail in the time of the manifestation of Christ; for until today various and antagonistic nations exist in the world: very few acknowledge the God of Israel, and the greater number are without the knowledge of God. In the same way, universal peace did not come into existence in the time of Christ -- that is to say, between the antagonistic and hostile nations there was neither peace nor concord, disputes and disagreements did not cease, and reconciliation and sincerity did not appear. So, even at this day, among the Christian sects and nations themselves, enmity, hatred and the most violent hostility are met with.

But these verses apply word for word to Bahá'u'lláh. Likewise in this marvelous cycle the earth will be transformed, and the world of humanity arrayed in tranquillity and beauty. Disputes, quarrels and murders will be replaced by peace, truth and concord; among the nations, peoples, races and countries, love and amity will appear. Cooperation and union will be established, and finally war will be entirely suppressed. When the laws of the Most Holy Book are enforced, contentions and disputes will find a final sentence of absolute justice before a general tribunal of the nations and kingdoms, and the difficulties that appear will be solved. The five continents of the world will form but one, the numerous nations will become one, the surface of the earth will become one land, and mankind will be a single community. The relations between the countries -- the mingling, union and friendship of the peoples and communities -- will reach to such a degree that the human race will be like one family and kindred. The light of heavenly love will shine, and the darkness of enmity and hatred will be dispelled from the world. Universal peace will raise its tent in the center of the earth, and the blessed Tree of Life will grow and spread to such an extent that it will overshadow the East and the West. Strong and weak, rich and poor, antagonistic sects and hostile nations -- which are like the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and kid, the lion and the calf -- will act toward each other with the most complete love, friendship, justice and equity. The world will be filled with science, with the knowledge of the reality of the mysteries of beings, and with the knowledge of God.²⁷⁵

Shoghi Effendi reiterates that it was Bahá'u'llah rather than Jesus Who fulfilled the prophecies in the Book of Isaiah, cited in Some Answered Questions, as well as others²⁷⁶:

To Him Isaiah, the greatest of the Jewish prophets, had alluded as the "Glory of the Lord," the "Everlasting Father,"²⁷⁷ the "Prince of Peace,"²⁷⁸ the "Wonderful,"²⁷⁹ the "Counsellor,"²⁸⁰ the

²⁷⁵Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, pp. 63-64

²⁷⁶Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, pp. 94-95

²⁷⁷Book of Isaiah 9:6

²⁷⁸Ibid.

²⁷⁹Ibid.

"Rod come forth out of the stem of Jesse"²⁸¹ and the "Branch grown out of His roots,"²⁸² Who "shall be established upon the throne of David,"²⁸³ Who "will come with strong hand,"²⁸⁴ Who "shall judge among the nations,"²⁸⁵ Who "shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips slay the wicked,"²⁸⁶ and Who "shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth."²⁸⁷

Shoghi Effendi likewise asserts that Bahá'u'llah was descended from Jesse, the father of David:

He derived His descent, on the one hand, from Abraham (the Father of the Faithful) through his wife Katurah, and on the other from Zoroaster, as well as from Yazdigird, the last king of the Sasanian dynasty. He was moreover a descendant of Jesse...²⁸⁸

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Having examined the text on the cosmic Jesus which opens the Gospel of John, and the genealogies that are found in the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew and the third chapter of the Gospel of Luke, we will now consider the depiction of John the Baptist from the time of His conception through His annunciation of Jesus, as reported in all four canonical Gospels, and then consider these stories in light of the references thereto in the Qur'an and the Bahá'í source texts.

We begin with the prophecy of the appearance of John the Baptist, found in the Book of Isaiah²⁸⁹:

The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight in the desert.

This verse is stated to have been fulfilled by John the Baptist in all of the canonical Gospels²⁹⁰, and it is alluded to in the references to Him in the Writings of Bahá'u'llah²⁹¹:

²⁸⁰Ibid.

²⁸¹Book of Isaiah 11:1

²⁸²Ibid.

²⁸³Book of Isaiah 9:7

²⁸⁴Book of Isaiah 40:10

²⁸⁵Book of Isaiah 2:4

²⁸⁶Book of Isaiah 11:4

²⁸⁷Book of Isaiah 11:12

²⁸⁸Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 94

²⁸⁹Book of Isaiah 40:3

²⁹⁰Gospels of Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23

²⁹¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kútáb-i-Iqán*, pp. 64-65

As to the sign in the invisible heaven -- the heaven of divine knowledge and understanding -- it was Yahya, son of Zachariah, who gave unto the people the tidings of the Manifestation of Jesus. Even as He hath revealed: "God announceth Yahya to thee, who shall bear witness unto the Word from God, and a great one and chaste."²⁹² By the term "Word" is meant Jesus, Whose coming Yahya foretold. Moreover, in the heavenly Scriptures it is written: "John the Baptist was preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye: for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand."²⁹³ By John is meant Yahya.²⁹⁴

O followers of the Son! We have once again sent John unto you²⁹⁵, and He, verily, hath cried out in the wilderness of the Bayan: O peoples of the world! Cleanse your eyes! The Day whereon ye can behold the Promised One and attain unto Him hath drawn nigh! O followers of the Gospel! Prepare the way! The Day of the advent of the Glorious Lord is at hand! Make ready to enter the Kingdom. Thus hath it been ordained by God, He Who causeth the dawn to break.²⁹⁶

Say, did ye not hearken to the Voice of the Crier, calling aloud in the wilderness of the Bayan, bearing unto you the glad-tidings of the coming of your Lord, the All-Merciful? Lo! He is come in the sheltering shadow of Testimony, invested with conclusive proof and evidence, and those who truly believe in Him regard His presence as the embodiment of the Kingdom of God. Blessed is the man who turneth towards Him, and woe betide such as deny or doubt Him.²⁹⁷

Verily, the Crier hath cried out, when the promised time came, and they that have recognized the splendors of Sinai have swooned away in the wilderness of hesitation, before the awful majesty of thy Lord, the Lord of creation.²⁹⁸

Another prophetic verse which is fulfilled by John the Baptist, as affirmed by the synoptic Gospels²⁹⁹ is from the Book of Malachi³⁰⁰:

I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me...

A third prophetic verse also from the Book of Malachi³⁰¹, is cited in two of the synoptic Gospels³⁰²:

²⁹²Qur'an 3:39

²⁹³Gospel of Matthew 3:1-2

²⁹⁴The first reader of Kitab-i-Iqan was a Muslim, who knew John the Baptist by His name in the Qur'an, Yahya, and where His father's name is Zachariah.

²⁹⁵According to Bahá'í teaching, the Bab was the return of John the Baptist, even as Bahá'u'lláh was the return of Jesus Christ:

²⁹⁶Bahá'u'lláh, Suriy-i-Haykal, in The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p. 62

²⁹⁷Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 11

²⁹⁸Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, pp. 132-133

²⁹⁹Gospels of Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 1:76

³⁰⁰Book of Malachi 3:1

I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord...

‘Abdu’l-Bahá affirms that John the Baptist was the return of Elijah³⁰³, and at a later juncture in this narrative we will examine His explanation of the way in which Elijah returned in John:

Therefore, John the Baptist was the promised Elias.³⁰⁴

In the Gospel it says that John, the son of Zacharias, is Elias.³⁰⁵

Christ announced that John the Baptist was Elias, who was to come before Christ...³⁰⁶

Elijah also was expected to come from heaven, and the Christ said, "Elijah is none other than John the Baptist."³⁰⁷

Shoghi Effendi reminds us that the Báb was also the return of Elijah:

...the "Return of Elijah" anticipated by the Jews...³⁰⁸

...the Báb -- Whose advent marks the return of the Prophet Elijah...³⁰⁹

Two of the persons depicted in the story of John the Baptists are His mother and His father. The Bahá’í source texts make no reference to His mother, but do mention His father, and in a manner that warrants our attention. According to the Book of Exodus³¹⁰, Elisheva³¹¹ was the daughter of Amminadab, the sister of Naashon, and the wife of Aaron, and her ancestors and descendants are cited in the Book of Ruth³¹² and the Gospel of Matthew.³¹³ In the Gospel of Luke, Elizabeth³¹⁴ is a cousin of Mary³¹⁵, a descendant of Aaron³¹⁶, and the wife of Zacharias³¹⁷. In that same Gospel, she

³⁰¹Book of Malachi 4:5

³⁰²Gospels of Matthew 11:14; Luke 1:17

³⁰³Elijah is called Elias in Greek, and His name is cited as such in the Gospels, and in most of the Bahá’í source texts that refer to Him.

³⁰⁴Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 133

³⁰⁵Abdu’l-Bahá, Ibid., p. 288

³⁰⁶Abdu’l-Bahá, Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha, v1, pp. 116-117

³⁰⁷Abdu'l-Baha on Divine Philosophy, p. 38

³⁰⁸Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 57

³⁰⁹Shoghi Effendi, Ibid., p. 276

³¹⁰Book of Exodus 6:23

³¹¹Elizabeth in Greek.

³¹²Book of Ruth 4:12, 18-22

³¹³Gospel of Matthew 1:1-16

³¹⁴Elisheva in Hebrew

³¹⁵(Luke 1:36)

is depicted as infertile³¹⁸ and therefore childless, and aged³¹⁹. In the Qur'an, it is related that the wife of Zachariah is infertile³²⁰ and therefore childless³²¹. The father of John is named Zacharias³²², and this is a well known name found many times in the historical accounts of the Bible³²³, and according to the Gospel of Luke he was a priest [cohen]³²⁴; he burned incense in the temple of the Lord³²⁵; he was descended from Abia³²⁶; he was elderly³²⁷ and righteous before God, obeying all His commandments³²⁸. In the Qur'an, Zakariyya the father of Yahya is elderly³²⁹, the servant of God³³⁰, and among the virtuous ones [min al-Salihiina]³³¹. The portraits are identical in the Gospel of Luke and the Qur'an. In the Bahá'í Writings Zacharias is depicted in a few passages. In *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, Bahá'u'llah refers to

³¹⁶ Gospel of Luke 1:5

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ (Luke 1:7)

³¹⁹ Gospel of Luke 1:7,18

³²⁰ Qur'an (3:40; 19:8; 21:89)

³²¹ Qur'an(21:89)

³²² Zacharias in Greek, Zachariah in Hebrew and Zakariyya in Arabic

³²³ The name Zachariah is found for the following persons in the Tanakh:

(1)King of Israel (2 Kings 15:10);

(2)the father of Abi, Hezekiah's mother (2 Kings 18:2);

(3)prophet (Luke 11:51), son of Barachias (Zechariah 1:1,7; Matthew 23:35), grandson of Iddo the prophet (Zechariah 1:1,7);

(4)son of Jehoiada, the high priest [cohen ha-gadol] (2 Chr 24:20);

(5)prophet in the reign of King Uzziah (2 Chr 26:5);

(6)chief in the time of Ezra (Ezra 8:16); (7)descendant of Reuben (1 Chr 5:7);

(8)Levite, porter at door of the tabernacle of the congregation (1 Chr 9:21);

(9)son of Gibeon (1 Chr 9:37);

(10)Levites appointed as musicians in the temple of King David (1 Chr 15:18,20);

(11)Levite in service to the temple of King David (1 Chr 24:25);

(12)prince of King Jehoshaphat of Judea (2 Chr 17:7), son of Jehoshaphat and brother of King Jehoram (2 Chr 21:1-2);

(13)one of those who stood by Ezra the priest as he read the book of the law to the assembled people (Neh 8:4);

(14)priest, son of Iddo (Neh 12:16);

(15)priest, son of Jonathan (Neh 12:35);

(16)priest (12:41);

(17)son of Jeberechiah, witness to record the words of Isaiah (Isaiah 8:2)

(18)Zacharias, descendant of Abia (Greek), Abijah (Hebrew): (1)second son of prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 8:2);

(19)son of Rehoboam, King of Judah (1 Chr 3:10);

(20)son of Jeroboam, King of Israel (1 Kings 14:13)

(21)Zacharius, a priest [cohen], descendant of Aaron, whose progeny like him were to be priests (Lev 8:1-9; 1 Chr 12:27)

(22)Priest who burns incense in the temple of the Lord (Exo 30:7,8; 1 Chr 23:13; 2 Chr 29:11)

³²⁴Gospel of Luke 1:5

³²⁵Gospel of Luke 1:8-9

³²⁶Gospel of Luke 1:5

³²⁷Gospel of Luke 1:7

³²⁸Ibid.

³²⁹Qur'an 3:40; 19:8

³³⁰Qur'an 19:1

³³¹Qur'an 6:85

*John as the son of Zacharias*³³², and in *Some Answered Questions*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says three times over in the same paragraph that John was the son of Zacharias³³³.

We next come to the annunciation of John, the announcement to His parents that He will be born to them. The Gospel of Luke tells us that Zacharias prays for a child³³⁴; that an angel of the Lord appears to Zacharias in the temple of the Lord, at the side of the altar of incense³³⁵; that the angel of the Lord is named Gabriel³³⁶; that the angel of the Lord promises Zacharias: (1) a son, to be named John (Luke 1:13), that (2) Zacharias will be joyful, and many will rejoice at the birth of his son (Luke 1:14), that (3) his son will be great in the sight of the Lord (Luke 1:15), that (4) his son will not drink wine, strong drink (Luke 1:15), that (5) his son will be filled with Holy Spirit, from the womb (Luke 1:15), that (6) he will turn many of children of Israel to God (Luke 1:16), that (7) he will go forth in the spirit and power of Elijah, to ready the people for the Lord (Luke 1:17). Zacharias protests to Gabriel that this is impossible (1:18), and Gabriel replies that Zacharias will be rendered dumb until these promises are fulfilled (Luke 1:20). The Qur’an tell substantially the very same story: Zakariyya prays for pure offspring (3:38; 19:4-6; 21:89); the angels of the Lord reply to him as he stands praying in the shrine [al-mihraabi] (3:39); he receives a reply from God (19:7; 21:89) while Zakariyya is in the shrine [al-mihraabi] (19:11); and the reply of the Lord promises Zakariyya: (1) a son, to be named John [yahya] (3:39; 19:7; 21:90), that (2) his son will testify to the truth of the word from God, that (3) his son will be noble, that (4) his son will be chaste, that (5) his son will be a prophet, that (6) his son will be among the righteous [min al-Salihina] (3:39). Zakariyya is incredulous (3:40; 19:8), and he asks for a token, a sign [aj’al] (3:41; 19:10), and the reply he receives is that the token/sign for him will be that he will not be able to speak for three days and three nights (3:41; 19:10), and Zakariyya is instructed to remember [adhkur] the Lord in the evening and early morning (3:41), and apparently he was not struck dumb immediately because Zakariyya comes out of the shrine (al-mihraabi) and instructs the people to praise God morning and evening (19:11).

After the annunciation, Zacharius returns to his own house from the temple of the Lord, and John is conceived (Luke 1:23). The Qur’an likewise says that God cured Zakariyya’s wife of infertility and granted him a son (21:90). The Gospel of Luke goes into some detail about the pregnancy of John’s mother, about His birth and His circumcision...none of which details are described in the Qur’an or the Bahá’i source texts. It is telling that, of all of the canonical Gospels only the Gospel of Luke set forth these details. Could it be because the author of this Gospel was a physician?³³⁷ In any case, the principal events recounted in the Gospel of Luke are briefly repeated here: Elizabeth hides herself for five months (Luke 1:24); Mary visits Elizabeth during her pregnancy (Luke 1:39-56), arriving in her sixth month (Luke 1:26,36); when Elizabeth hears the salutation of Mary, her cousin, her Báby John leaps in her womb and she is filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:41); Elizabeth recognizes Mary as the mother of the Lord (Luke 1:42-45); Mary recites the prayer known as the magnificat (Luke 1:46-55); Mary abides with Elizabeth for three months and then returns to her home, prior to the birth of Jesus (Luke 1:56); Elizabeth births her son after Mary departs for

³³²Bahá’u’lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 158

³³³‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 132; also p. 288

³³⁴Gospel of Luke 1:13

³³⁵Gospel of Luke 1:11

³³⁶Gospel of Luke 1:19

³³⁷Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians 4:14

her homeland (Luke 1:57); her neighbors and cousins rejoice (Luke 1:58); and **“on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father. And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John. And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name.”** (Luke 1:59-60); **“And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called. And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all.”** (Luke 1:59-63); **“And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake [Zacharias], and praised God.”** (Luke 1:64); the news of the birth and of all the signs attending it was spread throughout Judea (Luke 1:65-66); Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied regarding the coming of the Lord (savior from the house of David), and his son John as the prophet of the Highest (Luke 1:68-79)

The Gospel of Luke then says that **“the child John grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel”** (Luke 1:80), and with that the Gospel of Luke leaves off with the detailed descriptions....and, surprise of surprises, the Qur’an starts up! John manifests divine wisdom while yet a child and tenderness of heart and purity, piety, is dutiful towards his parents, not haughty and rebellious, and a man of peace his whole life long (19:12-15); he is described as vying with his father Zacharias in good works, and reported that both father and son called upon God in hope and fear and humbled themselves before God (21:90).

Now that we reach the maturity of John, and the start of His prophetic ministry, the other canonical Gospels begin to participate in telling the story. The Gospel of Luke tells us that Zacharias prophesied that his son John would be a prophet (Luke 1:76), and that the Word of God came to John in the wilderness in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar (Luke 3:1-2). He is described as preaching in the wilderness of Judaea (Matthew 3:1; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:2); in country around Jordan (Luke 3:3); in Bethabara beyond Jordan (John 1:28). He baptizes with water (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; John 1:26,31); baptizes in Jordan (Matthew 3:6; Mark 1:5,9); baptizes unto repentance (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:4), with confession of sins (Matthew 3:6; Mark 1:5), for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4); all of Jerusalem and Judaea are baptized (Matthew 3:5; Mark 1:5); those of the region around Jordan are baptized (Matthew 3:5-6). John is baptizing in **“Aenon near to Salim”** at the same time as Jesus is baptizing in Judaea (John 3:22-23). His raiment is of camel's hair (Matthew 3:4; Mark 1:6); and a leather girdle (Matthew 3:4), girdle of skin (Mark 1:6); not soft raiment as in the king's houses (Matt 11:8). His foods are locusts and wild honey (Matthew 3:4; Mark 1:6). Priests and Levites come from Jerusalem to ask John who he is, and he indicates that he is not Christ, not Elias and not the promised prophet (John 1:19-21). The common folk also wonder if he is the promised Christ (Luke 3:15). John reproves the tetrarch of Galilee, King Herod Antipas for having taken his brother Philip's wife, Herodias, and for his other evil actions (Matt 14:3-4; Mark 6:17-19; Luke 3:19). Herod Antipas fears and admires John (Mark 6:20, 26), and fears the common folk because they believe John to be a prophet (Matt 14:5, 21:26; Luke 20:6).

John is cast into prison because of his criticism of the King's marriage (Matthew 4:12, 11:1, 14:3; Mark 1:14, 6:17; Luke 3:20). When in prison, John sends two of His disciples to Jesus (Matthew 11:2-6):

11:2 Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, 11:3 And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? 11:4 Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: 11:5 The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. 11:6 And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

Considering that according to all of the canonical Gospels, John was aware of the prophetic identity, the station of Jesus at the time of His baptism, this story may seem peculiar at first. But if this is the way in which John provided for his emissaries to learn of the ministry of Jesus, it makes much more sense. Either John did not know the full station of Jesus and wanted to be reassured, which is possible but unlikely inasmuch as John heard the voice of God calling from heaven, and John called Jesus the Lamb of God; or John wanted His disciples to hear the claims of Jesus firsthand, and to know from Jesus Himself that He was the one promised by John and by all the Hebrew prophets who preceded Him.

While John was in prison, Salome, the daughter of Herodias, wife of Herod Antipas (and formerly wife of Phillip) was asked to dance by her stepfather at his birthday feast, and she agreed to do so provided that he granted her wish. He swore he would grant her wish, and she forthwith asked for John's head (Matt 14:8; Mark 6:24). Herod had John beheaded (Matt 14:10-11; Mark 6:27-28). John's disciples buried his body (Matt 14:12; Mark 6:29), and went and told Jesus (Matt 14:12).

Bahá'u'llah referred to Bethlehem as the birth place of Jesus Christ, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to him as Jesus of Nazareth in some of his talks:

In like manner, when the hour of the Revelation of Jesus drew nigh, a few of the Magi, aware that the star of Jesus had appeared in heaven, sought and followed it, till they came unto the city which was the seat of the Kingdom of Herod. The sway of his sovereignty in those days embraced the whole of that land.

These Magi said: "Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the east and are come to worship Him!" [Matthew 2:2] When they had searched, they found out that in Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, the Child had been born. This was the sign that was manifested in the visible heaven. As to the sign in the invisible heaven -- the heaven of divine knowledge and understanding -- it was Yahya, son of Zachariah, who gave unto the people the tidings of the Manifestation of Jesus. Even as He hath revealed: "God announceth Yahya to thee, who shall bear witness unto the Word from God, and a great one and chaste." [Qur'an 3:39] By the term "Word" is meant Jesus, Whose coming Yahya foretold. Moreover, in the heavenly Scriptures it is written: "John the Baptist was preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying,

Repent ye: for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand." [Matthew 3:1-2] By John is meant Yahya. (Bahá'u'llah, *The Kitáb-i-Iqán*, pp. 64-65)

Bethlehem is astir with the Breeze of God. We hear her voice saying: 'O most generous Lord! Where is Thy great glory established? The sweet savours of Thy presence have quickened me, after I had melted in my separation from Thee. Praised be Thou in that Thou hast raised the veils, and come with power in evident glory.' We called unto her from behind the Tabernacle of Majesty and Grandeur: 'O Bethlehem! This Light hath risen in the orient, and travelled towards the occident, until it reached thee in the evening of its life. Tell Me then: Do the sons recognize the Father, and acknowledge Him, or do they deny Him, even as the people aforetime denied Him (Jesus)?' Whereupon she cried out saying: 'Thou art, in truth, the All-Knowing, the Best-Informed.' Verily, We behold all created things moved to bear witness unto Us. Some know Us and bear witness, while the majority bear witness, yet know Us not. (Bahá'u'llah, *Tablets of Bahá'u'llah*, pp. 14-15)

Therefore, they were deprived of the bounties of Christ, whereas if they had forsaken imitations and investigated the reality of the Messiah, they would have surely been guided to believing in Him. Instead of this they said, "We have heard from our fathers and have read in the Old Testament that Christ must come from an unknown place; now we find that this one has come from Nazareth." Steeped in the literal interpretation and imitating the beliefs of fathers and ancestors, they failed to understand the fact that although the body of Jesus came from Nazareth, the reality of the Christ came from the unknown place of the divine Kingdom. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 291-292)

And now, do you consider these great men of France greater than Jesus of Nazareth? It is evident that in comparison with Jesus Christ they are as nothing. Consider the grandeur and majesty of Jesus in contrast with such men as we have mentioned. Consider Him from the standpoint of fame and renown. Where is the station of Christ, and where is their station? What comparison is there? In reality, Christ is incomparable. What harm, then, could come from your declaration that Jesus of Nazareth was a great man of Israelitish birth and, therefore, we love Him? ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 414)

The philosophers of the times, Romans and Greeks, wrote against Christ. Even the kings wrote books of abuse, calumny and contempt. One of these kings was a Caesar. He was also a philosopher. In his book he says, concerning the people of Christ, "The most degraded of people are the Christians. The most immoral of the people of this time are the Christians. Jesus of Nazareth has led them astray. O people! If you wish to know who Jesus is and what Christian

means, go and ask his relatives. Go and ask the Jews who know him. See what a bad person he is, how degraded he is." There were many similar accounts. But remember that these statements did not affect the cause of Christianity. On the contrary, Christianity advanced daily in power and potency. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 429)

Bahá'u'llah refers to the flight of Jesus with his parents from the persecution of King Herod to another land in Epistle to the Son of the Wolf (p. 58). 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to this flight in Ten Days in the Light of Acca (p. 7), indicating in the same collection of pilgrim notes that this is elaborated in one of the lost Gospels...originally he says there were 50 Gospels. Shoghi Effendi also refers to the flight in God Passes By (p. 107).

THE APOSTLES OF JESUS

There are very few references to and quotations from the Acts and Epistles of the disciples of Jesus to be found interspersed among the talks and writings of the Central Figures and Guardian of the Faith. There are many more citations from the Book of Revelation than there are for the entirety of this section of the New Testament, even though the former is only 15 pages in length while the latter is 118 pages long, six more pages than the four canonical Gospels. This may be reflect the interests of the Western (Christian) believers to some degree, for if they asked many questions about the interpretation of the Book of Revelation and few questions about the Acts and Epistles this would explain the inverse ratio. However, it seems also likely that these few references also reflected the priorities of the Bahá'í leadership, and their conception of which of the contents of the New Testament were of the most decided value for modern readers.

Both Peter and Paul come in for praise from 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

One's conduct must be like the conduct of Paul, and one's faith similar to that of Peter. This musk-scented breeze shall perfume the nostrils of the people of the world, and this spirit shall resuscitate the dead.³³⁸

I have the utmost love for thee and I ask God that thou mayest become assisted in the world and in the Kingdom and precede Paul and Peter in spreading the Word of God and diffusing the fragrances of God and become a manifest ensign in the regions of America.³³⁹

Nevertheless, Bahá'u'llah affirms the primacy of Peter rather than that of Paul:

There is certainly an element of truth at the bases of the organizations of the Christian Church. For instance, the primacy of Peter and his right to succession after Jesus have been established by the latter, though only orally and not in an explicit and definite language. The real reason why Christ did not make some explicit statement regarding His succession is not known, and cannot be known. For how can we, poor humans, claim to unravel the mysteries of God's mind and purpose, and to grasp the inscrutable Dispensations of His Providence. The utmost we can do is to give some explanations, but these must necessarily fail to give the fundamental reason to the problem we seek to solve. Now with regard to your questions. First concerning the statement of Jesus Christ 'Thou art Peter and upon this rock etc.'; this saying of Jesus establishes beyond any doubt the primacy of Peter and also the principle of succession, but is not explicit enough

³³⁸Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 223-224

³³⁹Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, v2, p. 471

regarding the nature and functioning of the Church itself. The Catholics have read too much into the statement, and derived from it certain conclusions which are quite unjustifiable.³⁴⁰

As to the position of Christianity, let it be stated without any hesitation or equivocation that its Divine origin is unconditionally acknowledged, that the Sonship and Divinity of Jesus Christ are fearlessly asserted, that the Divine inspiration of the Gospel is fully recognized, that the reality of the mystery of the Immaculacy of the Virgin Mary is confessed, and the primacy of Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, is upheld and defended. The Founder of the Christian Faith is designated by Bahá'u'lláh as the 'Spirit of God', is proclaimed as the One Who 'appeared out of the breath of the Holy Ghost', and is even extolled as the 'Essence of the Spirit'. His mother is described as 'that veiled and immortal, that most beautiful countenance', and the station of her Son eulogized as a 'station which hath been exalted above the imaginings of all that dwell on earth,' whilst Peter is recognized as one whom God has caused 'the mysteries of wisdom and of utterance of flow out of his mouth.'³⁴¹

While Peter is affirmed as the Prince of the Apostles, upon which the Church has been established, his Epistles are not quoted in any of the Bahá'í Writings, while there are a few citations from the Epistles of Paul, which comprise 74 out of the 118 pages of the Acts and Epistles. These are cited below. First there is one reference to the Epistle to the Romans of Paul, ironically in the last book revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, whose first reader was a fanatical enemy of the Bahá'ís and one who no doubt considered the entirety of the New Testament unreliable, corrupted and thus without divine authority.

In the Epistle to the Romans Saint Paul hath written: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God." And further: "For he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." He saith that the appearance of the kings, and their majesty and power are of God.

Moreover, in the traditions of old, references have been made which the divines have seen and heard. We beseech God -- blessed and glorified be He -- to aid thee, O Shaykh, to lay fast hold on that which hath been sent down from the heaven of the bounty of God, the Lord of the worlds. The divines must needs unite with His Majesty, the Shah, and cleave unto that which will insure the protection, the security, the welfare and prosperity of men. A just king enjoyeth nearer access unto God than anyone. Unto this testifieth He Who speaketh in His Most Great

³⁴⁰From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, September 7, 1938; in Lights of Guidance, p. 492)

³⁴¹Shoghi Effendi: The Promised Day is Come, pp. 113-114

Prison. God! There is none other God but Him, the One, the Incomparable, the Almighty, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.³⁴²

Question. -- Is the ablution of baptism useful and necessary, or is it useless and unnecessary? In the first case, if it is useful, why was it abrogated? And in the second case, if it is useless, why did John practice it?

Answer. -- The change in conditions, alterations and transformations are necessities of the essence of beings, and essential necessities cannot be separated from the reality of things. So it is absolutely impossible to separate heat from fire, humidity from water, or light from the sun, for they are essential necessities. As the change and alteration of conditions are necessities for beings, so laws also are changed and altered in accordance with the changes and alterations of the times. For example, in the time of Moses, His Law was conformed and adapted to the conditions of the time; but in the days of Christ these conditions had changed and altered to such an extent that the Mosaic Law was no longer suited and adapted to the needs of mankind; and it was, therefore, abrogated. Thus it was that Christ broke the Sabbath and forbade divorce. After Christ four disciples, among whom were **Peter and Paul**, permitted the use of animal food forbidden by the Bible, except the eating of those animals which had been strangled, or which were sacrificed to idols, and of blood.³⁴³ They also forbade fornication. They maintained these four commandments. Afterward, Paul permitted even the eating of strangled animals, those sacrificed to idols, and blood, and only maintained the prohibition of fornication. So in chapter 14, verse 14 of his Epistle to the Romans, Paul writes: "**I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.**"

Also in the Epistle of Paul to Titus, chapter 1, verse 15: "**Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.**" Now this change, these alterations and this abrogation are due to the impossibility of comparing the time of Christ with that of Moses. The conditions and requirements in the later period were entirely changed and altered. The former laws were, therefore, abrogated.

The existence of the world may be compared to that of a man, and the Prophets and Messengers of God to skillful doctors. The human being cannot remain in one condition: different maladies occur which have each a special remedy. The skillful physician does not give the same medicine to cure each disease and each malady, but he changes remedies and medicines according to the different necessities of the diseases and constitutions. One person may have a severe illness

³⁴²Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, pp. 91-92; first paragraph in *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 72

³⁴³Acts of the Apostles 15:20

caused by fever, and the skilled doctor will give him cooling remedies; and when at some other time the condition of this person has changed, and fever is replaced by chills, without doubt the skilled doctor will discard cooling medicine and permit the use of heating drugs. This change and alteration is required by the condition of the patient and is an evident proof of the skill of the physician.

Consider, could the Law of the Old Testament be enforced at this epoch and time? No, in the name of God! it would be impossible and impracticable; therefore, most certainly God abrogated the laws of the Old Testament at the time of Christ. Reflect, also, that baptism in the days of John the Baptist was used to awaken and admonish the people to repent from all sin, and to watch for the appearance of the Kingdom of Christ. But at present in Asia, the Catholics and the Orthodox Church plunge newly born children into water mixed with olive oil, and many of them become ill from the shock; at the time of baptism they struggle and become agitated. In other places, the clergy sprinkle the water of baptism on the forehead. But neither from the first form nor from the second do the children derive any spiritual benefit. Then what result is obtained from this form? Other peoples are amazed and wonder why the infant is plunged into the water, since this is neither the cause of the spiritual awakening of the child, nor of its faith or conversion, but it is only a custom which is followed. In the time of John the Baptist it was not so; no, at first John used to exhort the people, and to guide them to repentance from sin, and to fill them with the desire to await the manifestation of Christ. Whoever received the ablution of baptism, and repented of sins in absolute humility and meekness, would also purify and cleanse his body from outward impurities. With perfect yearning, night and day, he would constantly wait for the manifestation of Christ, and the entrance to the Kingdom of the Spirit of God.³⁴⁴

To recapitulate: our meaning is that the change and modification of conditions, and the altered requirements of different centuries and times, are the cause of the abrogation of laws. For a time comes when these laws are no longer suitably adapted to conditions. Consider how very different are the requirements of the first centuries, of the Middle Ages, and of modern times. Is it possible that the laws of the first centuries could be enforced at present? It is evident that it would be impossible and impracticable. In the same manner, after the lapse of a few centuries, the requirements of the present time will not be the same as those of the future, and certainly there will be change and alteration. In Europe the laws are unceasingly altered and modified; in bygone years, how many laws existed in the organizations and systems of Europe, which are now abrogated! These changes and alterations are due to the variation and mutation of thought, conditions and customs. If it were not so, the prosperity of the world of humanity would be wrecked.

For example, there is in the Pentateuch a law that if anyone break the Sabbath, he shall be put to death. Moreover, there are ten sentences of death in the Pentateuch. Would it be possible to

³⁴⁴I.e., of Christ, Whom the Muslims frequently designate by the title of Ruhullah, the Spirit of God.

keep these laws in our time? It is clear that it would be absolutely impossible. Consequently, there are changes and modifications in the laws, and these are a sufficient proof of the supreme wisdom of God.

This subject needs deep thought. Then the cause of these changes will be evident and apparent. Blessed are those who reflect!³⁴⁵

Question. -- In verse 22 of chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians it is written: "**For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.**" What is the meaning of these words?

Answer. -- Know that there are two natures in man: the physical nature and the spiritual nature. The physical nature is inherited from Adam, and the spiritual nature is inherited from the Reality of the Word of God, which is the spirituality of Christ. The physical nature is born of Adam, but the spiritual nature is born from the bounty of the Holy Spirit. The first is the source of all imperfection; the second is the source of all perfection.

The Christ sacrificed Himself so that men might be freed from the imperfections of the physical nature and might become possessed of the virtues of the spiritual nature. This spiritual nature, which came into existence through the bounty of the Divine Reality, is the union of all perfections and appears through the breath of the Holy Spirit. It is the divine perfections; it is light, spirituality, guidance, exaltation, high aspiration, justice, love, grace, kindness to all, philanthropy, the essence of life. It is the reflection of the splendor of the Sun of Reality.

The Christ is the central point of the Holy Spirit: He is born of the Holy Spirit; He is raised up by the Holy Spirit; He is the descendant of the Holy Spirit -- that is to say, that the Reality of Christ does not descend from Adam; no, it is born of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, this verse in Corinthians, "**As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive,**" means, according to this terminology, that Adam³⁴⁶ is the father of man -- that is to say, He is the cause of the physical life of mankind; His was the physical fatherhood. He is a living soul, but He is not the giver of spiritual life, whereas Christ is the cause of the spiritual life of man, and with regard to the spirit, His was the spiritual fatherhood. Adam is a living soul; Christ is a quickening spirit.

This physical world of man is subject to the power of the lusts, and sin is the consequence of this power of the lusts, for it is not subject to the laws of justice and holiness. The body of man is a captive of nature; it will act in accordance with whatever nature orders. It is, therefore, certain that sins such as anger, jealousy, dispute, covetousness, avarice, ignorance, prejudice, hatred, pride and

³⁴⁵Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 93-96

³⁴⁶Abu'l-bashar, i.e., the father of man, is one of the titles given by the Muslims to Adam.

tyranny exist in the physical world. All these brutal qualities exist in the nature of man. A man who has not had a spiritual education is a brute. Like the savages of Africa, whose actions, habits and morals are purely sensual, they act according to the demands of nature to such a degree that they rend and eat one another. Thus it is evident that the physical world of man is a world of sin. In this physical world man is not distinguished from the animal.

All sin comes from the demands of nature, and these demands, which arise from the physical qualities, are not sins with respect to the animals, while for man they are sin. The animal is the source of imperfections, such as anger, sensuality, jealousy, avarice, cruelty, pride: all these defects are found in animals but do not constitute sins. But in man they are sins.

Adam is the cause of man's physical life; but the Reality of Christ -- that is to say, the Word of God -- is the cause of spiritual life. It is "a quickening spirit," meaning that all the imperfections which come from the requirements of the physical life of man are transformed into human perfections by the teachings and education of that spirit. Therefore, Christ was a quickening spirit, and the cause of life in all mankind.

Adam was the cause of physical life, and as the physical world of man is the world of imperfections, and imperfections are the equivalent of death, Paul compared the physical imperfections to death.

But the mass of the Christians believe that, as Adam ate of the forbidden tree, He sinned in that He disobeyed, and that the disastrous consequences of this disobedience have been transmitted as a heritage and have remained among His descendants. Hence Adam became the cause of the death of humanity. This explanation is unreasonable and evidently wrong, for it means that all men, even the Prophets and the Messengers of God, without committing any sin or fault, but simply because they are the posterity of Adam, have become without reason guilty sinners, and until the day of the sacrifice of Christ were held captive in hell in painful torment. This is far from the justice of God. If Adam was a sinner, what is the sin of Abraham? What is the fault of Isaac, or of Joseph? Of what is Moses guilty?

But Christ, Who is the Word of God, sacrificed Himself. This has two meanings, an apparent and an esoteric meaning. The outward meaning is this: Christ's intention was to represent and promote a Cause which was to educate the human world, to quicken the children of Adam, and to enlighten all mankind; and since to represent such a great Cause -- a Cause which was antagonistic to all the people of the world and all the nations and kingdoms -- meant that He would be killed and crucified, so Christ in proclaiming His mission sacrificed His life. He regarded the cross as a throne, the wound as a balm, the poison as honey and sugar. He arose to teach and educate men, and so He sacrificed Himself to give the spirit of life. He perished in body so as to quicken others by the spirit.

The second meaning of sacrifice is this: Christ was like a seed, and this seed sacrificed its own form so that the tree might grow and develop. Although the form of the seed was destroyed, its reality became apparent in perfect majesty and beauty in the form of a tree.

The position of Christ was that of absolute perfection; He made His divine perfections shine like the sun upon all believing souls, and the bounties of the light shone and radiated in the reality of men. This is why He says: "**I am the bread which descended from heaven; whoever shall eat of this bread will not die**"³⁴⁷ -- that is to say, that whosoever shall partake of this divine food will attain unto eternal life: that is, every one who partakes of this bounty and receives these perfections will find eternal life, will obtain preexistent favors, will be freed from the darkness of error, and will be illuminated by the light of His guidance.

The form of the seed was sacrificed for the tree, but its perfections, because of this sacrifice, became evident and apparent -- the tree, the branches, the leaves and the blossoms being concealed in the seed. When the form of the seed was sacrificed, its perfections appeared in the perfect form of leaves, blossoms and fruits.³⁴⁸

It is said in the New Testament that God is like a potter who makes "**one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour.**"³⁴⁹ Now the dishonored vessel has no right to find fault with the potter saying, "Why did you not make me a precious cup, which is passed from hand to hand?" The meaning of this verse is that the states of beings are different. That which is in the lowest state of existence, like the mineral, has no right to complain, saying, "O God, why have You not given me the vegetable perfections?" In the same way, the plant has no right to complain that it has been deprived of the perfections of the animal world. Also it is not befitting for the animal to complain of the want of the human perfections. No, all these things are perfect in their own degree, and they must strive after the perfections of their own degree. The inferior beings, as we have said, have neither the right to, nor the fitness for, the states of the superior perfections. No, their progress must be in their own state.

Also the inaction or the movement of man depend upon the assistance of God. If he is not aided, he is not able to do either good or evil. But when the help of existence comes from the Generous Lord, he is able to do both good and evil; but if the help is cut off, he remains absolutely helpless. This is why in the Holy Books they speak of the help and assistance of God. So this condition is like that of a ship which is moved by the power of the wind or steam; if this power ceases, the ship cannot move at all. Nevertheless, the rudder of the ship turns it to either

³⁴⁷Gospel of John 6:41, 50, 58

³⁴⁸Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 117-121

³⁴⁹Epistle to the Romans 9:21

side, and the power of the steam moves it in the desired direction. If it is directed to the east, it goes to the east; or if it is directed to the west, it goes to the west. This motion does not come from the ship; no, it comes from the wind or the steam.

In the same way, in all the action or inaction of man, he receives power from the help of God; but the choice of good or evil belongs to the man himself. So if a king should appoint someone to be the governor of a city, and should grant him the power of authority, and should show him the paths of justice and injustice according to the laws -- if then this governor should commit injustice, although he should act by the authority and power of the king, the latter would be absolved from injustice. But if he should act with justice, he would do it also through the authority of the king, who would be pleased and satisfied.

That is to say, though the choice of good and evil belongs to man, under all circumstances he is dependent upon the sustaining help of life, which comes from the Omnipotent. The Kingdom of God is very great, and all are captives in the grasp of His Power. The servant cannot do anything by his own will; God is powerful, omnipotent, and the Helper of all beings.³⁵⁰

In his scriptural lesson this morning the revered doctor read a verse from the Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, "**For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.**"³⁵¹

The light of truth has heretofore been seen dimly through variegated glasses, but now the splendors of Divinity shall be visible through the translucent mirrors of pure hearts and spirits. The light of truth is the divine teaching, heavenly instruction, merciful principles and spiritual civilization. Since my arrival in this country I find that material civilization has progressed greatly, that commerce has attained the utmost degree of expansion; arts, agriculture and all details of material civilization have reached the highest stage of perfection, but spiritual civilization has been left behind. Material civilization is like unto the lamp, while spiritual civilization is the light in that lamp. If the material and spiritual civilization become united, then we will have the light and the lamp together, and the outcome will be perfect. For material civilization is like unto a beautiful body, and spiritual civilization is like unto the spirit of life. If that wondrous spirit of life enters this beautiful body, the body will become a channel for the distribution and development of the perfections of humanity.

Jesus Christ came to teach the people of the world this heavenly civilization and not material civilization. He breathed the breath of the Holy Spirit into the body of the world and established

³⁵⁰Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 249-250

³⁵¹First Epistle to the Corinthians 13:12

an illumined civilization. Among the principles of divine civilization He came to proclaim is the Most Great Peace of mankind. Among His principles of spiritual civilization is the oneness of the kingdom of humanity. Among the principles of heavenly civilization He brought is the virtue of the human world. Among the principles of celestial civilization He announced is the improvement and betterment of human morals.

Today the world of humanity is in need of international unity and conciliation. To establish these great fundamental principles a propelling power is needed. It is self-evident that the unity of the human world and the Most Great Peace cannot be accomplished through material means. They cannot be established through political power, for the political interests of nations are various and the policies of peoples are divergent and conflicting. They cannot be founded through racial or patriotic power, for these are human powers, selfish and weak. The very nature of racial differences and patriotic prejudices prevents the realization of this unity and agreement. Therefore, it is evidenced that the promotion of the oneness of the kingdom of humanity, which is the essence of the teachings of all the Manifestations of God, is impossible except through the divine power and breaths of the Holy Spirit. Other powers are too weak and are incapable of accomplishing this.

For man two wings are necessary. One wing is physical power and material civilization; the other is spiritual power and divine civilization. With one wing only, flight is impossible. Two wings are essential. Therefore, no matter how much material civilization advances, it cannot attain to perfection except through the uplift of spiritual civilization.

All the Prophets have come to promote divine bestowals, to found the spiritual civilization and teach the principles of morality. Therefore, we must strive with all our powers so that spiritual influences may gain the victory. For material forces have attacked mankind. The world of humanity is submerged in a sea of materialism. The rays of the Sun of Reality are seen but dimly and darkly through opaque glasses. The penetrative power of the divine bounty is not fully manifest.

In Persia among the various religions and sects there were intense differences. Bahá'u'lláh appeared in that country and founded the spiritual civilization. He established affiliation among the various peoples, promoted the oneness of the human world and unfurled the banner of the Most Great Peace. He wrote special Epistles covering these facts to all the kings and rulers of nations. Sixty years ago He conveyed His message to the leaders of the political world and to high dignitaries of the spiritual world. Therefore, spiritual civilization is progressing in the Orient, and oneness of humanity and peace among the nations is being accomplished step by step. Now I find a strong movement for universal peace emanating from America. It is my hope

that this standard of the oneness of the world of humanity may be upraised with the utmost solidity so that the Orient and Occident may become perfectly reconciled and attain complete intercommunication, the hearts of the East and West become united and attracted, real union become unveiled, the light of guidance shine, divine effulgences be seen day by day so that the world of humanity may find complete tranquillity, the eternal happiness of man become evident and the hearts of the people of the world be as mirrors in which the rays of the Sun of Reality may be reflected. Consequently, it is my request that you should strive so that the light of reality may shine and the everlasting felicity of the world of man become apparent.

I will pray for you so you may attain this everlasting happiness. When I arrived in this city, I was made very happy, for I perceived that the people here have capacity for divine bestowals and have worthiness for the civilization of heaven. I pray that you may attain to all merciful bounties.

O Almighty! O God! O Thou compassionate One! This servant of Thine has hastened to the regions of the West from the uttermost parts of the East that, perchance, these nostrils may be perfumed by the fragrances of Thy bestowals; that the breeze of the rose garden of guidance may blow over these cities; that the people may attain to the capacity of receiving Thy favors; that the hearts may be rejoiced through Thy glad tidings; that the eyes may behold the light of reality; that the ears may hearken to the call of the Kingdom. O Almighty! Illumine the hearts. O kind God! Make the souls the envy of the rose garden and the meadow. O incomparable Beloved! Waft the fragrance of Thy bounty. Radiate the lights of compassion so that the hearts may be cleansed and purified and that they may take a share and portion from Thy confirmations. Verily, this congregation is seeking Thy path, searching for Thy mystery, beholding Thy face and desiring to be characterized with Thine attributes.

Almighty! Confer Thou infinite bounties. Bestow Thine inexhaustible treasury so that these impotent ones may become powerful.

Verily, Thou art the Kind. Thou art the Generous. Thou art the Omniscient, the Omnipotent.³⁵²

Shoghi Effendi cited additional verses which contain prophecies fulfilled by the advent of the Twin Manifestations for this day and age:

To the hour of His advent St. Paul had alluded as the hour of the "**last trump**," the "**trump of God**," whilst St. Peter had spoken of it as the "**Day of God, wherein the heavens being on**

³⁵²Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 11-13

fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat." His Day he, furthermore, had described as "**the times of refreshing,**" "**the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy Prophets since the world began.**"³⁵³

The verses cited in their immediate context are found here:

15:51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 15:52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the **last trump**: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.³⁵⁴

4:16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the **trump of God**: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 4:17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.³⁵⁵

3:10 But the **day of the Lord** will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. 3:11 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, 3:12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day **of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?** 3:13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.³⁵⁶

3:19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when **the times of refreshing** shall come from the presence of the Lord. 3:20 And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: 3:21 Whom the heaven must receive until **the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.**³⁵⁷

Much has been written about the apostle Paul's views of women generally and of Christian women in particular. Some, particularly in our modern times, when the equality and indeed the commonality of male and female are so generally accepted and assumed, have regarded Paul a traditional Jew of his time, while others have sought in

³⁵³Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 95

³⁵⁴First Epistle to the Corinthians 15:52

³⁵⁵First Epistles to the Thessalonians 4:16

³⁵⁶Second Epistle of Peter 3:10-13

³⁵⁷Sermon of Peter recorded in the Book of Acts of the Apostles 3:19-21

Paul's personal experience a cause for what they characterize as his misogyny. Here are the four passages from among his letters that are at issue:

11:3 But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. 11:4 Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. 11:5 But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. 11:6 For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. 11:7 For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. 11:8 For the man is not of the woman: but the woman of the man. 11:9 Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. 11:10 For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels. 11:11 Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. 11:12 For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God. 11:13 Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? 11:14 Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? 11:15 But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. (First Epistle to the Corinthians)

14:34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. 14:35 And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. (First Epistle to the Corinthians)

2:9 In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; 2:10 But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. 2:11 Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. 2:12 But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. 2:13 For Adam was first formed, then Eve. 2:14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. 2:15 Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety. (First Epistle to Timothy)

1:26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: 1:27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. (Epistle to the Romans)

There is nothing remotely misogynistic about Paul's views. They do not seem to be based however on the Torah, because the only verse in the Law and the Prophets that correlates with what he has written in these letters is the strong condemnation of homosexual acts between men in the Book of Leviticus:

18:22 Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.

20:13 If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.

The behavior enjoined upon women by Paul is nonetheless entirely compatible with Jewish tradition, as described in the Talmud and codified in the legal code [halachah] based thereon. A discussion of the obedience of wife to husband in the Talmud is here cited³⁵⁸:

When we turn to the respect that a woman owes her husband, however, a different picture emerges. The Talmud (Qiddushin 31a) rules that honoring one's father takes precedence over honoring his mother, "because you and your mother are required to honor your father." Similarly (ibid. 30b) we learn that even though both men and women are required to honor their parents, "a man is able to do it, but a woman is not able to do it, because others have control over her"; i.e. her husband, as Rashi comments. Thus a married woman is exempt from the Biblical command of "honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12) because the honor she owes her husband comes first. This "honor" clearly means doing his will, as the Midrash says (Tana De-Vei Eliyahu 10:5), "There is no fit one among women but she who does the will of her husband." The following story told by the Talmud (Nedarim 66b) shows how far the virtue of obedience to a woman's husband goes. Once a man from B'abylon came to the Land of Israel and took a wife. She didn't understand him very well, however, because of the differences between the dialects of Aramaic spoken in the two countries. Day after day she went wrong in the cooking, until one day he told her, "Go bring me two gourds (buzinei)". She misunderstood this too and brought him two lamps. At this he got angry and said, "Go break them on the top of the door! (al reisha de-B'aba)" But she misunderstood this too and thought he meant "over the head of B'aba"; i.e. B'aba ben Buta, the leading scholar of the day who was sitting that moment as the judge in court, and thus she did. He asked her, "What's this you've done?" "Thus commanded me my husband", she answered. At this B'aba ben Buta blessed her, saying, "You did the will of your husband - may the Omnipresent bring out from you two sons like B'aba ben Buta!" Since the obedient wife is held in such high esteem, the Talmud advises one to be patient and careful in choosing a wife who will accept his authority. Thus Rav Papa says (Yevamot 63a), "Go down a step and take a wife", or as Rashi explains, "Don't take a wife who is more important than you, lest you not be accepted by her."

³⁵⁸http://www.ottmall.com/mj_ht_arch/v15/mj_v15i40.html

It seems reasonable that Paul, a student of the Pharisees in Jerusalem prior to his conversion, should have become familiar with the so-called oral traditions which were ultimately recorded in the Mishnah and Gemara. But was Paul the only follower of Jesus who held to such views? We would be remiss to entertain such a belief, inasmuch as Peter, the first and foremost disciple of Jesus articulated substantially the same convictions in this canonical text:

2:25 For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. 3:1 Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; 3:2 While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. 3:3 Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; 3:4 But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. 3:5 For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: 3:6 Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement. 3:7 Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered. (First Epistle of Peter)

Sarah did call Abraham "my lord"...once and in a specific context that belies the reference to her cited here:

18:1 And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; 18:2 And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, 18:3 And said, My LORD, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: 18:4 Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: 18:5 And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said. 18:6 And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth. 18:7 And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetcht a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hasted to dress it. 18:8 And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat. 18:9 And they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent. 18:10 And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him. 18:11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. 18:12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure,

my lord being old also? 18:13 And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? 18:14 Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son. 18:15 Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh. (Book of Genesis)

As to her obedience to her husband Abraham, the only explicit indication we have of this in the Bible is a story which indicates that she lied in order to save his life:

12:11 And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: 12:12 Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. 12:13 Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee. 12:14 And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair. 12:15 The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh: and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. 12:16 And he entreated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels. 12:17 And the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife. 12:18 And Pharaoh called Abram and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? 12:19 Why saidst thou, She is my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way. (Book of Genesis)

Hence, both Paul, the learned student of the Pharisees, and Peter, the most likely illiterate fisherman held to traditional Jewish views about a woman's place and her relationship with her husband that were not explicitly set forth in the Hebrew Bible, but are found in the oral tradition associated recorded some centuries thereafter. We might well ask then whether Paul and Peter spoke in this way because it was expedient for them to do so, or whether they sincerely believed that Jesus enjoined such behavior upon his followers. It might well have seemed auspicious to both of them that their contemporary fellow believers should behave in such a manner as would commend them most highly to the unbelievers of their times, so that they might more successfully become "fishers of men" (Gospel of Matthew 4:19, KJV). Their decision not to require ritual observance of Jewish law from Gentile converts and to renounce such ritual observance themselves indicates that they were sensitive to the audience they addressed, but also that they did not believe that such ritual observance was required by Jesus. This is quite remarkable, inasmuch as the Gospel of Matthew records Jesus saying:

5:17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. 5:18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. 5:19 Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least

commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 5:20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

As both Paul and Peter held that some of the commandments were not binding on Christians, is it not inevitable that we recognize this fact...that they believed that "all" was "fulfilled" that "heaven and earth" had passed, and that, in this new heaven and new earth, the "righteousness" of the Christians did not depend on their obedience to "the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees"? If, notwithstanding this "paradigm shift" they espoused views about women and marriage that were in harmony with Jewish tradition two centuries later, what does this mean? Were such views integral to the vision of the kingdom of God revealed by Jesus? And If they believed that these teachings were from Jesus himself, what words of his might be the basis for such convictions? In subsequent postings, with the participation of other exegetes, we will explore these questions.

Responding to Peter and Paul

To recall the previous posting, Paul describes the relationship between man and woman in relation to the story of Adam and Eve:

11:7 For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. 11:8 For the man is not of the woman: but the woman of the man. 11:9 Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. (First Epistle to the Corinthians)

2:21 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; 2:22 And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. 2:23 And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. (Book of Genesis)

There is another Biblical story that is alluded to by Paul and which suggests another kind of relationship between man and woman:

1:26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. 1:28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the

earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (Book of Genesis)

Whereas Paul derives the woman from the man from the story of Adam and Eve, the story which describes “man” as having been “created in his own image” by God specifically states that “male and female created he them” and “God blessed them, and God said unto them” His commandments that together they “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over...every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” In His relations with His mother, His aunt, His female followers, and the women He addressed in the course of His ministry, Jesus does not come across as one who believes or wishes them to consider themselves as created of man and for man. On the contrary, women and men alike are created that they might be born again and attain to eternal life, and this is only in service to God and attainment to His kingdom.

THE PROPHECIES OF JESUS AND THEIR FULFILMENT

1) DID JESUS PREDICT THE ADVENT OF MUHAMMAD

Now we must consider whether or not Jesus Christ gave "glad tidings of a Messenger" to follow Him. The numerous references in the Gospels to the appearance of the "Comforter", the "Son of man coming in the glory of the Father", the "Spirit of Truth" demonstrate beyond the shadow of a doubt that Jesus Christ did indeed promise a divine Messenger after His departure from this world. Inasmuch as the references which are traditionally cited both by Christians and by Muslims with reference to this question are those which refer to the "Comforter", these will be examined in depth. All of these references are found in the Gospel of John (XIV:16, XIV:26, XV:26, XVI:7). The actual Greek words employed in this Gospel are "Parakleton" (XIV:16) and "Parakletos" (XIV:26, XV:26, XVI:7) which has been translated into English as "Comforter" (King James Version); "Comforter" (Revised Version text) and "Advocate" and "Helper" (Revised Version margin); "Helper" (Watchtower Society text) and "Comforter" (Watchtower margin). In all cases, "Parakletos" and "Parakleton" are masculine in gender.

Every one of the four Gospels (Matthew III:3; Mark I:3; Luke III:4; John I:23) contains an account of John the Baptist fulfilling a certain prophetic verse (number three) found in the 40th chapter of the Book of Isaiah: "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." The verse which opens this chapter of Isaiah is as follows: "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God." (XL:1) In the Hebrew language the original wording of this text is as follows: "nakhamu nakhamu 'ami yomar eloheikhem" (XL:1) "Nakhamu" is the Hebrew word translated as "comfort ye". In Hebrew, the verbal infinitive form of "comfort" is "nikhem"; the noun forms for "comfort" are "nokhiyut", "nekhamah" and "tenkhumim"; and the noun form for "comforter" is "mnakhem". The three letter root of all of these words is [NKHM].

This word may contain a clue to the meaning intended by Jesus in identifying His successor by the name "Comforter", which, in Hebrew, would be "Menakhem". There does not appear to be any connection whatsoever between the Hebrew name "Menakhem" and the Arabic name "Ahmad". Christian and Muslim commentators have claimed that the answer to this puzzle is to be found in the Greek term used in the Gospel of John. Christian commentators affirm that "Parakleton/Parakletos" sounds similar to "Periklytos", and that while the former means "Comforter" the latter means "praised, glorified", and since this latter word agrees with the meaning of the Arabic name "Muhammad" and its cognate "Ahmad", the author of the

Qur'an--whom they presume to be Muhammad--must have thought heard the text of the Gospel of John in Greek and decided that the wrong word had been employed, that what Jesus Christ had intended was not "Parakletos" but "Periklytos". This preposterous conclusion is based upon no evidence whatsoever. Is it likely that an illiterate merchant from Arabia would ever come into contact with a Greek text of the Gospels? And if he ever did so, what is the likelihood that He would have mastered the Greek tongue sufficiently to discover the relevant passages to "Parakletos" in the Gospel of John and also come to know that there was a quite similar Greek word "Periklytos" which had much the same meaning as His own name? This would imply that Muhammad was a deceiver, one might even say a forger--for He claimed that the Qur'an was revealed to Him by the Angel Gabriel--and a scholar of New Testament Greek to boot! This examination of the evidence seems to point to a symbolic rather than a literal interpretation of these verses--that is, a symbolic interpretation of "Parakletos" in the Gospel of John and a symbolic interpretation of "Ahmad" in the Qur'an. A literal interpretation of either or both of these terms seems to make them incompatible, and to render the claims of Muhammad uncertain if not invalid on this score. Jesus Christ promised that a "Comforter" would follow Him. The Qur'an states that Jesus promised that He would be followed by a Messenger of God named "more laudable, more praiseworthy". Jesus Christ did not say that the Comforter's name was to be "Comforter". The Qur'an does not say that the new Messenger's name would be "Ahmad". There is no conflict. But did Jesus Christ say that the "Comforter" would be "more laudable, more praiseworthy" than Himself?

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; Even the Spirit of truth... (Gospel of John XIV:16-17)

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. (Gospel of John XIV:26)

Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment...I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. (Gospel of John XVI:7-8, 12-13)

*These references to the "Comforter" certainly seem to refer to a Prophet of God who is "more laudable, more praiseworthy" than the His predecessor, with regard to the intensity of His Revelation and the readiness of humanity to receive that greater intensity. When He said: **"It is expedient for you that I go away"** (Gospel of John XVI:7), Jesus Christ was teachings His followers that Prophets succeed each other, that they do not remain fixed stars by which humanity is meant to navigate forever; also, He was not referring to His station as a Prophet of God, which is eternal and immeasurably exalted above all earthly acts, including birth and death, but rather to His Dispensation and possibly to His mortal humanity. For every Prophet of God is a human being as well as the Supreme Representative in the worlds of creation of the Creator Himself. Literal interpretations often fall far short of hitting the mark. Bahá'u'llah writes in "K̄itab-i-Iqan" (KI:80-81):*

Judge fairly: Were the prophecies recorded in the Gospel to be literally fulfilled; were Jesus, Son of Mary, accompanied by angels, to descend from the visible heaven upon the clouds; who would dare to disbelieve, who would dare to reject the truth, and wax disdainful? Nay, such consternation would immediately seize all the dwellers of the earth that no soul would feel able to utter a word, much less to reject or accept the truth.

*The K̄itab-i-Iqan cites many verses from the canonical Gospels and interprets them as being fulfilled by Muhammad. Bahá'u'llah likewise indicates that inasmuch as these prophecies are phrased in symbolic language having universal applications, they refer also to the advent of the Báb and to the coming of every Manifestation of God. The first reference to such prophecies cites a verse from the Gospel of John (Bahá'u'llah, *K̄itab-i-Iqan*, pp. 20-22):*

To them that are endowed with understanding, it is clear and manifest that when the fire of the love of Jesus consumed the veils of Jewish limitations, and His authority was made apparent and partially enforced, He the Revealer of the unseen Beauty, addressing one day His disciples, referred unto His passing, and, kindling in their hearts the fire of bereavement, said unto them: **"I go away and come again unto you."** [Gospel of John XVI:7] And in another place He said: **"I go and another will come Who will tell you all that I have not told you, and will fulfil all that I have said."** [paraphrase of Gospel of John XVI:7-8] Both these sayings have but one meaning, were you to ponder upon the Manifestations of the Unity of God with divine insight.

Every discerning observer will recognize that in the Dispensation of the Qur'án both the Book and the Cause of Jesus were confirmed. As to the matter of names, Muhammad, Himself, declared: "I am Jesus." He recognized the truth of the signs, prophecies, and words of Jesus, and testified that they were all of God. In this sense, neither the person of Jesus nor His writings hath differed from that of Muhammad and of His holy Book, inasmuch as both have championed the Cause of God, uttered His praise, and revealed His commandments. Thus it is that Jesus, Himself, declared: **"I go away and come again unto you."** [Gospel of John XVI:7] Consider the sun. Were it to say now, "I am the sun of yesterday," it would speak the truth. And should it, bearing the

sequence of time in mind, claim to be other than that sun, it still would speak the truth. In like manner, if it be said that all the days are but one and the same, it is correct and true. And if it be said, with respect to their particular names and designations, that they differ, that again is true. For though they are the same, yet one doth recognize in each a separate designation, a specific attribute, a particular character. Conceive accordingly the distinction, variation, and unity characteristic of the various Manifestations of holiness, that thou mayest comprehend the allusions made by the creator of all names and attributes to the mysteries of distinction and unity, and discover the answer to thy question as to why that everlasting Beauty should have, at sundry times, called Himself by different names and titles.

The prophecies contained in the mirror apocalypse in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark:

24:29 Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: 24:30 And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see **the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.** 24:31 **And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.** 24:32 **Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh:** 24:33 **So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.** 24:34 **Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.** 24:35 **Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.** 24:36 **But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.** 24:37 But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. 24:38 For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, 24:39 And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. 24:40 Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. 24:41 Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. 24:42 Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. 24:43 But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. 24:44 **Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.**

13:24 But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, 13:25 **And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken.** 13:26 **And then shall they see the Son of man**

coming in the clouds with great power and glory. 13:27 And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven. 13:28 Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near: 13:29 So ye in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, even at the doors. 13:30 Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done. 13:31 Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. 13:32 But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. 13:33 Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. 13:34 For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. 13:35 Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: 13:36 Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. 13:37 And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.

Bahá'u'lláh writes, explaining the meaning of these verses:

These are the melodies, sung by Jesus, Son of Mary, in accents of majestic power in the Ridvan of the Gospel, revealing those signs that must needs herald the advent of the Manifestation after Him. In the first Gospel according to Matthew it is recorded: And when they asked Jesus concerning the signs of His coming, He said unto them: **"Immediately after the oppression of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the earth shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet."** [Gospel of Matthew 24:29-31] (Bahá'u'llah, *The Kitáb-i-Iqán*, pp. 24-25)

Inasmuch as the Christian divines have failed to apprehend the meaning of these words, and did not recognize their object and purpose, and have clung to the literal interpretation of the words of Jesus, they therefore became deprived of the streaming grace of the Muhammadan Revelation and its showering bounties. The ignorant among the Christian community, following the example of the leaders of their faith, were likewise prevented from beholding the beauty of the King of glory, inasmuch as those signs which were to accompany the dawn of the sun of the Muhammadan Dispensation did not actually come to pass. Thus, ages have passed and centuries rolled away, and that most pure Spirit hath repaired unto the retreats of its ancient sovereignty. Once more hath the eternal Spirit breathed into the mystic **trumpet**, and caused the dead to speed out of their

sepulchres of heedlessness and error unto the realm of guidance and grace. (Bahá'u'llah, *The K̄itab-i-Iqan*, p. 26)

Beside this passage, there is yet another verse in the Gospel wherein He saith: "**Heaven and earth shall pass away: but My words shall not pass away.**" [Gospel of Matthew XXIV:35; Gospel of Mark XIII:31] Thus it is that the adherents of Jesus maintained that the law of the Gospel shall never be annulled, and that whensoever the promised Beauty is made manifest and all the signs are revealed, He must needs re-affirm and establish the law proclaimed in the Gospel, so that there may remain in the world no faith but His faith. This is their fundamental belief. And their conviction is such that were a person to be made manifest with all the promised signs and to promulgate that which is contrary to the letter of the law of the Gospel, they must assuredly renounce him, refuse to submit to his law, declare him an infidel, and laugh him to scorn. This is proved by that which came to pass when the sun of the Muhammadan Revelation was revealed. Had they sought with a humble mind from the Manifestations of God in every Dispensation the true meaning of these words revealed in the sacred books -- words the misapprehension of which hath caused men to be deprived of the recognition of the Sadratu'l-Muntaha, the ultimate Purpose -- they surely would have been guided to the light of the Sun of Truth, and would have discovered the mysteries of divine knowledge and wisdom. (Bahá'u'llah, *The K̄itab-i-Iqan*, pp. 27-28)

As to the words -- "**Immediately after the oppression of those days**" [Gospel of Matthew XXIV:29]-- they refer to the time when men shall become oppressed and afflicted, the time when the lingering traces of the Sun of Truth and the fruit of the Tree of knowledge and wisdom will have vanished from the midst of men, when the reins of mankind will have fallen into the grasp of the foolish and ignorant, when the portals of divine unity and understanding -- the essential and highest purpose in creation -- will have been closed, when certain knowledge will have given way to idle fancy, and corruption will have usurped the station of righteousness. (Bahá'u'llah, *The K̄itab-i-Iqan*, p. 28)

What "**oppression**" is greater than that which hath been recounted? What "**oppression**" is more grievous than that a soul seeking the truth, and wishing to attain unto the knowledge of God, should know not where to go for it and from whom to seek it? For opinions have sorely differed, and the ways unto the attainment of God have multiplied. This "**oppression**" is the essential feature of every Revelation. Unless it cometh to pass, the Sun of Truth will not be made manifest. For the break of the morn of divine guidance must needs follow the darkness of the night of error. For this reason, in all chronicles and traditions reference hath been made unto these things, namely that iniquity shall cover the surface of the earth and darkness shall envelop mankind. (Bahá'u'llah, *The K̄itab-i-Iqan*, pp. 31-32)

And now, concerning His words -- "**The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give light, and the stars shall fall from heaven.**" [Gospel of Matthew XXIV:29; Gospel of Mark XIII:24-25] By the terms "**sun**" and "**moon**," mentioned in the writings of the Prophets of God, is not meant solely the sun and moon of the visible universe. Nay rather, manifold are the meanings they have intended for these terms... (Bahá'u'llah, *The K̄itab-i-Iqan*, p. 32)

Thus, by the "**sun**" in one sense is meant those Suns of Truth Who rise from the dayspring of ancient glory, and fill the world with a liberal effusion of grace from on high. These Suns of Truth are the universal Manifestations of God in the worlds of His attributes and names... (Bahá'u'llah, *The K̄itab-i-Iqan*, p. 33)

Thus, it hath become evident that the terms "**sun**," "**moon**," and "**stars**" primarily signify the Prophets of God, the saints, and their companions, those Luminaries, the light of Whose knowledge hath shed illumination upon the worlds of the visible and the invisible... (Bahá'u'llah, *The K̄itab-i-Iqan*, p. 34)

In another sense, by these terms is intended the divines of the former Dispensation, who live in the days of the subsequent Revelations, and who hold the reins of religion in their grasp. (Bahá'u'llah, *The K̄itab-i-Iqan*, p. 35)

In another sense, by the terms 'sun', 'moon', and 'stars' are meant such laws and teachings as have been established and proclaimed in every Dispensation, such as the laws of prayer and fasting. These have, according to the law of the Qur'án, been regarded, when the beauty of the Prophet Muhammad had passed beyond the veil, as the most fundamental and binding laws of His dispensation. (Bahá'u'llah, *The K̄itab-i-Iqan*, p. 37)

And now, with reference to His words: "**And then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.**" [Gospel of Matthew 24:30-31; Gospel of Mark 13:26] These words signify that in those days men will lament the loss of the Sun of the divine beauty, of the Moon of knowledge, and of the Stars of divine wisdom. Thereupon, they will behold the countenance of the promised One, the adored Beauty, descending from heaven and riding upon the clouds. By this is meant that the divine Beauty will be made manifest from the heaven of the will of God, and will appear in the form of the human temple. (Bahá'u'llah, *The K̄itab-i-Iqan*, pp. 66-67)

In the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, Bahá'u'llah interprets one of these verses:

The **Hour** that was concealed within the knowledge of God hath struck, whereupon all the atoms of the earth have proclaimed: "The Ancient of Days is come in His great glory! Hasten unto Him, O peoples of the earth, with humble and contrite hearts." (Bahá'u'llah, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p. 56)

O Shaykh! Hearken unto the melodies of the Gospel with the ear of fairness. He saith -- glorified be His utterance -- prophesying the things that are to come: "**But of that Day and Hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father.**" [Gospel of Matthew XXIV:36; Gospel of Mark XIII:32] By Father in this connection is meant God -- exalted be His glory. He, verily, is the True Educator, and the Spiritual Teacher. (Bahá'u'llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 143)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá is reported to have explained the meaning of one of these verses:

The meaning of Christ's saying "**Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away till all these things be fulfilled**" [Gospel of Matthew XXIV:34; Gospel of Mark XIII:30] is this: There are two generations -- a spiritual one and a physical one. Thirty-three years is counted one physical generation (Christ himself was thirty years old when He began to teach, and was crucified when He was thirty-three) but in this saying, Christ was not speaking of the physical but of the spiritual generation or epoch, and meant that His dispensation or epoch would not pass away, until all things should be fulfilled -- which took place at the coming of Mohammed. (Bahá'í Prayers 9, pp. 48-49)

2)FULFILLED BY BAHÁ'U'LLAH

According to the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and letters written by and on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, a number of prophecies uttered by Jesus and recorded in the gospels are fulfilled by Bahá'u'lláh. In certain verses recorded in the Gospel of John, Jesus Christ speaks to His disciples about His death and His return:

And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever; Even the Spirit of Truth; Whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. (John XIV:16-18)

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. (John XIV:16)

But when the Comforter is come, Whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me. (John XV:26)

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. (John XVI:7)

It is well known that most Christians have understood the promise of Jesus Christ to send the Comforter as meaning that He would send to His followers the Holy Ghost (Spirit), and that this promise was fulfilled in Pentecost, and that hence no other Comforter is implied. Bahá'u'llah does not deny that the followers of the Christ received the inspiration and confirmation of the Holy Spirit after the ascension of their Master. Here is how He describes the spiritual influence of the Christ upon His ascension:

Know thou that when the Son of man yielded up His breath unto God, the whole creation wept with a great weeping. By sacrificing Himself, however, fresh capacity was infused into all created things. Its evidences, as witnessed in all the peoples of the earth, are now manifest before thee. The deepest wisdom which the sages have uttered, the profoundest learning which any mind hath unfolded, the arts which the ablest hands have produced, the influence exerted by the most potent of rulers, are but manifestations of the quickening power released by His transcendent, His all-pervasive, and resplendent Spirit. ("Lawh-i-Fatah A'dham", in GL:85-86)

Many other verses of Bahá'u'llah speak of this theme, and it is also discussed in the discourses and writings of His appointed interpreters. The other meaning of "Comforter" according to Bahá'u'llah is its reference to the return of Jesus Christ in another Prophet, or what Christians call the "second coming", and Bahá'u'llah claims to be the most recent fulfillment of this promise:

The Comforter Whose advent all the Scriptures have promised is now come that He may reveal unto you all knowledge and wisdom. Seek Him over the entire surface of the earth, haply ye may find Him. (WOB:104-105)

In the Gospel of John XIV:16 and XV:26 the Comforter is identified with the Spirit of Truth. In John XVI:13 Jesus Christ speaks of the Spirit of Truth to His followers:

Howbeit when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will show you things to come.

Bahá'u'lláh speaks directly to this verse in a number of passages, declaring its fulfillment in His ministry:

O kings of Christendom! Heard ye not the saying of Jesus..."**When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth.**" And yet, behold how, when He did bring the truth, ye refused to turn your faces towards Him, and persisted in disporting yourselves with your pastimes and fancies. ("Surat'u'l-Muluk"; PDC:27-28; BWF:38)

Verily the Spirit of Truth is come to guide you into all truth. (WOB:104)

Verily, He Who is the Spirit of Truth is come to guide you unto all truth. He speaketh not as prompted by His own self, but as bidden by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. ("Lawh-i-Aqdas," TB:12)

In the same chapter of the Gospel of John there are other verses pertaining to this Comforter, this Spirit of Truth --they are fulfilled also:

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. (John:16:12)

These gospel verses are also referenced by Bahá'u'lláh in several statements:

This is the Word which the Son concealed, when to those around Him He said: '**Ye cannot bear it now.**' And when the appointed time was fulfilled and the Hour had struck, the Word shone forth above the horizon of the Will of God. Beware, O followers of the Son, that ye cast it not behind your backs. (TB:11)

Adorn ye your bodies whilst the raiment of God is stained with the blood of hatred at the hands of the people of denial? Issue forth from your habitations and bid the people enter the Kingdom of God, the Lord of the Day of Judgement. **The Word which the Son concealed is made manifest.** It hath been sent down in the form of the human temple in this day. Blessed be the Lord Who is the Father! He, verily, is come unto the nations in His most great majesty. Turn your faces towards Him, O concourse of the righteous! (SLH:#112, p. 59)

This is the Word which the Son veiled when He said to those around Him that at that time they could not bear it. (WOB:104)

Briefly, in the sayings of Him Who is the Spirit (Jesus) unnumbered significances lie concealed. Unto many things did He refer, but as He found none possessed of a hearing ear or a seeing eye **He chose to conceal most of these things.** Even as He saith: "**But ye cannot bear them**

now." That Dawning-Place of Revelation saith that on that Day He Who is the Promised One will reveal the things which are to come. Accordingly in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, and in the Tablets to the Kings, and in the Lawh-i-Ra'is, and in the Lawh-i-Fu'ad, most of the things which have come to pass on this earth have been announced and prophesied by the Most Sublime Pen. (ESW:148)

In the Gospel of John the description of the true successor to Jesus continues:

He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you. (John 26:14)

That statement is also referenced by Bahá'u'lláh:

He is the **One Who glorified the Son** and exalted His Cause. (WOB:104)

Say, this is the **One Who hath glorified the Son** and hath exalted His Cause. ("Lawh-i-Aqdas", TB:12)

There are also prophecies of Jesus found in the synoptic Gospels, including the following passages:

For the **Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels...** (Mt:16:27)

...of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when **He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.** (Mk:8:38)

...of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when **He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels.** (Lk:9:26)

This wording is somewhat modified but nonetheless reiterated in Matthew 24:30 and Luke 21:27:

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the **Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.** (Mt:24:30)

And then shall they see the **Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.** (Lk:21:27)

In His Tablet to Pope Pius IX, the leader of the largest community of Christians:

Adorn ye your bodies whilst the raiment of God is stained with the blood of hatred at the hands of the people of denial? Issue forth from your habitations and bid the people enter the Kingdom of God, the Lord of the Day of Judgement. The Word which the Son concealed is made manifest. It hath been sent down in the form of the human temple in this day. **Blessed be the Lord Who is the Father! He, verily, is come unto the nations in His most great majesty.** Turn your faces towards Him, O concourse of the righteous! (Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet to Pope Pius IX, in The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, #112, p. 59; Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh:30-31)

In His Tablet to Czar Alexander of Russia Bahá'u'lláh refers to this prophecy:

Beware lest thy sovereignty withhold thee from Him Who is the Supreme Sovereign. He, verily, is come with His Kingdom, and all the atoms cry aloud: "Lo! **The Lord is come in His great majesty!**" He Who is the Father is come, and the Son, in the holy vale, crieth out: "Here am I, here am I, O Lord, My God!", whilst Sinai circleth round the House, and the Burning Bush calleth aloud: "**The All-Bounteous is come mounted upon the clouds!** Blessed is he that draweth nigh unto Him, and woe betide them that are far away." ("Tablet to Czar Alexander II of Russia", Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh:83,85; ESW:57; SLH:#159, p. 84)

In "Kitab-i-Aqdas" we find this reference to the prophecy:

Ye are but vassals, O kings of the earth! **He Who is the King of Kings hath appeared, arrayed in His most wondrous glory [Bahá]**, and is summoning you unto Himself, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting [al-Qayyum]. ("Kitab-i-Aqdas", #82; in GL:211)

Bahá'u'lláh in "Lawh-i-Aqdas" addresses various categories of Christians regarding the same prophecy:

Say, O followers of the Son! Have ye shut out yourselves from Me by reason of My Name? Wherefore ponder ye not in your hearts? day and night ye have been calling upon **your Lord, the Omnipotent**, but when **He came from the heaven of eternity in His great glory**, ye turned aside from Him and remained sunk in heedlessness. (TB:9)

O concourse of priests! Leave the bells, and come forth, then, from your churches. It behoveth you, in this day, to proclaim aloud the Most Great Name among the nations. Prefer ye to be silent, whilst every stone and every tree shouteth aloud: '**The Lord is come in His great glory!**'? (TB:13)

Bethlehem is astir with the Breeze of God. We hear her voice saying: "**O most generous Lord...Praised be Thou in that Thou hast raised the veils, and come with power in evident glory.**" (TB:14)

In "Suriy-i-Vafa" He reiterates this fulfillment to an individual believer:

The **Promised One Himself hath come down from heaven, seated upon the crimson cloud with the hosts of revelation on His right, and the angels of inspiration on His left**, and the Decree hath been fulfilled at the behest of God, the Omnipotent, the Almighty. (TB:182)

In "K̄itab-i-Iqan" Bahá'u'llah explains the inner meanings of the terms used in these passages --the meanings of "clouds", "coming down from heaven", "angels" and so forth-- and 'Abdu'l-Bahá has spoken and written extensively with regard to this symbolic language of the Prophets. Bahá'u'llah testifies that the return of the Son in the glory of the Father is the return of the Son in "Bahá'u'llah", a literal translation of "Glory of the Father" if the Father is taken to be equivalent to "Allah", which the reader will agree is entirely reasonable and indeed, inescapable. However, Bahá'u'llah takes this one step further, and this is what will astonish many Christians who are given to literal interpretations and therefore do not perceive the flexibility, the subtlety, the infinite significances of the Creative Word --the Son of man returns also in the glory of the Father: hence it is the Father Who is returning in His glory. This harmonizes with certain prophecies from the Hebrew Prophets as we shall see, especially with the Book of Isaiah, chapter IX, verse 6:

6For to us a Child will be born. To us a Son will be given. And the rule of the nations will be on His shoulders. His name will be called Wonderful, Teacher, Powerful God, Father Who Lives Forever, Prince of Peace.

Bahá'u'lláh referred to Himself as the fulfillment of this prophecy, in literal and direct language, indicating that not all prophecies are meant to be understood in an entirely metaphorical fashion and that He did not entirely eschew literal interpretation:

Lo! The **Father is come**, and that which ye were promised in the Kingdom is fulfilled! ("Lawh-i-Aqdas", TB:11; SLH:59)

Tell Me then: Do the sons recognize the **Father**, and acknowledge Him, or do they deny Him, even as the people aforetime denied Him (Jesus)? ("Lawh-i-Aqdas", TB:14-15; PDC:103)

O concourse of bishops! Trembling hath seized all the kindreds of the earth, and He Who is the **Everlasting Father** calleth aloud between earth and heaven. (Proclamation of Bahá'u'llah:93; PDC:101; BWF:60)

Adorn ye your bodies whilst the raiment of God is stained with the blood of hatred at the hands of the people of denial? Issue forth from your habitations and bid the people enter the Kingdom of God, the Lord of the Day of Judgement. The Word which the Son concealed is made manifest. It hath been sent down in the form of the human temple in this day. **Blessed be the Lord Who is the Father! He, verily, is come unto the nations in His most great majesty.** Turn your faces towards Him, O concourse of the righteous! (Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet to Pope Pius IX, in The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, #112, p. 59; Proclamation of Bahá'u'llah:30-31)

Beware lest thy sovereignty withhold thee from Him Who is the Supreme Sovereign. He, verily, is come with His Kingdom, and all the atoms cry aloud: "Lo! The Lord is come in His great majesty!" He Who is the **Father is come**, and the Son, in the holy vale, crieth out: "Here am I, here am I, O Lord, My God!", whilst Sinai circleth round the House, and the Burning Bush calleth aloud: "The All-Bounteous is come mounted upon the clouds! Blessed is he that draweth nigh unto Him, and woe betide them that are far away." ("Tablet to Czar Alexander II of Russia", Proclamation of Bahá'u'llah:83,85; ESW:57; SLH:#159, p. 84)

Shoghi Effendi quotes from Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet, cited above, and reaffirms the interpretation:

"Say: O concourse of bishops! Trembling hath seized all the kindreds of the earth, and He Who is the **Everlasting Father** calleth aloud between earth and heaven. Blessed the ear that hath heard, and the eye that hath seen, and the heart that hath turned unto Him Who is the Point of Adoration of all who are in the heavens and all who are on earth." (Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 101)

These "fallen stars" of the firmament of Christendom, these "thick clouds" that have obscured the radiance of the true Faith of God, these princes of the Church that have failed to acknowledge the sovereignty of the "King of kings," these deluded ministers of the Son who have shunned and ignored the promised Kingdom which the "**Everlasting Father**" has brought down from heaven... (Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 103)

In his history of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi reiterates this interpretation:

To Israel He was neither more nor less than the incarnation of the “**Everlasting Father**,” the “Lord of Hosts” come down “with ten thousands of saints”; to Christendom Christ returned “in the glory of the Father”... To Him Isaiah, the greatest of the Jewish prophets, had alluded as the “Glory of the Lord,” the “**Everlasting Father**,” the “Prince of Peace,” the “Wonderful,” the “Counsellor”...³⁵⁹

In passages addressed to its bishops He proclaims that “the Everlasting Father calleth aloud between earth and heaven,”... And finally, in several passages addressed to the entire body of the followers of Jesus Christ He identifies Himself with the “**Father**” spoken of by Isaiah, with the “Comforter” Whose Covenant He Who is the Spirit (Jesus) had Himself established, and with the “Spirit of Truth” Who will guide them “into all truth”...³⁶⁰

There is yet another passage in the gospels which has been referenced by Bahá'u'lláh as fulfilled by Himself... it is found in the prayer of Jesus, cited in the Gospel of Matthew (6:10) and the Gospel of Luke (11:2):

Thy kingdom come...

Bahá'u'lláh writes, in His Tablet to Pope Pius IX:

Adorn ye your bodies whilst the raiment of God is stained with the blood of hatred at the hands of the people of denial? Issue forth from your habitations and bid the people **enter the Kingdom of God, the Lord of the Day of Judgement**. The Word which the Son concealed is made manifest. It hath been sent down in the form of the human temple in this day. Blessed be the Lord Who is the Father! He, verily, is come unto the nations in His most great majesty. Turn your faces towards Him, O concourse of the righteous!³⁶¹

By the righteousness of God! Should they cast Him into a fire kindled on the continent, He will assuredly rear His head in the midmost heart of the ocean and proclaim: "He is the Lord of all that are in heaven and all that are on earth!" And if they cast Him into a darksome pit, they will find Him seated on earth's loftiest heights calling aloud to all mankind: "Lo, the Desire of the World is come in His majesty, His sovereignty, His transcendent dominion!" And if He be buried beneath the depths of the earth, His Spirit soaring to the apex of heaven shall peal the summons: "Behold ye the coming of the Glory; **witness ye the Kingdom of God**, the Most Holy, the Gracious, the All-Powerful!" And if they shed His blood, every drop thereof shall cry out and

³⁵⁹Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 94

³⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 210

³⁶¹Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet to Pope Pius IX, in *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, #112, p. 59

invoke God in this Name through which the fragrance of His raiment hath been diffused in all directions.³⁶²

Shoghi Effendi reiterated this fulfillment of prophecy in several of his communications:

It alone can usher in the **Kingdom of the Heavenly Father** as anticipated by the Faith of Jesus Christ.³⁶³

Then will the worldwide sovereignty of Bahá'u'lláh—the Establisher of the **Kingdom of the Father** foretold by the Son, and anticipated by the Prophets of God before Him and after Him—be recognized, acclaimed, and firmly established.³⁶⁴

The final establishment of this seat of the future Bahá'í World Commonwealth will signalize at once the proclamation of the sovereignty of the Founder of our Faith and the advent of the **Kingdom of the Father** repeatedly lauded and promised by Jesus Christ.³⁶⁵

The Formative Period, the Iron Age, of that Dispensation was now beginning, the Age in which the institutions, local, national and international, of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh were to take shape, develop and become fully consolidated, in anticipation of the third, the last, the Golden Age destined to witness the emergence of a world-embracing Order enshrining the ultimate fruit of God's latest Revelation to mankind, a fruit whose maturity must signalize the establishment of a world civilization and the formal inauguration of the **Kingdom of the Father** upon earth as promised by Jesus Christ Himself. (God Passes By, p. 324)

Shoghi Effendi refers to the fulfillment of these several prophecies, citing Bahá'u'lláh's words already included in this survey:

“The Word which the Son concealed is made manifest. It hath been sent down in the form of the human temple in this day. Blessed be the Lord Who is the Father! He, verily, is come unto the nations in His most great majesty. Turn your faces towards Him, O concourse of the righteous! ... This is the day whereon the Rock [Peter] crieth out and shouteth, and celebrateth the praise of its Lord, the All-Possessing, the Most High, saying: ‘Lo! The Father is come, and that which ye were promised in the Kingdom is fulfilled!...’ My body longeth for the cross, and Mine head

³⁶²Ibid., #116, pp. 60-61

³⁶³Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 46

³⁶⁴Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 12

³⁶⁵Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950-1957*, p. 75

waiteth the thrust of the spear, in the path of the All-Merciful, that the world may be purged from its transgressions....³⁶⁶

A humiliation less spectacular yet historically more significant awaited Pope Pius IX. It was to him who regarded himself as the Vicar of Christ that Bahá'u'lláh wrote that “the Word which the Son [Jesus] concealed is made manifest,” that “it hath been sent down in the form of the human temple,” that the Word was Himself, and He Himself the Father. It was to him who styling himself “the servant of the servants of God” that the Promised One of all ages, unveiling His station in its plenitude, announced that “He Who is the Lord of Lords is come overshadowed with clouds.” It was he, who, claiming to be the successor of St. Peter, was reminded by Bahá'u'lláh that “this is the day whereon the Rock [Peter] crieth out and shouteth ... saying: ‘Lo, the Father is come, and that which ye were promised in the Kingdom is fulfilled.’”³⁶⁷

³⁶⁶Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 32

³⁶⁷Shoghi Effendi, *Ibid.*, p. 52

TO BE CONTINUED

Books of this variety usually end with “Conclusions”, often prefaced with “Summaries”. You will notice that this volume provides neither...and intentionally. It would be impossible to meaningfully summarize the great variety of ideas surveyed here, and any attempt to do so would devalue the project as a whole. The purpose of this study is to open doors and provoke the appearance of new ideas, not to neatly pigeonhole the words and ideas cited here and thereby deprive them of light and warmth alike. And there can be no conclusion to an enterprise such as this, particularly when further volumes are contemplated. We just got started here. I welcome you now, to volume two.