

THE CONCEPT OF REVELATION
AS FOUND IN ISLAM AND
THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis seeks in some small manner to compare and contrast the cardinal features of Islamic and Baha'i Revelations.

It is structured to allow for a general examination of the socio-political, and in the case of Islam, the geo-religious conditions prevalent at the birth of each Revelation.

Of central import to the study is the station and authority of the Prophet as a Messenger of God; leading to a discussion of the nature of the content of Revelation as the Word of God.

Some attempt is made to explore the claim of both Muhammad and Baha'u'llah that their respective Revelations came from a single Source and are, therefore, a progressive continuation of previous Revelations.

The death of the Prophet, the Bringer of Revelation, inevitable produces a "crisis of continuation," for it leaves the faithful devoid of a direct line of communication with their Creator. If the newborn Religion that springs from Revelation is to continue as a viable entity it must provide a method whereby it may, as historic Revelation, "speak" to future generations of the Faithful. The traditional manner of coping with this crisis of continuation has been "authorized" interpretation of the duly accepted Scriptures. The writer feels it to be readily evident that Interpretation

is crucial to the expansion and survival of a Religious Community. As such, a section of this work investigates the basis (if any) of interpretation as found in the Qur'an and the Baha'i Revelation. Of equal interest is the actual application of such interpretation and its subsequent implications for the respective Communities.

While for the main part each of the foregoing issues are examined in their individual Islamic and Baha'i contexts, an Epilogue houses an overall comparative synthesis of the most important points of contact.

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FOREWORD

This thesis has two main objectives. Its central thrust must be seen as no more than the attempt to compare the salient features of Islamic and Baha'i Revelations in relation to certain basic issues. For the main part there are seven such issues. First, the relationship of each Revelation to the environment in which it was revealed, to the people who received it, and to the commitment required by their personal declaration of faith. Second, the signs of authentic Revelation, or, how Revelation is to be recognized by the Prophet as well as by people in general. Third, the vehicle of Revelation, or how it is revealed to the Prophet, and subsequently to men at large (including an analysis of the station, nature and authority of the Prophet). Fourth, the nature of what is revealed: is it some form of abstract or philosophical truth, or a Truth through which Deity chooses to reveal Himself, and/or, His Will? Fifth, the raison d'être of Revelation as viewed from within the religious framework--why does God send Revelation, and/or, why

does man need Revelation? Sixth, the concept of Progressive Revelation as found within Islam and the Baha'i Faith. Finally, the relevancy of Revelation to past, present and future generations of believers; with specific attention to the manner in which historic Revelation "speaks" to modern man (including an analysis of the "authority base" from which ongoing interpretation and legislation of law can be authentically propagated within their respective Communities).

It should be recognized from the outset that such a point by point comparison is for the Muslim a useless intellectual exercise. To the Muslim the Baha'i Faith is at best no more than a sect that has broken off from the mainstream of Islam. In other words it has no separate identity but is simply an innovative heresy.

Baha'is, on the other hand, see their Faith as a continuation of the true line of Prophetic Revelation. They do not see themselves as a sect of Islam (anymore than a Christian sees himself as a sect of Judaism), but as the fulfilment and consumation of Islam. As such they would hope that such a comparison as herein attempted might serve to justify the basis of their Faith.

Be these as they may, it is not it must be emphasized,

within the aim or scope of this work to prove the "Truth" of either Islam or the Baha'i Faith. Nor is it the writer's object to refute or defend either Revelation. On the other hand, he has taken the position of presenting both visions of reality as true within the boundaries of their given frameworks. The reader in turn is therefore left to hold, or form, subjective agreement or disagreement with their "Truth" as he or she desires.

As the reader will quickly discover much use has been made throughout the paper of direct quotations. Whereas these may be somewhat tedious for the scholar familiar with the Qur'an, they cannot fail to be of interest in the case of the less familiar Baha'i Scriptures (if for no other reason than to bring the reader into direct contact with the evidence).

To suggest that this work forms a complete examination of the subject matter would be nonsense. Indeed the writer is only too keenly aware of the superficial nature of his attempted analysis. It is to be hoped, however, that in suggesting, rather than developing, what he feels to be a few of the most important issues within the spheres of these Revelations, that he will have presented sufficient material to both stimulate and warrant their further study by other

students of religion.. If such is the case he will have achieved the second, and final, objective of this work. In optimistic anticipation of such an achievement he has provided as complete a bibliography of Baha'i sources, and related materials, as possible.

Certain portions of the chapters on the Baha'i Faith make use of unpublished letters and telegrams of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada. The writer wishes to thank that Body for allowing him to use that material in the present work. As an added bonus, Mr Douglas Martin, Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly, was kind enough to proffer a number of pertinent and useful comments on the latter half of this paper.

Deep appreciation must be extended to Mr Ted Oliver, Auxiliary Board Member of the Baha'i Faith, for his guidance and comments on the chapters of this work which deal specifically with the Baha'i Faith.

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During the 1973-74 academic year the writer had the good fortune to study Islam under Professor Charles J. Adams of the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University. The reader must assume where no source is given on an issue in the sections on Islam that the writer is indebted to "notes" taken during the course of the Professor's lectures (if there are errors they most certainly originate with the writer and not Professor Adams).

A word of thanks must also go to Mrs Violet States who was kind enough to proofread the completed manuscript.

The writer would be remiss were he to overlook the expression of his gratitude to Dr Anton C. Zijderveld, whose past kindness, confidence and genuine interest have gone a long way toward aiding the completion of this work.

Finally, without the cooperation, love and understanding of my wife Nicole, and my son Danny (both of whom have spent many evenings alone while the writer was "locked up" with his books) this paper could never have been completed.

Wherever possible the format used throughout this work is that detailed in: K. L. Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations (Third edition, revised, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972).

CHAPTER I

THE SETTING OF ISLAMIC REVELATION

To the sixth and seventh century inhabitants of the Arabian peninsula, the land, surrounded as it is on all sides by natural barriers, was known as Jazīrat al-'Arab or the "Island of the Arabs." This island is surrounded on three sides by the waters of the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean and the Red Sea, while on the fourth side the Syrian desert isolates it from the neighbouring world.

Along the edges of its seaboard, before the land inevitably rises into mountain ranges, a narrow strip of fertile land was able to sustain some form of settled life. The mountain barrier seldom permitted moisture bearing clouds to penetrate to the interior of the country. As one would expect, the land of the interior was, and remains, essentially a desert area--known to its Bedouin inhabitants as sahrah, or simply desert. One has, of course, to make an exception of the areas along the Arabian Sea, in the south, which receive the monsoon rains and, therefore, have plenty of fertility. Of

course one also has to take into account that there were some settlements in oasis-like areas in the interior of the peninsula, even in its northern extremities. For the main part, however, the land was desert.

Those hardy and versatile souls who managed to survive in the central and northern interior were of necessity nomadic in their social structure: a condition necessitated by the inability of the land to produce agricultural products in amounts sufficient to support life on a settled basis. Over the years the Bedouin, as it happens, came to regard farming as an occupation which was in reality beneath the dignity of "real men" such as themselves. What means of sustenance they had came from flocks and herds (mainly camels and goats, with some sheep). Grazing was obtained wherever possible, with the entire tribe continually moving to new pastures as the old ones were depleted. In addition to not settling, the nomads never developed any method of preserving food, and were then totally dependent, on a daily basis, on the produce of their animals. Available to some extent was the date, and to a much lesser degree, grain. The latter of these could be obtained either through trade, or raiding those areas along the edge of the desert which could, and did, support small farming communities.

In addition it became praiseworthy, as well as profitable, to raid the many trade caravans which crossed certain

sections of the desert. Such caravan routes were made necessary because of political unrest between the Byzantine and Sassanian empires.¹ These raids yielded not only material goods which could be sold, food that could be consumed, livestock that supplemented their herds, but also ransom for the unfortunate travellers who were captured,--failing ransom they could always be sold as slaves.

It is not hard to imagine that survival became a matter of fitness and concern to all, in that no one individual, no matter how strong, could survive for long in isolation. It is possibly this fact that accounts for the very strong ties and bonds of the nomadic families. Obligations were limited to ones kin. This was carried to the point that the clan would protect, without question or hesitation, any of its own members who were threatened by the members of another tribe. Indeed anyone outside of the clan was little more than an enemy. There was no sense of moral responsibility to what we in the West would call the "public". The natural environment existing between the various tribes was one of almost constant warfare. This was made possible by the singular absence of any form of government or civil authority. There were no taxes, census, or other forms of civilization. Only

¹ Bernard Lewis, The Arabs in History (3rd. edition, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1972), p. 31.

the mutual fear of one tribe for another produced what peace might¹ from time-to-time exist. Void of central leadership the tribes survived only by the inwardness of their thinking -- "my tribe first and foremost." Indeed so strong was the bond of kinship that the clan rose or fell, hungered or thirsted, as a single unit. No one had privileged social status, indeed even tribal leadership appears to have been temporal and charismatic in nature. A leader was chosen by tacit agreement and by merit of some special talent, and/or, experience, to handle situations as they arose. In essence, leadership was to a great extent determined by a man's ability to influence other men. Such a leader must in turn take into consideration the advice of the council of elders (Majlis) on any given matter. The Majlis represented the various families within the tribe and was generally composed of the heads of the various families. The Majlis can then be looked upon as the mouthpiece of public opinion.² The Bedouin were by nature fiercely proud of their individual freedom and the right to speak their mind in matters that affected the tribe, yet duty bound to act in accordance with the tribe in times of emergency. Humility was scorned, while the chief virtue was courage.

This brings us to a discussion of the nomadic way of

²Ibid., p.29.

life as concurrently lived in the city of Mecca--an important distinction, for it was from that city that the Revelation of Muhammad sprang forth.

The ancient city of Mecca is located very near the most important break or pass in the Hejaz Mountains. It has a special importance because it commands a junction of caravan routes. Caravans that came from the south on reaching the vicinity of Mecca had the choice either to continue on north up the coast, or to verge away to the east toward Iraq. Mecca is situated just at the point where that path branches. Thus, in reality, in a position to control one major set of trade routes. There were, of course, other trade routes in the peninsula. Indeed much of the trade that Meccan caravans carried would normally have gone by sea to the head of the Persian Gulf, but the rivalry between the Byzantines and the Sassanians prevented this, forcing ships instead to discharge their cargoes on the southern shores of Arabia from whence they were conveyed by caravan. The inhabitants of Mecca came to act primarily as middlemen in the handling not only of material goods but in matters of finance as well. Their profits, at the time of Muhammad, were so enormous as to make them the single most powerful force in the peninsula. Since Mecca is surrounded by barren, rocky, infertile terrain, the Meccans were forced to concentrate all their energies on the affairs of such trade. This concentration was apparently

strong enough to overcome their nomadic instincts and to keep them static.

This of course raises the question as to why they should be there in the first place--that is, before Mecca assumed its importance as a trading city. The answer lies in some measure in the domain of religious beliefs.

Standing as they did at the cross roads of the trade routes of the east and the west, the Arabs were exposed to a great variety of religious beliefs, however, they have never in their history been subjected, through armed settlement, to the full force of any one religious doctrine. It is natural however, that contact with foreigners must have left some religious impressions in their beliefs and customs, and that such beliefs would, without constant guidance from a people familiar with the sources, easily degenerate into superstition (if, indeed, such were not the original case).

Some Arabs came to believe that life was a purely natural phenomenon and were thus devoid of any concept of God. Associated with this concept of life as a natural phenomenon was the concept of dahr (time) as unstoppable in its encroachment on, and eventual annihilation of, man's life. Man's sole recourse was to hedonistically cram as much existence into every moment as possible.

The Bedouin view of life was thoroughly hedonistic. Love, wine, gambling, hunting, the pleasures of song and romance, the brief, pointed, and elegant expression

of wit and wisdom--these things he knew to be good.
Beyond them he saw only the grave.

Roast meat and wine: the swinging ride
On a camel sure and tried,
Which her master speeds amain
O'er low dale and level plain:
Women marble-white and fair
Trailing gold-fringed raiment rare:
Opulence, luxurious ease,
With the lute's soft melodies--
Such delights hath our brief span;
Time is Change, Time's fool is man.
Wealth or want, great store or small,
All is one since Death's are all.

It would be a mistake to suppose that these men
always, or even generally, passed their lives in the
aimless pursuit of pleasure. Some goal they had--
earthly no doubt--such as the accumulation of wealth
or the winning of glory or the fulfilment of blood-
revenge. ³

The only immortality that could be achieved, in the face of
Time, was in and through the ongoing memory of the tribe.

There was absolutely no concept of an afterlife in any but
those terms (notable examples of the "exception to the rule"
would of course be those Arabs of Judaic or Christian per-
suasion). A man's nobility came directly through inheritance,
both individually and as a member of the tribe: men were a
product of their collective past. It was then of great
importance to insure that tribal honour and nobility were
ongoingly maintained (or created). To some extent these facts
would seem to explain the frenetic and savage qualities of

³ Reynold A. Nicholson, A Literary History of the Arabs
(The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 32 East 57th
Street, New York, 1969), p. 136.

the Bedouin at the time of Muhammad's appearance (it is important to note that the Arabs of Mecca had by the time of Muhammad greatly altered their traditional life structure in accordance with circumstances peculiar to that environment). To the Arabs this bond with their forefathers had mystical overtones and came to be known as asabiyah. The asabiyah of a tribe was not only the tie which gave relevance to the past but formed also the bond which held them in unity in the present -- it was the spirit of the clan.

The life of the tribe was regulated by custom, the Sunna or practice of the ancestors, which owed such authority as it had to the general veneration for precedent and found its only sanction in public opinion. The tribal Majlis (council) was its outward symbol and its sole instrument.⁴

The belief in life as a natural phenomenon did not seem to interfere with the belief in external supernatural forces capable of affecting men's lives. The natural offshoot of which was that where these forces were felt to exist it was wise to treat them with respect, if not open worship.

Some Arabs were idol worshippers with some vague sense of the existence of a chief god known as Allah. Others worshipped the Sun and/or the Moon.

In relationship to this it would appear that Mecca, supported only by the Qur'an, was associated with the ancient

⁴ Lewis, Arabs in History, pp. 29-30.

religion of Abraham. Indeed Abraham is given the distinction of having constructed the Kab'ah.⁵ Over the years this religion supposedly degenerated into what became known as the "cult of the Kab'ah"--which was based primarily on idol worship, with some vague notion of Allah, who could be interceded to through his three daughters, al-Lat (the goddess), al-'Uzza (the morning star), Manah (allotted fate), as the chief or father deity.⁶

The article on "Allah" in the Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam cites one of the proofs of Allah's existence as the Qur'an itself, delineating surah and verse as quoted below:

...to give the evidence of the Kur'an. There, the Meccans admit that Allah is the creator and supreme provider (xiii.16; xxix.61,63; xxxi.25; xxxix.38; xliii.9,87;...); they call upon him in times of special peril (x.22;xvi.53; xxix.65; xxxi.32; but these passages hang together and hardly have independent weight); they recognize him by swearing solemnly and specially by him (vi.109; xvi.38; xxxv.42); they assign him a separate portion, distinct from that of all the other deities (vi.136); they urge that he had never forbidden them to worship other gods with him (vi.148; xxxvii.168)...⁷

The article goes on to point out that the Meccans tended, no doubt in light of the last fact, to pay obeisance to Allah's

⁵ Qur'an, ii.124-125.

⁶ Philip K. Hitti, History of the Arabs (tenth edition, MacMillan, St Martin's Press, London, 1970), p.99; Nicholson, Literary History of the Arabs, p.135.

⁷ "Allah," Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam, 1953, p.33.

subordinates rather than to Allah as the One. There is sense in this if only to permit one the "freedom" (convenience) to meet any situation without recourse to the rule of a single God. In other words, the freedom of unhindered interpretation of one's actions (past, present or future). This was an exceedingly important development as related to the Meccans, for it allowed their structure of authority, which as we shall see was based on wealth, to function with no thought of recourse--one god could be changed in favour of another as the current situation warranted.

Returning again for a moment to the Kab'ah, and the cult which had grown around it, it would appear that originally the inhabitants of Mecca were there in the capacity of "shrine keepers"--if only in the sense of supplying food, water, and those things associated with the sacrificial and ritual observances of those who made pilgrimage to that spot. Approximately one hundred years prior to the advent of Muhammad a tribe known as the Quraysh came into possession of the Kab'ah. Indeed Muhammad came from one of the poorer descendents of this tribe (namely the Banu Hashim).

At the time of Muhammad's birth it is generally held that Mecca, unlike its sister nomadic encampments of the desert, was a fairly stable community. By this is meant that it had developed some sort of social organization based around its "industry" of trade and commerce. Of great importance

to the stability of trade (and also no doubt to encourage pilgrims) was the fact that the Quraysh had successfully negotiated treaties with the surrounding Bedouin tribes with regard to the safety of traders within the haram of the Kab'ah. As their financial power grew so too did their ability to both enforce and expand the inviolability of the haram.

The fact that its social organization was based on trade forms the crux of a way of life that was peculiar to the Meccans. For example, the fundamental social unit among the desert Bedouin was the "tie of kinship or blood." This unity was also present in the Meccan structure. There were, however, at least two main differences between the traditional desert way of life and that practiced by the Meccans. In the desert no man could afford to be too much of an individual: his very survival depended on cooperation between the members of his family and tribe. The relative stability of Mecca, combined with its lucre, had altered this condition to the point where the rich achieved not only unprecedented power by virtue of their wealth, but also the freedom that such power brings to function independently of the poorer members of the tribe. In essence it created a type of merchant nobility capable of imposing its will on the poorer among them. This consolidation of power eventually reached the point where a council of such rich men could be formed to

"govern" the affairs of the city and its inhabitants. The functioning of the tribe had then passed from a condition where each member (through the Majlis) had an equal say in the affairs of the tribe, to one in which the rich could, and did, dictate tribal affairs without concern for the wishes, and perhaps even the welfare, of its poorer members. From those records that are presently available to scholars they can surmise that this "council" was faced with a trade situation that was at once enormous and sophisticated--demanding in turn the implementation of highly sophisticated systems of record keeping, currency exchange rates, as well as other similar management tools.

While the Meccans were able to change the social-economic structure to suit their material needs, they had no such desire (or, it might possibly be argued, ability) to effect a corresponding change in their moral standards. In short, their moral standards continued to reflect those of their nomadic ancestors.

CHAPTER II

THE PROPHET

It was into this milieu that Muhammad was born. As stated earlier he was born into one of the poorer tribes of the Quraysh. He was a posthumous child who became doubly orphaned when only six years old. Under the code of the asabiyah he became the responsibility of his blood relatives within the clan. Poor though he might have been, had his father survived to raise him, he was accorded even lower status as a ward of the clan. He remained unmarried until the age of twenty-five. During the years of his marriage to his first wife, Khadijah, he lost all the sons born to them. This fact served to further diminish his social stature within the clan. In (and of themselves these things may not have amounted to much but they no doubt assumed a great importance in the minds of the clan members when he advanced his claim to prophethood. Imagine the consternation when a fatherless, motherless, sonless man advanced the call to one and all to follow him as God's chosen Prophet. Here was an insignificant man from the tribe of the "Quraysh of the outside" calling men, in God's Name, to give up their asabiyah, to completely

break with the traditions of their forefathers, to change their sunna to one which he would give them from God. Within his own family this must have seemed an impudence; within the tribe at large, an insult. Perhaps more importantly this religious affirmation might possibly have been recognized as containing within it the potential "political" implication of having to follow Muhammad as leader. This of course threatened to undermine the entire structure of their society, which we have seen was based on a privileged status for the rich.

In proselytizing among the Meccans, Muhammad was faced with great difficulties and opposition--very few men were willing to sacrifice status, in the form of wealth and power, to follow this would-be Prophet! The task of converting the desert Bedouin was no less arduous as can be seen from their mass defection on the death of the Prophet: based on their understanding of their commitment to Islam as being a personal temporal covenant with Muhammad, and not an eternal covenant with Allah.⁸

As a point of departure into the specifics of the concept of Islamic Revelation it will be useful at this juncture to examine what men of that age understood "becoming a Muslim" to mean. With that understanding we can better come

⁸ Sura xlix.14-15 would seem to point to Muhammad's knowledge of this state of affairs. Infra, p.114, for a discussion of "covenant" in Baha'i contexts.

to grips with exactly what that concept entails.

At the very heart of every Muslim's faith is the belief, as demanded by the Qur'an, that "there is no God but Allah,"⁹ and that "Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah."¹⁰

Acceptance of both these tenets is required for a person to be a Muslim. For the Arabs of Muhammad's day to accept these tenets requires, as we have partially seen, a drastic restructuring of the social, political, and religious concepts which they held. In making these changes, which as we shall see were both physical and spiritual, a person became a Muslim.

"Islam" is a noun expressing the action of a verb. It comes from the basic root "s l m." This root also forms "aslama" (the act of Islaming), which can be conveyed into English as "to be at peace or rest," with the implication of "not to struggle or resist," and is inevitably translated as "to surrender."

There are at least three other senses which are inherent in the "s l m" root. These senses shed much light on the transformation that was required of the pre-Islamic Arabs in becoming a Muslim (one who does Islam).

The first is the commercial sense. It is not too

⁹ Qur'an, xlvii.19.

¹⁰ Ibid., xlviii.29.

surprising that the word should bear such a potential meaning when it is recalled that Muhammad's Revelation originated while he was an inhabitant of commercial Mecca. In the commercial parlance of Mecca the word "aslama" encompassed the meanings of "to seal a deal;" "I accept those terms;" "I submit to those conditions." In essence it assumed the meaning of a binding agreement or covenant.

Another possible derivation comes from the atmosphere of military thinking prevalent in pre-Islamic poetry. The word "istaslama," which derives from the same basic "s l m" root, is one which stands for a moral or ethical concept. It implies the attitude of death defiance, of resignation to one's fate. Also inherent is the "courageous facing up to the worst in any situation," or, "facing danger and death like a real man." Yet even this context contains some commercial overtones in that the sense of "selling" or "giving over in exchange for" is present. In the positive vein this covers the "selling of one's soul for the sake of another, in the face of death," or in a more religious sense "the war in which one resigns his soul even unto death for the sake of God."

In Muhammad's mouth the call to Islam is characterized by the expectation that the hearer will aslama. To say that one is a Muslim then takes on the meaning "I am one who commits himself to God," "I am one who will sacrifice himself

for God," "I am one who makes his peace with God."¹¹

This is then a profoundly personal declaration of faith. A declaration which called for the reorientation of the declarant's social and religious reality. It is a declaration which forces the abandonment of the asabiyah of the clan in favour of that of Muhammad (as revealed through God's Holy Qur'an). It meant the adoption of spiritual standards in lieu of the material standards of the past. It placed the community of Muslims above and before the blood-ties of kinship and tribe.¹² It meant the cleansing of the ego of pride and haughtiness, in favour of humility and forbearance.¹³ It retained, however, the virtue of courage, but courage in the path of God, rather than in the path of material gain. This declaration meant the surrender of man's ego to God, and, as such, must have been a severe test for the Bedouin in that perhaps his greatest pride lay in his freedom of individuality (in the sense of having no one master). Most especially for the Meccans it meant the end of the distinction brought by wealth alone. It meant not only the levelling of authority and privilege which this wealth brought to them, but also the abandonment

¹¹ Qur'an, xlix.14-15; v.3.

¹² Ibid., iii.36.

¹³ Ibid., iv.36 (pride and haughtiness); xxv.36, xvii.37 (humility and forbearance).

of the lucrative "cult of the Kab'ah." It meant that all men, as Muslims, became equal in the sight of Allah.

In direct contrast to the freedom and licentious ways of the tribal asabiyah it imposed the spiritual obligations of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.¹⁴ Usury, an accepted and highly profitable business among the Quraysh, was condemned outright.¹⁵ Fairness and justice in trade were the order of Islam.¹⁶

In addition to the changes which are inherent just in the "s-l-m" root, we find the Qur'an pronouncing that there is a life after death in which a man would receive punishment or reward in accord with the measure of his deeds on this earth.¹⁷ This was, of course, in direct contrast to the belief in the profane singleness of life on this earth which was held by most pre-Islamic Arabs.¹⁸

The Qur'an also called men to abolish their belief

¹⁴ Ibid., lxii.9 (prayer); ii.183 (fasting); xxiv.56 (almsgiving).

¹⁵ Ibid., ii.275.

¹⁶ Ibid., iv.135.

¹⁷ Ibid., xxi.47; xxxvi.12.

¹⁸ Nicholson, Literary History Arabs, p.166; Qur'an, xlv.24 and vi.29.

in idols, even as intermediaries to Allah.¹⁹ It demanded that God be worshipped as single and without partners.

It capitalized on the Bedouin's spirit of courage and honour, and through the integrity of their faith (once given) the Revelation of Muhammad gave to the Arabs a Unity of Religion which has proved the basis of the Islamic world.

¹⁹Qur'an, xxxix. 3.

CHAPTER III

REVELATION

To this point we have dwelt only on the fact that the Qur'an both demanded and received the "faith" of the Arabs without pausing to examine the reasons as to why that faith was expected.

W. M. Watt, in his book Islamic Revelation in the Modern World, posits two main grounds upon which men were to accept the Islamic Revelation.²⁰ The first hinges he feels around the charismatic nature of both Muhammad's character, and the depth of the conviction evinced by him toward his claim to Prophethood. His subsequent constancy in his claim no doubt consolidated, in the eyes of those who watched, the power held in the depth of his conviction.

The second centers around the Qur'anic challenge for "unbelievers" to produce its like:

Moreover this Koran could not have been devised by any but God: but it confirmeth what was revealed before it, and is a clearing up of the Scriptures--there is no doubt thereof--from the

²⁰ W. M. Watt, Islamic Revelation in the Modern World (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, Scotland, 1969), p. 60.

Lord of all creature. Do they say, 'He hath devised it himself?' Say: Then bring a Sura like it; and call whom ye can beside God, if ye speak truth.²¹

Watt appears to interpret this to mean only "...that the Qur'an was regarded as in some way through its literary form self-authenticating."²² In other words, Watt would limit the "miracle" of the Qur'an to the realm of literary style.

Muslims, I believe, would go one step further and assert that the "miracle" lies in the Truth of the content rather than solely in the form of the presentation. On the other hand, however, it must be recognized that Watt's views about the Qur'an as a literary miracle are in a certain sense very close to the traditional Muslim understanding of the Qur'an as the finest and purest saj'.²³

Central to this issue, in my opinion, is the Qur'anic claim that "this Book is without doubt a Revelation sent down from the Lord of the Worlds."²⁴ To accept this verse, or one

²¹ Qur'an, x. 39.

²² Watt, Islamic Revelation, p. 60.

²³ For a discussion of saj' as related to the traditional Muslim view of the Qur'an, the reader may refer to: Nicholson, Literary History Arabs, pp. 74 and 159.

It was I believe Noldeke who first suggested that the mention of the miraculousness of the Qur'an, in the Qur'an's own terms, probably refers to the nature of Qur'anic discourse. He does not seem to think that the verses apply exactly to content but rather to the mode of the Qur'an's delivery. When it is said that no one can produce another like it, he feels that the reference is to the inability of anyone else to bring forth such obviously inspired and revealed discourse.

²⁴ Qur'an, xxii. 1-2.

of a score just like it, as Truth, forms the base from which a Muslim can formulate an understanding of Revelation itself. That is, in accepting it he accepts that all else in the Qur'an is also true--revealed by God. Revelation is not then merely a claim aimed at men's minds (as a literary style would be), but is rather meant to strike into the realm of the "heart" as a Message directly from God. In limiting his discussion to the power and depth of Muhammad's conviction and the literary form of the Message, Mr Watt either overlooks, or dismisses (as so many scholars in their search for so called "objectivity" are wont to do), that men are capable of experience on a level beyond that of the rational mind, and that the personal and inner nature of such an experience is, in the long run, unconditioned, in any but a superficial manner, by either the conviction of those around them, or the form through which it is presented. If, as Mr Watt suggests, the reverse is true, we are forced to explain the failure of Muhammad to "convert" everyone who heard his recitation on the basis of their ignorance or indifference to his literary style. My point is that while, in some instances, conviction and style may have been the mechanisms that triggered the experience, the important claim must remain the experience itself. How else can one explain the later conversion of those who neither knew the Prophet personally, nor appreciated the literary achievements of the Arabic mind? Again it should be emphasized that

while these points were perhaps sufficient for some there undoubtedly remained those to whom both were meaningless. On this premise I wish to briefly explore the "experience" of first, the proselyte, and secondly, the Prophet.

The experience of Revelation is seen by the Qur'an as operating in one or more of three basic modes:

It is not for man that God should speak with him
but by inspiring, or from behind a veil:
Or, He sendeth a messenger to reveal, by His permission,
what He will:
For He is Exalted, Wise!²⁵

The first of these modes, "inspiring," is usually the translation that is given to the Arabic "wahy" (a hasty suggestion or infusion into the heart, as distinguished from Revelation through words).²⁶

The second, "from behind a veil" is usually rendered as either "ru'ya" (dreams), or "kashf" (visions).²⁷

Both of these first two types, or modes, seem limited to the delivery of a specific message to a specific individual. Examples would be:

And We inspired the mother of Moses, saying: Suckle him and, when thou fearest for him, then cast him into the river and fear not nor grieve. Lo! We shall bring him back unto thee and shall make him (one) of Our Messengers.²⁸

²⁵ Ibid., xlii.51.

²⁶ M. M. Ali, The Religion of Islam (The Ahmadiyyah Anjuman Isha'at Islam, Lahore, 1950), p.204.

²⁷ Ibid., p.205.

²⁸ Qur'an, xxviii.7.

or,

And the king said: Lo! I saw in a dream...²⁹

In other words these forms are not for mankind in general.

It is left to the third form of Revelation to fill that gap:

"He sendeth a messenger to reveal." This latter type is generally seen as being for the whole of, or at least a sizable portion of, mankind. Furthermore it is granted only to Prophets. In these terms we see the Qur'an as the Message of God as revealed by the "messenger" or Prophet Muhammad:

It said, 'Verily, I am the Servant of God; He hath given me the Book, and hath made me a Prophet.'³⁰

and,

By the Star when it setteth,
Your compatriot erreth not, nor is he led astray,
Neither speaketh he from mere impulse.
The Koran is no other than a revelation revealed
to him:
One terrible in power taught it him,
Endued with wisdom.³¹

The manner in which Muhammad received Revelation can take any one, or a combination of the three that are cited above.

The Qur'an mentions at least "inspiration"³² and through a "messenger"³³ in reference to Muhammad.

²⁹ Ibid., xii.43.

³⁰ Ibid., xix.31.

³¹ Ibid., liii.1-7.

³² Ibid., liii.4.

³³ Ibid., xvi.2 (an angel); ii.97 (Gabriel); xvi.102 (the Holy Spirit).

By far the most important would seem to be the latter, for as already stated, in addition to being reserved or restricted to Prophets, it is also the method by which God gives Revelation to mankind in general. That is to say, men, as a group, "experience" Revelation through the intermediary of a Prophet (just as the Prophet experiences Revelation through a messenger). This form of experience is not limited, as are the others, to a specific message for a specific individual, but is, rather, for mankind in general--it must, however, be accepted by each individual through the action of "Islam," and, as such, becomes a personal experience.

The actual physical experience of Revelation by the Prophet is relayed mainly through tradition. The experience includes the ringing of a bell, the vision of an angel who speaks as a man, a young man approaching him, the humming of bees, and finally, but by no means least, the sound of metal being beaten.³⁴ These "signs" were of course evident only to the Prophet, nevertheless, other "signs" were visible to those who were in Muhammad's presence when he received a Revelation. They include the appearance of profuse perspiration on the Prophet (even on cold days), a sudden "heaviness" of the Prophet's limbs (to the point where a camel could no longer bear his weight), his snoring or rattling like a young camel, while yet fully awake, his falling into lethargy

³⁴"Wahy," Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam, p.623.

or suddenly growing livid. It is generally agreed that Revelation would come to him at any time of the day or night, while riding, eating, washing, etc.³⁵

The question can be raised at this point as to why mankind should need Revelation at all? Again the answer can be found within the Qur'an, for one cannot read that Book without noting the advancement of certain claims. For example:

He created you all of one amn, ... There is no God but He. How then are ye so turned aside from Him.³⁶

Verily, in this Koran is teaching for those who serve God. We have not sent thee otherwise than as a mercy unto all creatures.³⁷

No doubt is there about this Book:
It is a guidance to the God fearing...³⁸

Inherent to these and surrounding verses is the idea that man, in his "creatureliness," has the capacity to stray from the path his Creator has allotted for him. God, in His mercy, sends "guidance" (Prophetic Revelation) to guide men back to the "fear of God," and in so doing, to the Right Path. God is above the approach of men's knowledge, indeed the concept of man's creatureliness would seem to state that man is dependent on

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Qur'an, xxxix.6.

³⁷ Ibid., xxi.106.

³⁸ Ibid., ii.2.

God in order to distinguish "right" from "wrong"---in essence he has limited faculties which if left to themselves would prevent him from attaining his highest potentialities. This must no doubt be seen in Islamic terms as bearing witness to God's singleness and the recognition of Muhammad as the Messenger of God (emphasizing of course man's inability to communicate directly with God).³⁹ Revelation can then be seen as the vehicle through which God guides man to his higher destiny. The Qur'an being the visible form taken by that guidance. In addition it is a transcript of the archetypal Book (note too the repeated use of the word "Book" in previously quoted verses).⁴⁰ The following verse is more definitive:

Ha. Mim. By the Luminous Book! We have made it an Arabic Koran that ye may understand; and it is a transcript of the archetypal Book, kept by us; it is lofty, filled with wisdom...⁴¹

Revelation as a process, or function, then takes the form of a reproduction of this Luminous Book. The Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam in its article on "'al-Kur'an" points out that the meaning of the word "Qur'an" should probably be sought first.

³⁹ Ibid., vi.104.

⁴⁰ A. J. Arberry, Revelation and Reason in Islam (George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1957), p.10.

⁴¹ Qur'an, xliii.1-4; also lvi.74-80, xx.54, lvii.22, lxxxv.21, lxxx.13.

and foremost as used within itself. A review of that Book shows the meanings of "to read" or more often "to recite," "to discourse" or "to relate" that which was received in or through Revelation from Allah. The distinction being that the latter senses do not necessarily pre-suppose the existence of an actual written text from which to read, but leave open the possibility of "hearing" or "impression upon the heart," or some other form of receipt of the content of Revelation. Indeed the point of emphasis (as found in that article) lies in the obscurity of the detail on the actual process of communication that is to be found in the Qur'an. Important as these distinctions may be, the fact remains that to the Muslim the words mean that man sees in the Qur'an the "Word of God" and that this "Word" gives to man the divine pattern or blueprint upon which he must fashion his life. There seems the added inference that this "pattern" is a constant. That is, that it somehow exists, in all its details, in God, as symbolized by the archetypal Book. This again has the implication that all past Revelation has the very same foundation. The Qur'an itself confirms this assertion through several channels. The first is that originally "men were of one religion only: they then fell to variance..."⁴² In other words, man through his waywardness fell away from the singleness that was his original foundation. Later in the same Surah

⁴² Qur'an, x.20.

we find the logical extension of this:

More over this Koran could not have been devised by any but God: but it confirmeth what was revealed before it, and it is a clearing up of the scriptures--there is no doubt thereof--from the Lord of all creatures.⁴³

In the above verse we see one of the most important claims of the Qur'an, namely, that it is a fulfillment of previous Books (Scriptures). While only two Books are mentioned by name, the Torah and the Gospels,⁴⁴ it nevertheless plainly states that "...every people hath had its apostle..."⁴⁵ This would seem to indicate that we must take the confirmation to be of universal significance and intention. In this sense Revelation becomes not only "guidance" to men but also forms "the tie that binds" them together as men, and of course ultimately to God. In other words, through Revelation man is led to an awareness of certain basic "Unities," which ultimately point to, or stem from, the Unity of the One True God. To my mind this concept of Unity is one of the most distinctive features of Qur'anic Revelation. Although I have to some extent developed the basics of this concept in the preceding pages I would like to further elaborate it by placing its components in some sort of logical sequence.

⁴³ Ibid., x. 38.

⁴⁴ Ibid., v. 44 (Torah); v. 47 (Gospel).

⁴⁵ Ibid., x. 48.

To begin with, the Qur'an simply, but powerfully, advances the claim of Divine Unity, the elements of which are seen in Surah cxii:

Say: He is God alone:
God the eternal!
He begetteth not, and is not begotten;
And there is none like unto Him.

Perhaps the best known declaration of God's Unity is the one which has come to be seen as a cornerstone of Islamic faith:

"There is no God but Allah..." In his book Religion of Islam, M. M. Ali points out that this Unity implies that God is one Person, or one in His person' (dhat), one in His attributes (sifat), and one in His works (af'al).⁴⁶

Earlier we saw that the One God is too far above His creatures for them to perceive His person or discover, on their own, His divine blueprint. He then, in His mercy, sends a transcript of the archetypal Book, in the form of Revelation through a Prophet, to guide men to the right path. The implication is that there must also be a Unity of the Prophets with God:

Whoso obeyeth the Apostle in so doing obeyeth God...⁴⁷

Of a truth they who believe not on God and His Apostles, and seek to separate God from His Apostles, and say, 'Some we believe, and some we believe not,' and desire to take a middle way; These! they are veritable infidels! and for the infidels have we prepared a shameful

⁴⁶ M. M. Ali, Religion of Islam, p. 144.

⁴⁷ Qur'an, iv. 82.

punishment.

And they who believe on God and His Apostles,
and make no difference between them--these!
we will bestow on them their reward at last.
God is Gracious, Merciful!⁴⁸

It is important to note at this juncture that in the Islamic framework the Prophet does not himself enter into Divinity:

Say: I am only a mortal like you. My Lord
inspireth in me that your God is only One God...⁴⁹

Neither does the Qur'an claim "sinlessness" ('isma) for him.

Nevertheless, tradition tells us that the Prophet is purified or made "sinless" through an Act of God--the tearing of Muhammad's heart from his breast by an angel, who washed it and replaced it in his chest.⁵⁰

The logical extension of the Unity of the Prophets with God is, of course, that there should exist a Unity among the Prophets themselves, in that each one is chosen to herald the same things:

The Apostles believeth in that which hath been sent down from his Lord, as do the faithful also. Each one believeth in God, and His Angels, and His Books, and His Apostles. And they say: 'We have heard and we obey. Thy mercy, Lord! for unto thee must we return.'⁵¹

or even the verses quoted in support of the Unity of the

⁴⁸ Ibid., iv. 149-151.

⁴⁹ Ibid., xviii. 111.

⁵⁰ Ibn Ishag, Sirat Rasul Allah, trans. by A. Guillaume (Oxford University Press, Pakistan, 1970), pp. 71-72.

⁵¹ Qur'an, ii. 285.

Prophets with God. The Unity of the Prophets with each other even stretches as far as:

We have not sent any apostles or prophet before thee, among whose desires Satan injected not some wrong desire, but God shall bring to naught that which Satan suggested. Thus shall God affirm His revelations for God is Knowing, Wise!⁵²

While it would be unnecessarily tedious to pursue the issue much further, may it suffice to add that the principle "oneness of the Prophets" lies in their declaration, or proclamation, of themselves as the heralds of a new Revelation from God. These Revelations, as we have already seen, form a Unity--they are all revealed by God from the archetypal Book. If we couple this concept of Unity to that which we have labelled the Unity of the Prophets with God, we can carry them through to the conclusion that they either all say the same thing, and/or, that they (in the language of the people receiving the Message--"this is an Arabic Qur'an") repeat and revive the Message that has gone before them. Both are true:

Say ye: We believe in God, and that which hath been sent down to us, and that which hath been sent down to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes; and that which hath been given to Moses and to Jesus, and that which was given to the prophets from their Lord. No difference do we make between any of them: and to God are we resigned (Muslims).⁵³

The second conclusion is confirmed in:

⁵² Ibid., xxii.51.

⁵³ Ibid., ii.130.

And in the footsteps of the prophets caused we Jesus, the son of Mary, to follow, confirming the law which was before him: and we gave him the Evangel with its guidance and light, confirmatory of the preceding law; a guidance and a warning to those who fear God:— ...And to thee we have sent down a Book: the Koran with truth, confirmatory of previous Scriptures, and their safeguard. Judge therefore between them by what God hath sent down...To everyone of you have we given a rule and a beaten track.⁵⁴

The inference is ultimately that there exists a unity of men, not only in that all were created from the same clay,⁵⁵ but more importantly that all are, through Prophetic Revelation, being nurtured into the acceptance of their God destined maturity. In that Revelation is progressively revealed to men (from age to age), it too forms a part of the Unity.

In summation we can say that Prophetic Revelation is the agency through which the One God, in His divine mercy, allows, in every age, one man chosen as His Prophet, through the intermediary of an Angel or the Holy Spirit, to reveal the contents of the archetypal Book, in order that mankind be led to guidance, and to finally under Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets, to the attainment of universal brotherhood and unity in Islam.

A brief examination of the basis of the last section of the above summation should prove the transition to our final area of discussion.

⁵⁴ Ibid., v. 50ff.

⁵⁵ Ibid., xxii. 5ff.

In surah xxxiii, verse 40 of the Qur'an we see Muhammad named as both the "Apostle of God" and the "Seal of the Prophets." Muslims have interpreted the latter title to mean that Muhammad is to be the last of the Prophets to bring a Book. God in His mercy has seen fit to ensure that the Qur'an will not, as its predecessors were, be altered by men. In other words, in Muhammad as Apostle and Seal of the Prophets we see not only the confirmation of past Revelations but also their final consummation. The Qur'an is seen as unalterable, thus man, under the protection of "divine providence," will never again forget God's plan for him. Scholars indeed generally agree that the Qur'an has in fact reached us in an unaltered condition.⁵⁶ The question of divine providence's protection of post prophetic man's application of the Qur'an to the ever changing exigencies of his place in linear space and time poses, on the other hand, for both Muslim and scholar alike, a great many difficulties. It is to these difficulties, under the general heading of interpretation, or, how does historic Revelation speak to modern man, that I now propose to turn my attention.

⁵⁶ Charles J. Adams, "Islam," A Reader's Guide to the Great Religions, ed. Charles J. Adams (The Free Press, Collier MacMillan Canada, Ltd., Toronto, 1965), p. 294.

CHAPTER IV

INTERPRETATION

If Revelation is to have meaning for men there are certain presuppositions which must be made.

The recipient must first of all be able to comprehend the language in which the Revelation is delivered. Language then becomes a necessary function of Revelation. That Muhammad was aware of this is readily seen in:

And We never sent a Messenger save with the language of his folk, that he might make (the message) clear for them...⁵⁷

Watt, in the source previously quoted, elaborates this point by saying that Muhammad did not speak in a vacuum. That is, he spoke in terms that were at once intelligible to the listener while at the same time having practical application to the situation in which they (the listeners) found themselves. Watt goes on to state that in consideration of these two points, Revelation is bound to assume either a syncretic and/or plagiaristic undertone.⁵⁸ That this is so

⁵⁷ Qur'an, xiv.4.

⁵⁸ Watt, Islamic Revelation, p.44.

in relation to the Qur'anic Revelation, at least in some scholar's minds, can hardly be denied--indeed from our introductory remarks about pre-Islamic Arabia we can gather more than a few examples of these two phenomena. For example, the Qur'an introduced the Judaic-Christian concept of history to the Arabs. That being, in grossly simplistic terms, that history moves through the Will of God toward the "time of the end" (speaking to Moses; actually entering profane time in the Person of Christ--as seen from the Christian side, Muslims, of course, hold to the humanity of the Prophets). This escatological theme is carried into the Qur'an as the "resurrection," the "reckoning," or simply the "day."⁵⁹ The point is not that Islam is merely remodelled Judaism or Christianity, but that it does exhibit, as do the other world religions, what appears to the scholar as a syncretic, and/or, plagiaristic tendency, without which it seems impossible to conceive of its having relevance for anyone but the Prophet. An example closer to the general pre-Islamic Arab religious outlook would be the continuation, albeit in a modified form, of the ties and bonds of the family and tribe, or, the continuation of a modified type of blood-wit. It must not be overlooked that from the religious perspective the words "syncretic" and "plagiaristic," with their negative implications, are poor

⁵⁹ Qur'an, i.40-43 (the "resurrection"); lxxix.1-46 (the "reckoning"); liv.6-8 (the "day").

words to describe what for the "believer" is an indisputable evidence or proof of Progressive Revelation. In other words, the believer sees the connection as both positive and necessary in that all Revelations are but a transcript of the same single Source. There must then be similarity and continuity if Revelation is to have current relevancy.

The necessity for Revelation to have current relevancy has the implication that the Prophet, as one chosen by God to deliver His Guidance, must also have the necessary authority to properly comprehend it in relation to the milieu in which it is delivered. In other words, the Prophet must act as the Interpreter of God's Word,⁶⁰ Acceptance of this fact by Muslims alive at the time of the Prophet (probably more implicitly than explicitly), removes any and all problems associated with how an individual should act as a Muslim--as a last resort the Prophet could be asked directly for his interpretation of whatever problem was at hand.⁶¹

Indeed it is generally agreed that it was not until after the Prophet's death, and Islam's subsequent outward expansion, that any real problems arose with regard to the application of God's message to "new" situations. That a problem should arise is not at all surprising when one considers that neither

⁶⁰ Watt, Islamic Revelation, p.49; M. M. Ali, Religion of Islam, p.220.

⁶¹ For a discussion of this exact procedure refer to the article on "wahy" in the Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam, pp.622-624.

the Qur'an nor the Prophet made a direct and/or indisputable statement as to the "administration" of the community after his death. By administration I refer to a divinely revealed (ordained) system and/or leader in which lay the authority to apply and interpret the Word of God as related to the ever changing exigencies of the Muslim community. The advent of the Caliphate is of course the result of the recognition by the Companions and community of the vacuum that the Prophet's death produced. For the main part two distinct sides formed during its introduction.

Those (later known as Sunni) who felt that the leadership should fall to Abu Bakr, who the Prophet, during the period before his passing, had requested to lead the prayers.⁶² This action setting the precedent of a leader chosen by the community, from the community.

The opposing group (later known as Shi'a) on the other hand stated that Muhammad had already made definite provisions as to the leadership of the community through the appointment of his son-in-law Ali to that position. The appointment was held to have been made during a speech by Muhammad at Ghadir-Khumm, and as such to provide for a divinely appointed successor:

Oh people, I will die, but I leave two things for you so that if you follow them you will never be misled

⁶² For the details of this "appointment" refer to Ibn Ishaq, Sirat Rasul Allah, pp. 680-681.

--they are the Holy Qur'an and my family.⁶³

The basis of the division as to community leadership appears to have centered, at least on the surface, around the above noted appointments. Watt summarizes the highlights as follows:

There was a practical problem which might be indicated by the question: should the adaptation of Islamic principals to a new situation be the work of the imam or leader of the community in light of his (some would say, divinely inspired) insight into the needs of the situation, or should it be the work of those who had made a study of the Qur'an and the practice of Muhammad? In view of their respective tasks it was not surprising that the 'secretaries' or civil servants, who carried out the orders of the caliph should have favoured the first alternative, while the main body of scholars or ulema should have favoured the second.

This practical problem with its political ramifications forced the community of Muslims to answer the question whether the Qur'an, the word of God, was created or uncreated. To say the Qur'an was created meant that it was not an essential expression of God's nature, since he might presumably have created it otherwise; and a corollary would be that a divinely inspired leader might properly at times override the principals stated in the Qur'an. On the other hand, if the Qur'an is the uncreated word of God, it expresses his essential nature, and no one who is divinely inspired can go against it. This latter view probably also entails that principles to deal with any conceivable situation are implicit in the Qur'an. These two views are, of course, the basis of the division of the Islamic community into Shi'ites and Sunnites; and there is truth in both.⁶⁴

⁶³ M. Shehabi, "Shi'a," Islam--The Straight Path, ed. K. W. Morgan (The Ronald Press, New York, 1958), p. 188.

⁶⁴ Watt, Islamic Revelation, p. 73.

The emphasis must lie on the absence of a direct unambiguous, unchallengeable, statement by the Prophet as to both who, on his death, was to lead the community, and as to how the community, with or without such a leader, was to ongoingly develop in compliance with the Will of God. The solution arrived at by the early Muslims, as viewed from our vantage point in history, can be seen to be closely related to the development of the Shari'ah.⁶⁵ It is to that concept and its ramifications that I now wish to turn.

While in modern usage the word "Shari'ah" has come to stand for Islamic Law, it was originally derived from a root with several different meanings, all of which had to do with a "road" or "pathway". The Shorter Encyclopædia of Islam gives the basic meaning as "the road or pathway to the watering place."⁶⁶ The significance of this choice of meaning is more than clear when one considers the crucial part that water played in the everyday lives of the desert Arabs of Muhammad's time. Imagining the security that the thirsty traveller must have experienced in knowing that his pathway led eventually to water! The implication in terms of the religious use of the word "Shari'ah" is that of the "path

⁶⁵ The "solution" was, of course, also influenced by the development of Kalam, and other related "sciences." *Infra* p.56.

⁶⁶ "Shari'a," The Shorter Encyclopædia of Islam, p.524.

leading to the knowledge of God's will." The Shari'ah is the way marked out by God--it is Islam in the mind of God, or perfect Islam. Fundamental to this concept is that given the traditional understanding of man's relationship to the world and God, Shari'ah forms one of the foundations of that relationship. In other words, given that God is beyond the comprehension of men, but that He reveals His Will to them through Revelation, we must view that Revelation as a Shari'ah.

God Himself is the Author of the law, by which we acknowledge His sovereignty. He Himself shows us the way wherein we should walk. Rational ethics or political science or economic theory--as the product of human logic, argumentation, dialectic or pondered experiences--do not theoretically exist in Islam. The basis of human conduct and organization is revelation. Only in writing the lesser points of the "by-laws" into the fundamental "constitution" for human life, given in revelation, have these human systems any validity. The true form of the family, the state, the economy, are discoverable in the Divine will.⁶⁷

From the religious perspective, and we must remember, that to the early Muslims there was perhaps no more fundamental an outlook, the most pious, and therefore praiseworthy, act in the eyes of God, would be to try to understand the Shari'ah and thereby to apply it to one's daily life. It is not surprising that the traditional view of the development of the Shari'ah should see the early Muslims as being acutely con-

⁶⁷ Kenneth Cragg, The Call of the Minaret (Oxford University Press, New York, 1956), p. 143.

cerned with accurately discerning his duties, obligations and rights in relation to the Shari'ah. Indeed the very early period of Islam has been traditionally characterized by its attention, but limitation, to two prime sources of the Shari'ah, namely the Qur'an and the Sunna or ahadith of the Prophet. Fazlur Rahman would add that "...since the 'given' could obviously not suffice for the developing needs of succeeding generations the...principle of human intelligence and understanding was recognized from the outset."⁶⁸ In the discussions that follow we have accepted Rahman's statement as an a priori.

Before continuing it will be useful to interrupt the main discussion with some general comments on the subject of "law" as it relates to a religious base. An overall definition might read as follows: law constitutes those rules for the conduct of human affairs in society as derived from an absolute basis and by a definite prescribed method. The "basis" is that point beyond which one cannot pass. In other words, there cannot, without undercutting it, be a law where one can imagine a more basic starting point. The ultimate basis may differ depending on the culture where it is found, but "it" must be accepted by the majority as forming an ultimate basis. Whatever the basis, the law is

⁶⁸ Fazlur Rahman, Islam (Doubleday and Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1968), p. 118.

self-authenticating in its authority. The manner by which the law is derived must also, of necessity, be absolute and therefore Right.

Central to the Islamic vision of law is the concept of its divine, and therefore absolute, basis in Revelation. That Revelation is the Qur'an. As we know the Qur'an does not present itself as a system of jurisprudence. Indeed the Qur'an is basically limited to three specific types of generally unorganized legislative material: the hadd punishments; laws related to inheritance; and finally other miscellaneous, but definite, commands and/or prohibitions. It must be obvious that such basic, but limited, types of legislative material had, in the face of the diverse and complex problems within the early Islamic Empire, to be supplemented. This supplementary material could, if it were to be law, be no less basic in nature than the Qur'an itself. While it can be stated that the primary source of such supplementary material came to be recognized as the traditions of the Prophet, it will be useful to the discussion to examine this development in terms of its religious and historical perspectives. Before doing so, however, I wish to preface such remarks with a brief examination of the etymology of the word "tradition."

In general we find that "tradition" is the blanket or umbrella term used by men to express the notion of the ongoing existence of "something" that has, over a long period

of time, become recognized as being firmly fixed or established in the memory of man. In other words, something which maintains its meaningfulness or application in the face of the ever changing exigencies of man's existence in space and time. Tradition is the sum total of the "solutions" proffered by a people in answer to the "how to" of recurring situations. Inherent is the capacity or ability to allow for a flexible interaction with the present. That is, tradition is not necessarily static or unchangeable, but of necessity allows man to ongoingly adapt to his environment, and by so doing establish "new" traditions. Tradition can then be seen in light of an "authority" as versus a dogma.

There are five basic Arabic words which translate as tradition. These are athr, khobar, riwayah, sunna and hadith.

Athr comes from a word meaning "to influence," and as such holds the sense of something left behind by a previous group. This might entail a report, or a monument, or some other generally tangible mark or trace as left behind by men.

Riwayah is related to the word riwah which means "to report", "to tell" or "to recite." Riwayah has then, the sense of reporting something originally given in oral form (which as we are well aware was the required form for the transmission of knowledge in pre-Islamic Arabia). Riwayah may cover a visual sighting of something, or the hearing of an

oral report as given by someone else. It is a mode of transmitting information.

Khabar, on the other hand, forms the substance of the riwayah and as such is a piece of information.

Literally all that is known of the Prophet has come to us from these "source" expressions of tradition.

The term sunna refers to the usual or normative way of doing things. The sunna is a path (or way of acting) that is not new. As Goldziher has pointed out, it represents "a compendium of practical rules" which have come to man through their deep rooted knowledge of tradition. Generally speaking it refers primarily to actions (not reports or information). For example, when a man is faced with a problem, he is naturally driven to ask the question "what is the sunna on this matter?" or "how was this thing done in the past?" The answer, provided it was a constant course of action, represented the sunna or normative authoritative path to follow. It is readily seen that the beginnings of sunna are, of necessity one might argue, to be found in the antiquity of man's history and not in the birth of Islam.

Hadith means an oral report, and is the form in which the sunna is known. Goldziher has stated however that "a norm contained in a hadith is naturally regarded as sunna; but it is not necessary that the sunna should have a corresponding hadith which gives it sanction. It is quite poss-

ible that the contents of the hadith may contradict the sunna..."⁶⁹ As an oral report or "tale" we find that hadith is not necessarily a communication among the believers of a religious community, but can form a vehicle of transmission for historical information of a secular variety.

A hadith has two parts. The first is the isnad or chain of authority. This portion contains the names of the people through whom the hadith has passed one to the other. The significance of the isnad is that it authenticates or supports the validity or trustworthiness of the second part of the hadith. The second part is the matn. This is the substance or actual wording of the hadith.

Perhaps the most important point to be made in the foregoing is that men placed great significance in the tradition of their forefathers: it formed the basis of reality in the present, the point to which everything could be related, and from which they could ongoingly construct their present vision of reality.

We saw earlier that until the advent of the Prophet men followed the tradition that was available to them, namely that of their own predecessors. There were then as many

⁶⁹ Ignac Goldziher, Muslim Studies, ed. by S. M. Stern, trans. by C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern (2 vols.; Aldine Publishing Co., Chicago, 1966), II, p. 24.

ways of acting in accordance with the past as there were separate geneologies--each man, of course, following the path laid down by his own direct predecessors.

The call to Islam meant (on one level) that men must cease to follow the sunna of their ancestors in lieu of that which Allah sent to them through the Prophet Muhammad. In other words, part of the commitment to Islam entailed the recognition by men that Allah alone controlled the past, present and future, and that He, in His mercy, had seen fit to send Guidance to enable men to distinguish the right Path. This Guidance was, of course, transmitted through His Prophet Muhammad in the form of the revealed Qur'an. As we know, the Qur'an was revealed over a period of many years, a fact that necessitated men to retain at least that portion of their sunna that was not specifically abrogated by that Recitation. In effect, it must not be supposed that men, on committing themselves to Islam, found themselves in possession of a complete(ly) new sunna. Goldziher expresses it in the following terms:

To regard religious life in the Islamic sense as having taken hold amongst the masses of the Muslim population from Syria to Transoxiana, from the very beginning would be to give an altogether faulty picture of the development of the system of Islamic religion. It would be, first of all, quite unjustified to believe that religious life in the Islamic world was from the first based on what could be called with more or less justification 'the sunna'. This may have been the case in Medina, where there was much interest in religious matters from the start,

and where a certain usage developed out of the elements of ecclesiastical law and life which later obtained canonic validity as the sunna. But such development can hardly be assumed for the outlying provinces with their Muslim population mainly consisting of colonized Arab warriors and indigenous converts. Among the Arabs transplanted to the eastern provinces there were presumably some Companions and 'followers' who worked for religious life and who spread the piety of Medina to the provinces. But at the time of the first conquests there was no ready-made system to be taken from Medina, since the new order was developing even there; and also the number of those learned in religion was far exceeded in the conquered lands by the indifferent and the ignorant."⁷⁰

The important point is however that they eventually did come to recognize that the Qur'an was first and foremost their new source of sunna, and that it must take precedent over their own sunna. The question of how to apply the new sunna was resolved in part by observing how Muhammad, as God's Messenger and confidant, applied it--who after all was in a better position to know God's intended application! To this end we find the Companions monitoring and recording (in their memories) every facet of the Prophet's activities (his sayings, his actions, his approbations etc.,). As was the case with the old sunna, the new was transmitted from one man to the next, which in this case meant from those in direct contact with Muhammad to those outside his physical presence. It should be emphasized, however, that the Qur'an was retained as the first and foremost path to be followed.

⁷⁰ Ibid., II, p. 38.

While it was generally agreed that after that Book one must follow that portion of the sunna not abrogated by "it," there was a great deal of confusion as to exactly what that sunna was. There was indeed a period of some three centuries before Al-Shafi'i laid down the principle that the only legitimate sunna was that of the Prophet, and that the only vehicle of that sunna was the hadith (here again we must recognize that acceptance of this was only gradual in surfacing). Prior to Al-Shafi'i, men were faced with the problem of choosing one of several available "Islamic" sunna: the sunna of the Companions, the sunna of the "followers," the sunna of the men of Mecca etc., to say nothing of the sunna of the Prophet himself. History has shown that men did eventually choose in favour of the sunna of the Prophet.

From the religious point of view this is an extremely significant step in that it gave men, in addition to the Word of God as revealed in the Qur'an, the enacted Word of God as seen in His Messenger and Apostle. This necessarily expanded the base from which Muslims could formulate correct actions in the face of the exigencies of their day to day lives. In effect, where a Muslim followed explicitly the Qur'an and the sunna of the Prophet he was absolutely assured of acting in a manner that was acceptable and pleasing to Allah. It gave Muslims a basis of certitude in matters of

faith. It gave them, through the transmission from one to another, an ongoing organic form of divine guidance. It meant as long as the Community based its actions on the Qur'an and ahadith, that they could be certain that those actions were the Will of God, and not mere bid'a.⁷¹ As such, the Community was, and is, the representative of God in this world. Only by belonging to this Community can men tread the Right Path.

This has the added implication that religion and state cannot, at least theoretically, be separated. To do such a thing would be tantamount to stating that man knows how to govern his own material environment and thereby restricting God to matters of the "spirit"--something which the Qur'an, in its provision of both spiritual (prayer etc.,) and material (inheritance etc.,) Guidance explicitly refutes.

That "irregularities" in the application of the Shari'ah developed over the years can hardly be denied (hadith fabrication, modern Turkey etc.,), but for the most part they have clung to an understanding presented through the religious point of view of the significance of the ahadith (witness its place of honour as second only to the Qur'an as the source and authority upon which to structure reality). The birth of the "science" of hadith as a basis from which to determine the authenticity of tradition can be seen as a confirmation

⁷¹ Literally "innovation."

of the great importance of hadith in the formation of the Community. It is of interest to note that the authorization, or recognition of the authenticity of a hadith was based on the ishad and not the matn, and as such serves to strengthen the feeling of an ongoing organic Community dependent only on the transmission of the divinely revealed Qur'an and the ahadith--if the man who transmitted this information were to be considered beyond reproach in his integrity, who then would dare to question what he relayed as being anything short of the Word of God and/or the inspired actions of God as seen in Muhammad.

As broad as the scope of these activities may seem, they were obviously not held as being sufficient, for epiphenomenal to them we find the development of ijma', or the "agreement of the Community." The consensus of the Community appears to draw its authority from a statement as recorded in the ahadith: "my Community will never agree on an error." This development gives all the appearances of solving the problems of fresh applications, yet it is intricately bound to another development, namely the conclusion: "from a given principle embodied in a precedent that a new case falls under this principle or is similar to this precedent on the strength of a common feature called the 'reason' (illa)." ⁷² As already stated, the evolution of these applica-

⁷² Rahman, Islam, p. 79

tions of Islam give the appearance of a "system" which has the capacity to ongoingly meet the extended future. Yet examination reveals that the [redacted] the present in terms of the past. To change [redacted] of action to meet the present, in the face of an already established past precedent, means that the past had no real meaning or significance. The history of the Muslim Community on the other hand must be seen as the history of God's guidance, and cannot be seen as somehow being in error--which is, of course, the exact implication in changing it! To change, in whatever manner, an authorized way of doing things is seen as heresy, or bida, for it must be remembered that the Community ideally represents, or re-enacts, the infallible actions of the Prophet of God, as passed through the "rightly guided" actions of those who based their actions on his. The record of the past, as well as the tools to adapt to the present, are then contained in the Shari'ah--the Path or Law. To change or restructure the Shari'ah through some form of original thinking (ijtihad) was bida, and therefore unthinkable. The sunni Muslim Community attempted to safeguard against bida by "closing the gates of ijtihad:"

The qualifications for ijtihad were made so immaculate and rigorous and were set so high that they were humanly impossible of fulfillment. The pictures of the early religious leaders of the community during the formative period were accordingly idealized more and more and fiction mixed with facts. The power of absolute ijtihad was completely

abolished; a relative ijtihad was allowed. This either meant that one was allowed to reinterpret law within one's own school of law or, and this was the highest point of original legislation, one could carry on an eclectic and comparative study of law of different schools and thus find some scope for limited expansion in details... But throughout the medieval centuries the law, definite and defined, was cast like a shell over the Community.⁷³

The Shi'a, on the other hand, adopted the position that the ijma' was of no importance to the formation of the Community. They placed full authority, after the Qur'an and the Shi'a hadith, in the Imam.

For whereas Sunni Islam vests the real religious authority in Ijma and recognizes in the Caliph only a political and religious executive head of the Community, the Shi'a Imam, by contrast is both sinless and absolutely infallible in his supposed pronouncements on the dogma and, indeed, in all matters. In fact, whereas in classical and medieval Sunni Islam the office of the Caliph is recognized as only a practical necessity, belief in the Imam and submission to him is, according to the Shi'a, the third cardinal article of Faith, after a belief in God and His Apostle.⁷⁴

Again the following excerpt from E. G. Browne's translation of A Traveller's Narrative, serves to emphasize and highlight the position and/or station of the Imam in the Shi'a Community:

The cardinal point wherein the Shi'ahs (as well as the other sects included under the more general term of Imamites) differ from the Sunnis is the doctrine of the Imamate. According to the belief of the

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 88f.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 212f.

latter, the vicegerency of the Prophet (Khilafat) is a matter to be determined by the choice and election of his followers and the visible head of the Musulman world is qualified for the lofty position which he holds less by special divine grace than by a combination of orthodoxy and administrative capacity. According to the Imamite view, on the other hand, the vicegerency is a matter altogether spiritual; an office conferred by God alone, first by His Prophet, and afterwards by those who so succeeded him, and having nothing to do with the popular choice or approval. In a word, the Khalifah of the Sunnis is merely the outward and visible Defender of the Faith: the Imam of the Shi'ahs is the divinely ordained successor of the Prophet, one endowed with all perfections and spiritual gifts, one whom all the faithful must obey, whose decision is absolute and final, whose wisdom is superhuman, and whose words are authoritative.⁷⁵

Browne goes on in the same passage to give details of the first twelve Imams of the Shi'a Community (the various subdivisions within Shi'a Islam each have their own count, but the important thing in this context is the "station" accorded to the Imam). Certain points of interest surround the twelfth Imam, "Muhammad, son of Imam Hasan 'Askari" who was designated by the Shi'ites as "Imam Mahdi." He is reputed not to have died but to have disappeared in the early fourth century (A.H.,) into an underground cave or passage in Surra-man-Ra'a. The tradition is that he still lives, surrounded by faithful followers, in a city somewhere in the bowels of the earth. It is he, the Hidden Imam, whose

⁷⁵ 'Abdu'l-Baha, A Traveller's Narrative: The Episode of the Bab, trans. with notes by Edward G. Browne (Baha'i Publishing Committee, P.O. Box 348, Grand Central Station, New York, 1930), p. 296.

return is awaited by Shi'a Islam. It is he who will rule, by virtue of divine right, at the "time of the end" and restore justice and truth to the people of Islam. He is also known as al-Mahdi by certain portions of the Shi'ite Community. Those Sunni who await 'Isa (their own saviour) or al-Mahdi, do not accord him the same divine station, but see his return as a "descent" pure and simple, after which he will rule according to the "law of Islam." The Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam cites at least some of the signs that will prevail at the "time of the end" and as such herald the advent of al-Mahdi ('Isa, return of the twelfth Imam, or whatever name is chosen).⁷⁶ The details are not as important to us as is the fact that both the Shi'a and Sunni await a "return at the time of the end."

In addition to the Imam (whose rule continuously and invisibly envelops the Community in all its aspects) the Shi'a maintain that the gates of ijtihad are still open. As justification for this they appeal to the Qur'an's many references to reason as allowed to judge Revelation,⁷⁷ as well as the exhortations to make full use of that faculty ("Do you not reflect?", "Do you not understand?" etc.,).⁷⁸

⁷⁶ "al-Mahdi," The Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam, p.310.

⁷⁷ Qur'an, iv.83.

⁷⁸ M. M. Ali, Religion of Islam, p.36.

Once again this gives the illusion of being able to cope with the problem of open-ended interpretation. In actual practice, however, it would appear that it is little more than an affirmation of the freedom of human choice as over and against the concept of predestination.

From the religious perspective, and in the final analysis, both the Sunni and Shi'a Shari'ah find their authorization and authenticity in the Qur'an and ahadith. To deny the authenticity of the entire hadith, on whatever the basis, is in essence to deny the authenticity of the Qur'an, for both have their origins with the Prophet, and both were dependent on the same vehicle of transmission--it is, of course this very denial which the modern historian wishes, at least in part, to advance!

Before passing to a discussion of the historian's view of the hadith and its fabrication in the development of Islam, it is of interest and value to briefly discuss the development of Kalam (theology) as a science of Islam.

It is not uncommon in the West to hear statements to the effect that Kalam has historically served a largely negative purpose for Muslims by providing them with a defense against competing systems of religious thought. While the foregoing (with one reservation) is true, it is certainly inadequate in covering the full significance of Kalam's part in the formation of the Muslim Community.

Before stating the reasons for my position regarding the inadequacy of the statement, let me state my reservation with regard to its truth.

The English use of the word "negative," while characterizing resistance or defense, has also come to possess the pejorative sense of "wrongness." The implication would seem that Islamic theology somehow "wrongly" developed. That is, due to the eagerness to defend Islam from the onslaught of other religions, and its open adoption of the hellenistic philosophical method of thought systematization, it was somehow developed in a manner that was not in keeping with the true "spirit of Islam." Another possible implication is that any theology based on resistance or defense is inferior or wrong. While from our vantage point in time these statements may both seem superficially valid, in the face of the multidimensional problems confronting the people of that (or any) era, they must, however, seem feeble and academic. From the traditional Muslim point of view we are, of course, asked to see whatever "forces" entered into the production and subsequent development of Kalam as being nothing less than operatives of the Will of God. Keeping these reservations in mind we may proceed with our discussion of Kalam's development.

Kalam literally means "talking," and, as such, has come to represent a science that is taught through talking. The

actual science of Kalam came into being in the third century after the hegira. Its origins can be traced to several factors, not the least of which was the growing desire on behalf of pious Muslims to express in a systematic rational manner what exactly Islam was. While, as we shall discuss a few paragraphs later, there was also outside stimulation for them to produce a clear rational statement on what it meant to be a Muslim, it can be argued that the lack of a systematic treatment of theological matters within the Qur'an, coupled to the genuine piety of the Muslims, would ultimately have served the same purpose. In other words, there is no doubt that while pious considerations stem from both the experience of conversion and the necessary knowledge, understanding and/or fear of God engendered in such a declaration of faith, they ultimately entail a real commitment on the part of the declarant to share his new found faith, in a manner that is rationally palatable to both believer and unbeliever alike.

Over and against this, but more demanding of an immediate reaction from the Community, we see the external impetus produced by the confrontation of Islam's desert Bedouin with the sophisticated and articulate polemicists of different religions. It is the latter of these two forces that is credited with imposing, through the Mu'atazilah, a philosophic rational grid over the Qur'an. Like so many other aspects of Islam we find that the cause lay in the

outward expansion of the years following Muhammad's death. Picture if you will the uneducated Bedouin armies sweeping into countries under hellenic influence. There can be little doubt that they met with severe academic, philosophical and theological questioning at their hands, especially when one recalls the absence within the Community of a formalized Islamic system of theology to "fight against" the system championed by their captives. This eventually gave the Muslims the necessary drive to meet the challenge by learning the workings of the hellenistic mind.

In the third and fourth Muslim centuries, in what must be considered a deliberate, concentrated effort at defense, the Abbasids had Christians translate great masses of hellenistic material into Arabic. Yet even this government sponsored effort is antedated by some 200 years through the "informal" discussion of polemics and religion that took place with the Christians, who were well versed in the hellenic mode of debate and discussion. That this type of discussion should have taken place is not hard to understand when we recall that the Muslims, though the conquerors, were in the minority, and bound therefore, to be exposed to the rational theological expositions of the time, and, as such, must have felt the necessity to respond with an appropriate Islamic "correction." The implication is that while they of necessity adopted the hellenic method of analysis, they were nevertheless bound, for

the most part, to reject the content. The group which appears to have fostered this system transplant is the Mu'tazila. Indeed it is common to hear them spoken of as the "rationalists" of Islam. For the main part our current knowledge of the Mu'tazila comes to us from their enemies, who were surprisingly enough the Sunni majority. Recently unearthed Mu'tazila material shows that from the modern perspective, that such opposition on the part of the Community was founded in ignorance of the real purpose of their expositions. They did not, for example, wish to undercut "faith," but rather to place it on a securer basis through the rejection of the superstitions which formed the general folk religion of the masses. In essence, they polemicized about the inadequacies of such beliefs as the "scale upon which the heart's of men are weighed," "the lake of the burning fire," etc., none of which were Qur'anic. The ultimate conclusion was their total rejection of such "insults" to true Islam. In the process they were forced to reject the authority of a great many hadith, and, as such, were eventually labelled as being rejectors of all hadith. It would appear, however, that they never undercut the general principle that tradition was a source of truth, but, on the other hand, tried to approach it on a more realistic basis. They would say that we know the truth through reason, and that truth is none other than Islam, but rational reasoning Islam nonetheless!

Anthropomorphism was cast aside as being, when taken literally, an insult to the character of the divine Being; which in turn forced them to introduce a symbolic or metaphoric interpretive stance with regards the Qur'an. In general it would appear that their prime concern was that Islam should receive an adequate, rational presentation that was common among the masses. While the Mu'tazila saw themselves as Muslims, they were, however, rejected as heretics by the Sunni majority. It was, however, only the content of their movement that was rejected, for ironically enough in order for the Sunni to adequately respond to the Mu'tazila, they were in turn compelled to adopt the tools of hellenic rational argument (as were in use by the Mu'tazila). In addition to producing the weapons to properly repel the so-called heretics, it also supplied them with a vehicle through which to respond to the ever pressing question of how one determines who, and what, a Muslim is? Is it determined by the inward commitment of the heart, and/or, by the outward observance of the Qur'anic commands? It should not be denied, however, that the answers to these and other similar theological questions were sought as much on political motives as from deep theological curiosity. In other words, to be able to base one's actions on the explicit teachings of Muhammad, was tantamount to stating that they were in conformity with

God's Will. It is not hard to understand that the Muslim leaders were quick to both realize this point and to employ those versed in religious knowledge to verify the "correctness" of their own particular political stance.

...it is evident that the rule of the 'Abbasid dynasty favoured the development of religious law and the cultivation of public law in the religious spirit, during the time of its flowering as well as in the epoch of its decline when the troubled circumstances of the time gave more and more scope for the influence of pietist elements. At the apogee of this dynasty, when its representatives exercised full power of government, development in this sense was encouraged by a stressing of the religious character which the caliph assumed in contrast to his predecessors. It was in accordance with this religious spirit that theologians of the epoch adopted an attitude of instruction towards the court and, correspondingly, the rulers gave, in accordance with the instruction, a religious bias to the administration of law and government.... However precisely the theologians drew up the line which the caliphs must follow in public life in order to establish the rule of the sunna, they showed themselves indulgent as regards the private life of the ruler which, ..., did not always correspond to the role which the imams felt called upon to play in their relations with the community. The court theologians took full account of the private side of the caliph's life. They showed themselves learned and ingenious when it came to finding religious exculpations for the life contrary to the sunna led by pleasure seeking rulers.⁷⁹

Kalam was then a powerful tool in the political arena, for it brought divine sanction to the ongoing realities of daily life and as such must be seen as more than just a defense against the intrusion of outside polemics and/or

⁷⁹ Goldziher, Muslim Studies, II, pp. 71-73.

religious doctrine. In addition to defensive or apologetic influences in the formation and development of Kalam, we must also recognize the importance of the piety of the early Muslims, their intellectual curiosity and their political aspirations.

In the case of the ahadith, for the main part their historical significance is not centered on the subjective aspects as integral units of faith, but in their objective adaptation to, and manipulation of, the religious, intellectual, social and political circumstances of the period of their formation.

The hadith will not serve as a document for the history of the infancy of Islam, but rather as a reflection of the tendencies which appeared in the community during the maturer stages of its development. It contains invaluable evidence for the evolution of Islam during the years when it was forming itself into an organized whole from powerfully mutually opposed forces. This makes the appreciation and study of the hadith so important for an understanding of Islam, in the evolution of which the most notable phases are accompanied by successive stages in the creation of the hadith.⁸⁰

Goldziher comes to the conclusion that while all hadith cannot, and should not, be regarded as what it claims from a religious perspective, it can furnish the rough progressive development of Muslim thought and, as such, enshrine not only the early controversies but also their solutions. In other words, while

⁸⁰ Ibid., II, p. 19.

the motivation for questions and answers may have seemed religious in theory, they have been historical in application. In effect the historian views the development of hadith as proceeding from the stress produced in the physical events following the death of Muhammad. To the historian Muhammad is no more than a statesman who "converted" the Bedouin to Islam through military and diplomatic methods. They are quick to point out that the vast majority of Muslims never saw Muhammad and that indeed their "faith" was a matter of the "acceptance" of Muhammad by the "heads" of their respective tribes. In essence their conversion was based not in the religious frame-work of faith, but rather in a political treaty of alliance based on convenience. Abu Bakr, for example, spent most of his two year caliphate in keeping the Community together (wars of the Ridwah--rebellion). The main point is that even where some form of true faith or conversion did exist there was confusion as to what exactly Islam was. When on the death of Muhammad the Muslims swept out of the peninsula they were subjected to an even greater series of tests in their confrontation with situations completely foreign to them as Muslims--no less as men! In addition to having no written Qur'an (not until Uthman's four copies) they were for the most part devoid of personal contact with Muhammad, or even anyone who had been directly associated with him. The end result, in the absence of explicit guidance

and/or more than a superficially common set of beliefs, was the improvisation or fabrication of ahadith. Goldziher concedes that,

It is a matter for psychologists to find and analyse the motives of the soul which made such forgeries acceptable to pious minds as morally justified means of furthering a cause which was in their conviction a good one. The most favourable explanation which one can give of these phenomena is presumably to assume that the support of a new doctrine (which corresponded to the end in their view) with the authority of Muhammad was the form in which it was thought good to express the high religious justification of that doctrine. The end sanctified the means. The pious Muslims made no secret of this.⁸¹

While Muslims do not deny the existence of hadith fabrication, as seen by the advent in the third century of the science of hadith, they nevertheless maintain that those hadith accepted by this science must be regarded as authentic. Goldziher, on the other hand, argues that a great deal of fabrication still exists in the 3000 traditions chosen by al-Bukhari and subsequently accepted as authentic by the community at large. This is not to say that the hadith is worthless to the historian. On the contrary they are useful in analysing the theological, political and general social atmospheres which produced them. The implication in regard to their religious authenticity, in the face of the foregoing "historical reality," is that they are useless as a means to

⁸¹ Ibid., II, p. 19.

exact knowledge of the biography of the Prophet, and must, therefore, be viewed as religiously non-authentic. In other words, its only authenticity lies in the subsequent structures that were historically reared upon it.

Joseph Schacht supplements the above argument by his statement that the authenticity of tradition grew backward as the Community matured. That is, that the early Muslim Community was not interested in keeping tradition. Indeed he sees the third century controversy over what tradition was authentic, as nothing more than the desire on the part of the lawyers to authenticate the Shari'ah. By way of proof he points to the existence of the law early in the second century based or backed by no tradition. By the end of the second, beginning of the third century, he finds evidence of the practice of authenticating the law on the traditions of the "Successors," subsequently giving way to the tradition of the "Companions," and only by the end of the third, beginning of the fourth centuries, to those of the Prophet.

On the premise that such a chain of events can only indicate the convenient application of the ahadith as a justification of the law, he too posits tradition as religiously inauthentic (but historically valuable).⁸²

The general historical view found in the foregoing,

⁸² Joseph Schacht, Origins of Muslim Jurisprudence (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1967).

gentlemen is probably fairly representative of the Western historical approach to tradition: that its sole importance must be seen in a functional light (what it did and does), rather than in what it claims to be (the ahadith of the Apostle of God). More recently, however, we find people such as Nabia Abbott advancing the point that to study the function of tradition is not necessarily a good method of judging its claim to actually be the ahadith of the Prophet. She posits this in that the "functionalists" came along after Muhammad and were not necessarily concerned, as were she feels the early Muslims, with the authenticity of the material, but only in its application to suit their needs. She feels, as stated, that the early Muslims were very much concerned with the claim of the ahadith to say something of truth about Muhammad, and that they were then critical in both choosing and recording authentic ahadith. As such she would say that we can therefore construct an accurate biography of the Prophet based on these materials--a point of crucial importance when one recalls that the Muslim Community relies on such biographical material in order to construct a "divinely guided" Community.⁸³

It can be seen from the foregoing discussion of

⁸³ Nabia Abbott, Qur'anic Commentary and Tradition: Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1967).

Shari'ah, Kalam, and ahadith fabrication, that the Muslim Community has been faced, from its very early beginnings, with the problem of how historic Revelation was to speak to "modern" man and yet retain its divine base. In the absence of direct Qur'anic and/or "authentic" ahadith references to how this was to be achieved, the Community forged ahead on its own interpretation of how it was to be accomplished. The result was, and remains, that many divergent views of the correct Path were formulated and followed: the end result of which has been disunity, or at best toleration, among the opposing sides. An interesting case in point is the Sufi division of Islam.

The Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam gives etymology of tasawwuf, or Sufism, as:

Masdar of form V, formed from the root suf, meaning wool, to denote 'the practice of wearing the woolen robe (laba al-suf)', hence the act of devoting oneself to the mystic life on becoming what is called in Islam a Sufi.⁸⁴

The indications are that the "mysticism" of the Sufi was not (at least in origin) related to irrationalism, or to appeals to the supernatural in a manner that defies reason, and hence mystifies. On the contrary, it refers to a specific type of religious experience. This experience was specifically marked by an element of immediacy and intensity. An

⁸⁴ "Tasawwuf," Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam, p. 579.

experience in which the person experiences face to face, without mediation, the bare reality of God. A point of distinction between Sufism and most of the remainder of Islam can be seen to lie in the nature of the believer's experience of God.

The traditional Sunni experience of God lies in the experience of Revelation. God is unapproachable except through the Qur'an, which reveals His attributes--the true Being of God, lying beyond the realm of created existence (even the Prophet must have the mediation of an angel). Through Revelation, and later through the Sunna of the Prophet, man receives Shari'ah, or knowledge of how to live in accordance with God's Will. Under no stretch of the imagination can God be conceived as directly communicating with individual men.

The mystical experience, as already intimated, is marked by the claim to a direct, immediate experience of God Himself. This union with God is achieved through the practice of some esoteric and/or disciplinary process and through the grace of God. It is often spoken of as direct union of the lover with his Beloved, or of the attainment of the seeker to his Goal (and the quest of his heart).

The main distinction can perhaps best be summarized as the difference between "knowledge about God," and "knowledge of God."

The exact reason as to why this distinction should have arisen is something which is yet to be unearthed. At best we can advance certain possibilities as to why it should have emerged. The first is that held by scholars for many years and is mainly that it developed in reaction to (quiet rebellion), and as influenced, or forged by outside religious, and/or, philosophical contacts, against the worldliness of the early Umayyads. One scholar, Louis Massignon, has proposed that while Sufism originated and developed from asceticism, it was, nevertheless, totally Islamic in nature.⁸⁵ In effect he argues that it has no need of outside influences, but found all the necessary ingredients in the Qur'an, the sunna of the Prophet and his immediate followers. Whatever the truth of this may be, it nevertheless seems evident that Sufism was more ascetic than mystical in its original practices. In other words there was no clear connection with mysticism as a separate way of doing things.

Either one, or both, of the example set by the practice of asceticism, or the claim to be mystically united with God, was enough to incur the opposition of the leaders within the existing Community:

The early Muslim mystics had not foreseen that they would come into conflict with the administrative authorities of the Muslim community. If they lived

⁸⁵ Louis Massignon, Essai sur les Origines du Lexique Technique de la Mystique Musulmane (Geuther, Paris, 1922).

rather retired lives in voluntary poverty (fakr) it was in order to be better able to meditate on the Kur'an (takarra'a is the old synonym of tasawwafa) by seeking to draw near to God in prayer. The mystic call is as a rule the result of an inner rebellion of the conscience against social injustices, not only those of others but primarily and particularly against one's own faults: with an intense desire after inner purification to find God at any price..., but does not yet directly threaten the established order, however unrighteous may be the conduct of the ruler. But it was the canonists and professional theologians, fukaha' and mutakallimun, who, very displeased at seeing people speak of searching their consciences and judging one another by their inner tribunal--since the Kur'anic law had only legislated for an external tribunal and punished public sins and had no weapon against religious hypocrisy (nifak)--tried to show that the ultimate results of the life led by the mystics were heterodox, since they held that intention is more important than the act, that practical example (wunnah) is better than strict letter of the law (fard) and that obedience is better than observance.⁸⁶

It is not surprising therefore that Sufism (if it can at this stage be called by that title) came into stiff opposition as bid'a. It nevertheless continued to develop and very quickly split into two distinct branches. One associated with the emotional (love) aspects of the experience, and as such, in the opinion of its adherents, beyond the scope of verbal expression. The other being the written construction of a cosmology to explain the how and why of Sufi experience. Both of these in turn appeared counter to the current minority and majority standpoints. The Mu'tazila and Zahiris, for example, rejected the concept of "love" that

⁸⁶ "Tasawwuf," Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam, p. 579.

formed the basis of the emotional branch as implying anthropomorphism in theory, and contact and permeation in practice. This latter facet is objectionable in that it implied the "usurpation of divinity by the humanity of a perishable body, since two substances cannot occupy the same place and at the same time."⁸⁷

The Sunnis, although slower in declaring their opposition, nevertheless attacked it on the basis that it substituted meditation at the expense of divinely ordained oral prayer. Although I have found no confirmation, I would in addition suppose that they must have opposed the writing of Sufi doctrine on the basis that it had no basis in divine authority (Revelation), and was therefore bid'a. The generally accepted feeling among scholars seems to point to the fact that it was not at that juncture taken as a serious threat to the formal discipline of Islam. The later addition of "dhikr"-- ceremony of the remembrance of God--was, however, seen as a direct threat to the central significance of the mosque as the center of religious learning. This development appears to have emerged as an offshoot of the formation, in the fifth and sixth centuries after the hegira, of Sufi Orders or Brotherhoods. These fraternities, with their structure of leadership, graduation, organized teachings, doctrines, ritual, dhikr, and social services slowly emerged as the bearers of

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 580.

the flame of Islam. By the seventh and eighth centuries, they had penetrated to the far corners of the Islamic civilization, and had assumed an importance equal to the Shari'ah and Kalam. Since they were made up of "the people" they touched all levels of society, and, as such, were seen as the custodians of the living faith of Islam (if only in their own eyes). H. A. R. Gibb argues that orthodox Islam had by this time reached an arid plateau of concern with the details of theology and law--a level of obscurantism that divorced them from communication with the people. Both the law and theology, therefore, lost relevance to matters of the moment. In so doing they lost their leadership--a vacuum quickly filled by Sufism, which supplied the emotional warmth that was so desperately needed by the masses.⁸⁸ It was then in this sense the Shaykhs of the Sufi Orders who brought the spirit of Islam to the people.

But the directly religious motivation was not the only factor in the spread of the Sufi movement. Its socio-political functions, were even more powerful than the religious one. Sufism offered, through its organized rituals and séances, a pattern of social life which satisfied the social needs of especially the uneducated classes. This more than anything else, explains the widespread success of the 'rustic orders' of the villages removed from the cultivated influence of the city life. This was particularly the case with those orders which freely indulged in practices of singing

⁸⁸ H. A. R. Gibb, Mohammedanism (2nd ed., Oxford University Press, New York, 1970), pp. 86-99.

dancing and other orgiastic rituals. It was through these socio-religious cults that Sufism came to be connected with organized professional groups...At the same time, the Sufi organizations were a kind of bulwark against the state authority, especially since the 5th/11th century when the political unity of the Islamic world began to crumble, giving place to the ever insecure masses against autocratic and ever despotic sultans whose authority was also accepted by the Ulama' as being a lesser evil than chaos and lawlessness. Sufism in its organized form, therefor functioned also as a protest against political tyranny..."⁸⁹

In so doing, Sufism stepped out against the state, for the Ulama' in their execution of the law can be seen as state functionaries. This attack is, of course, in direct opposition to the orthodox demand of loyalty to the state as the religious (divine), yet concrete, expression of Islam. Thus, there was a clash between the basic social unit of Islam as the religious bearers of a living religious tradition, and the divinely ordained (through consensus) structure given to supervision of that unit.

In some instances the Sufis openly and outspokenly claimed, because of their direct experience of God, to be above the law in its entirety. This of course opened Pandora's box. By the seventeenth and eighteenth Christian centuries there had arisen great criticism of the distortions that Sufism had allowed into Islam. Superstition ran rampant. The founders of the individual Sufi Orders had by that

⁸⁹ Rahman, Islam, p. 182.

time assumed, in the communal mind, a status of not just saintliness, but, in some instances, of actually standing above the Prophet himself. In addition, the Orders themselves had degenerated to discussion of the mechanics of Sufism (which, as we saw, was ironically the very occupation which its predecessors had succumbed to).

Muslim Modernists of the nineteenth and twentieth Christian centuries have added their voice to the anti-mystical harangues. One reason advanced is that they see the modern world as requiring a modern scientific approach -- which supposedly excludes mystical "superstition." The Modernists hold that in Islam they have a solid viable culture. That something has gone wrong is attributed to their mass neglect of the spirit of true Islam. In other terms, they look to Muhammad's day for pristine Islam, which if they could but recapture, would solve their current problems (which on one level appears as a lack of a developed industrial civilization such as is only too evident in the West). While the West is recognized as having a strong, viable industrial civilization, it is still seen as being culturally bankrupt (the price paid for the rejection of Muhammad as the Prophet of God). The suggestion is that a solution is to be found in the wholesale adoption of Western industrial technology, while yet retaining Islam's strong viable culture. They see Sufism as obstructing that process

by instructing people to have an other worldly attitude, which, of course, runs in direct contradiction to the concrete materialism required by the scientific approach. If Islam is to regain its true position of glory through rational scientific methods, the masses must be brought to complete rejection of Sufism and its attendant heresies.

Iran appears as the significant exception to the current wave of "coldness" and even open hostility to Sufism. While the Iranians are Shi'a, and as such base supreme authority in the Imam, they have also tightly bound themselves to saint worship. Indeed many Iranians see Sufism, and its ancilliary traditions, as not only part of their own distinctive self-esteem, but as being a lasting contribution to the world of humanity.⁹⁰

While it would certainly be wrong to suppose that the Muslim masses are to any great extent actively involved in any of the foregoing problems as related to the Shari'ah, Kalam, ahadith fabrication and/or Sufism, there appears nevertheless to be a general awareness that something has gone wrong

⁹⁰ The following quotation from the April 20, 1974 Montreal Star, sheds considerable light on why this should be so: "My country is Moslem, but not Arab!" On the face of it, it is hardly a controversial statement, but the persistence with which the Shah and his officials make it indicates deeper down, just that. The Arabs are Semites: the Iranians are Aryans, and the 'great civilization' to which the Shah reckons he is leading his people, after centuries of backwardness and humiliation, will be distinctively Aryan too."

with Islamic history. While differing in his handling of the subject, Wilfred Cantwell Smith summarizes the Islamic situation in the following words:

The fundamental malaise of modern Islam is a sense that something has gone wrong with Islamic history. The fundamental problem of modern Muslims is how to rehabilitate that history: to set it going in full vigor, so that Islamic society may once again flourish as a divinely guided society should and must. The fundamental spiritual crisis of Islam in the twentieth century stems from an awareness that something is awry between the religion which God has appointed and the historical development of the world which He controls.⁹¹

At least part of the problem, or dilemma, of modern Islam lies in its inability to unanimously resolve the question of how historic Revelation can speak to modern man, in a manner that will at once provide for the retention of the God given authority of its past, as the basis of its present, while simultaneously allowing it to meet the ever changing exigencies of the modern era. In short, one aspect of the problem, as seen in our discussions of the Shari'ah, Kalam, ahadith fabrication and Sufism, is surely one that is rooted in "interpretation."

It is in relation to this problem, as well as to the

⁹¹ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Islam in Modern History (The New American Library, 1301 Avenue of the Americas, New York, 1959), p. 47f. In all fairness it should be stressed that the writer is not trying to imply that Smith's arguments are in any way similar to his own, rather, that this particular passage, albeit out of context, summarizes in a few short words the bare bones of the Islamic dilemma.

concept of Islamic Revelation in general, that I now propose to discuss the concept of Revelation as found in the Writings of Baha'u'llah, the Prophet Founder of the Baha'i Faith.

CHAPTER V

THE SETTING OF BAHAI REVELATION

By the close of the seventh Christian century, the land of Persia had succumbed to, if no less accepted, the faith of Islam. During the ensuing centuries it might be said that it paralleled the first surge of religious and cultural progress that was released by the force of "pristine" Islam. By the middle of the nineteenth Christian century it had, however, sunk to a level of social and political degeneracy that might shock even the modern observer. The following extracts from the "Introduction" to Nabil-i-Azam's The Dawn Breakers, which makes much use of material gleaned from Lord Curzon's Persia and the Persian Question, although possibly lengthy for inclusion here, nevertheless depicts that ancient monarchy with authenticity and clarity.

All observers agree in representing Persia as a feeble and backward nation divided against itself by corrupt practices and ferocious bigotries. Inefficiency and wretchedness, the fruits of moral decay, filled the land. From the highest to the lowest there appeared neither the capacity to carry out methods of reform nor even the will seriously to institute them. National conceit preached a grandiose self-content. A pall of immobility lay over all things, and a general paralysis of mind made any development impossible...

.....

...the government of the country was, in Lord Curzon's phrase, 'a Church-State.' Venal, cruel, and immoral as it was, it was formally religious. Muslim orthodoxy was its basis and permeated to the core both its and the social lives of the people. But otherwise there were no laws, statutes, or charters to guide the direction of public affairs. There was no House of Lords nor Privy Council, no synod, no Parliament. The Shah was despot, and his arbitrary rule was reflected all down the official scale through every minister and governor to the lowliest clerk or remotest headman. No civil tribunal existed to check or modify the power of the monarch or the authority which he might choose to delegate to his subordinates. If there was a law, it was his word. He could do as he pleased. It was his to appoint or to dismiss all ministers, officials, officers, and judges. He had power of life and death without appeal over all members of his household and his court, whether civil or military. The right to take life was vested in him alone; and so were all the functions of government, legislative, executive, and judicial. His royal prerogative was limited by no written restraint whatever.

Descendants of the Shahs were thrust into the most lucrative posts throughout the country, and as the generations went by they filled innumerable minor posts too, far and wide, till the land was burdened with this race of royal drones who owed their position to nothing better than their blood and who gave rise to the Persian saying that 'camels, fleas, and princes exist everywhere.'

Even when the Shah wished to make a just and wise decision in any case that might be brought before him for judgement, he found it difficult to do so, because he could not rely on the information given to him. Critical facts would be withheld, or the facts given would be distorted by the influence of interested witnesses or venal ministers. The system of corruption had been carried so far in Persia that it had become a recognized institution which Lord Curzon describes in the following terms:

'I come now to that which is the cardinal and differentiating feature of Iranian administration. Government, nay, life itself, in that country may be said to consist for the most part of an interchange of presents. Under its social aspects this practice may be supposed to illustrate the generous sentiments of an amicable people; though even here it has a grimly unemotional side, as, for instance, when, congratulating

yourself upon being the recipient of a gift, you find that not only must you make a return of equivalent cost to the donor, but must also liberally renumerate the bearer of the gift (to whom your return is very likely the sole recognized means of subsistence) in a ratio proportionate to its pecuniary value. Under its political aspects, the practice of gift-making, though consecrated in the adamant traditions of the East, is synonymous with the system elsewhere described by less agreeable names. This is the system on which the government of Persia has been conducted for centuries, and the maintenance of which opposes a barrier to any real reform. From the Shah on downwards, there is scarcely an official who is not open to gifts, scarcely a post which is not conferred in return for gifts, scarcely an income which has not been amassed by the receipt of gifts....

'...The "madakhil" is a cherished national institution in Persia, the exaction of which, in a myriad forms, whose ingenuity is only equalled by their multiplicity, is the crowning interest and delight of a Persian existence. This remarkable word, for which...there is no precise English equivalent, may be variously translated as commission, perquisite, douceur, consideration, pickings and stealings, profit, according to the immediate context in which it is employed....By its operation, generosity or gratuitous service may be said to have been erased in Persia from the category of social virtues, and cupidity has been elevated into the guiding principle of human conduct....Hereby is instituted an arithmetical progression of plunder from the sovereign to the subject, each unit in the descending scale renumrating himself from the next in rank below his, and the hapless peasant being the ultimate victim. It is not surprising under these circumstances, that office is the common avenue to wealth, and that cases are frequent of men who, having started from nothing, are found residing in magnificent houses, surrounded by crowds of retainers and living in princely style. "Make what you can while you can" is the rule that most men set before themselves in entering public life. Nor does popular spirit resent the act; the estimation of any one who, enjoying the opportunity, has failed to line his own pockets, being the reverse to complimentary to his sense. No one turns a thought to the sufferers from whom, in the last resort, the material for these successive "madakhils" has been derived, and from the sweat of whose uncomplaining brow has been wrung the wealth that is

dissipated in luxurious country houses, European curiosities and enormous retinues."⁹²

While the details of social, political and religious life in nineteenth century Persia are of necessity unique to that particular country,⁹³ a striking parallel can, nonetheless, be drawn to the general decadence which beset the Arabs in the decades prior to the Revelation brought by Muhammad. The parallel structure of these two epochs becomes glaringly evident when in the year 1844 C.E., (1260 A.H.), in the Persian town of Shiraz, we find a young merchant, by the name of Siyyid Ali Muhammad, proclaiming to the Muslim world that He was the promised Qa'im, the long expected Mahdi, in short, a Prophet of God. As we have already seen in the case of the Prophet Muhammad, such a declaration, of necessity, entails the restructuring of prevailing material and spiritual standards into conformity with the Will of God, as revealed through His Revelation.

...The innovations which He proclaimed, though purely religious, were drastic; the announcement of His own identity startling and tremendous. He made Himself known as the Qa'im, the High Prophet or Messiah so long promised, so eagerly expected by the Muhammadan world. He added to this that he (sic) was also the Gate (that is, the Bab) through whom a greater Manifestation than Himself was to enter the human realm.

⁹² Nabil-i-Azam, The Dawn Breakers, trans. by Shoghi Effendi (Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1970), pp. xxiv-xxviii.

⁹³ Ibid., pp. xxxviii-xlvi.

Putting Himself thus in line with the traditions of Islam, and appearing as the fulfilment of prophecy, He came into conflict with those who had fixed and ineradicable ideas (different from His) as to what those prophecies and traditions meant. The two great Persian sects of Islam, the shi'ah and the sunnis, both attached vital importance to the ancient deposit of their faith but did not agree as to its contents or its import.....

.....
 Important as these differences are, both sects agree, however, in expecting a twofold Manifestation. The shi'ahs look for the Qa'im, who is to come in the fulness of time, and also for the return of the Imam Husayn. The sunnis await the appearance of the Mihdi and also, 'the return of Jesus Christ.' When at the beginning of his Mission, the Bab, continuing the tradition of the shi'ahs, proclaimed His function under the double title of, first, the Qa'im, second, the Gate, or Bab, some of the Muhammadans misunderstood the latter reference. They imagined His meaning to be that He was the fifth Gate in succession to Abu'l-Hasan-'Ali. His true meaning, however, as He himself clearly announced, was very different. He was the Qa'im; but the Qa'im, though a High Prophet, stood in relation to a succeeding and greater Manifestation as did John the Baptist to Christ. He was also the Forerunner of One yet more mighty than Himself. He was to decrease; that Mighty One was to increase. And as John the Baptist had been the Herald or Gate of the Christ, so was the Bab the Herald or Gate of Baha'u'llah.

There are many authentic traditions showing that the Qa'im on His appearance would bring new laws with Him and would thus abrogate Islam. But this was not the understanding of the established hierarchy. They confidently expected that the promised Advent would not substitute a new and richer revelation for the old, but would endorse and fortify the system of which they were the functionaries. It would enhance incalculably their personal prestige, would extent their authority far and wide among the nations, and would win for them the reluctant but abject homage of mankind. When the Bab revealed His Bayan, proclaimed a new code of religious law, and by precept and example instituted a profound moral and spiritual reform, the priests immediately scented mortal danger. They saw their monopoly undermined, their ambitions threatened, their own lives and conduct put to shame. They rose

against Him in sanctimonious indignation. They declared before the Shah and all the people that this upstart was an enemy of sound learning, a subverter of Islam, a traitor to Muhammad, and a peril not only to the holy church but to the social order and to the State itself.⁹⁴

It is not hard to understand, in light of the foregoing conditions as related to Persia, that this "new" Prophet should eventually meet with death at the hands of the Persian clergy, for it was after all their regime that was the most threatened by the new Revelation. His execution (Martyrdom) took place in the town of Tabriz on July 9th., 1850.⁹⁵ That this sentence was meant to extinguish the faith of those who gave adherence to Him, can hardly be questioned. As seems to be the case in so many other matters of faith, such action, coupled to the severe persecutions that were concurrently and subsequently inflicted upon His professed, or suspected, followers, served only to fan that faith to greater depths of devotion.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. xxix-xxxi.

⁹⁵ For details of the Martyrdom of the Bab, the reader may refer to any one of the following: Nabil-i-Azam, The Dawn Breakers, p. 513; Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By (Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1957), pp. 49-60; 'Abdu'l-Baha, A Traveller's Narrative, p. 319; A. L. M. Nicholas, Seyyed Ali Mohammed Dit Le Bab (Dujarric et Cie., 50 Rue Des Saints-Pères, 1905), p. 365.

⁹⁶ For details of the persecutions of the early Babis the reader may refer to any one of the following: Nabil-i-Azam, The Dawn Breakers, pp. 280, 282, 414, 446, 463, 487, 580 et al.; Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, pp. 35-48, 63-66, 71-85, 89-91, 180 (Babis); 178, 197-203, 296-299 (Baha'is).

While the precepts advanced by the Bab can be argued to be worthy (indeed demand) to stand alongside Islam, Christianity, Judaism etc., as a Religion of God, it is not within the aims of this thesis to examine that aspect in any but the preceeding superficial manner.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, the preceeding does contain the element needed for the transition to the detail of the actual subject matter. The bridge lies in the statement of the Bab that He was but the Forerunner or Herald of "He Whom God shall make manifest," namely the second greater Manifestation, or Prophet of God.⁹⁸

In 1853 C.E., Mirza Husayn Ali of Nur, a follower of the Bab, issued the Declaration that He was the One to Whom the Bab made reference.

Baha'u'llah, as Mirza Husayn Ali was surnamed by the Bab, was born in 1817, in Tehran. As the son of Mirza Buzurg of Nur, a minister of the court of the Shah, He grew up amidst great riches and comfort. Unlike those of His peer group He showed little or no attraction to the "courtly" life, and, indeed, on being offered the post left vacant by the death of His father, He refused to accept it, and subsequently withdrew forever from the life of the court.

⁹⁷ For a Baha'i expansion of the claim, the reader may refer to: Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah (Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1969), p.123.

⁹⁸ Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p.97.

It is commonly agreed that although untutored, and while still very young, He time and again amazed the doctors of Islam with His clear and irrefutable expositions of subjects reserved for the theologian or scholar. While He gave no formal intimation of His future Station and adherent Proclamation, we can nevertheless see in His childhood actions and bearing the classic powers associated with a Prophet:

...The learning current amongst men I studied not; their schools I entered not. Ask of the city wherein I dwelt, that thou mayest be well assured that I am not of them who speak falsely. This is but a leaf which the winds of the will of thy Lord, the Almighty, the All-Praised, have stirred....⁹⁹

At the age of twenty-seven Baha'u'llah received a letter from the Bab (Whom He had not previously met). On reading the contents of that letter He declared His belief in the Bab as both a Manifestation of God, and the Harbringer of a second greater Manifestation.

During the short ministry of the Bab (1844-1850), we find Baha'u'llah travelling, and promoting in general, the Teachings of the Bab. Upon the death of the Bab, He continued to bolster the faith of the Babis, and eventually in 1852 was imprisoned in the wake of an unsuccessful attempt on the life of the Shah by two Babis.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Baha'u'llah, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, trans. by Shoghi Effendi (Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1969), p. 89.

¹⁰⁰ For details of the leadership of the Babi Community

It was during this imprisonment that He relates the receipt of the first intimations of His own Mission as the one foretold by the Bab. Following is His account of those moments:

One night in a dream, these exalted words were heard on every side: 'Verily, We shall render Thee victorious by Thyself and by Thy Pen. Grieve Thou not for that which hath befallen Thee, neither be Thou afraid, for Thou art in safety. Ere long will God raise up the treasures of the earth--men who will aid Thee through Thyself and through Thy Name, wherewith God hath revived the hearts of such as have recognized Him.'

.....
 ...During the days I lay in the prison of Tihiran, though the galling weight of the chains and the stench filled air allowed Me but little sleep, still in those infrequent moments of slumber I felt as if something flowed from the crown of My head over My breast, even as a mighty torrent that precipitateth itself upon the earth from the summit of a lofty mountain. Every limb of My body would, as a result, be set afire. At such moments My tongue recited what no man could bear to hear.¹⁰¹

It was not, however, until 1863 that He made public His claims to Prophethood. This was in part achieved in a series of Letters, written between 1863 and 1892, addressed respectively to the kings and rulers of the world, the religious leaders of the world, as well as a "collective announcement" to mankind.¹⁰²

following the Martyrdom of the Bab, the reader may refer to: H. M. Balyuzi, Edward Granville Browne and the Baha'i Faith (George Ronald, Oxford, 1970), pp. 42ff.

¹⁰¹ Baha'u'llah, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, pp. 21-22.

¹⁰² For a complete compilation of these Letters, the reader may refer to: Baha'u'llah, The Proclamation of Baha'u'llah (Broadwater Press, Hertfordshire, 1967).

It is of interest to note that this method of "proclamation"

is also attributed to Muhammad:

It is on record that in 628 he (Muhammad) had letters written and sent to the four great rulers of his day: The King of Persia, the Emperor of Byzance, the Governor of Egypt, and the Prince of Abyssinia. Yet he summoned them, not to submit politically and to pay tribute, but to accept the Muslim religion.¹⁰³

The parallel is further enhanced by the fact that both "proclamations" were met with complete rejection by their respective recipients.

In addition to these Letters, He "revealed" over one hundred Tablets, the most important of which are the Kitab-i-Aqdas (The Book of Laws), Kitab-i-Iqan (The Book of Certitude), Kitab-i-Ahd (The Book of His Covenant), Lawh-i-Ibn-Dhi'b (Epistle to the Son of the Wolf), Kalimat-i-Maknunih (The Hidden Words), and Haft-Vadi (The Seven Valleys)--all of which, with the exception of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, which is presently available to the West in synopsis form only, have been translated into English. In addition, the following compilation works contain material of great importance: Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, and Baha'i World Faith.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Malachi Martin, The Encounter: Religions in Crisis (Michael Joseph Ltd., 52 Bedford Square, London, 1970), p.131.

¹⁰⁴ For a list of the names, dates and places of the "revelations" of Baha'u'llah, the reader may refer to: "Historical Data Gleaned From Nabil's Narrative (Vol.II) Regarding Baha'u'llah," The Baha'i World 1954-1963, 1970. Vol.XIII,

The foregoing Works form the central core of the Baha'i Revelation and, as such, preclude reference, as in the case of Islam, to one single piece of Source material. The matter is further complicated by the fact that both the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha (Baha'u'llah's son, and the Center of His Covenant), and Shoghi Effendi Rabbani (Baha'u'llah's great grandson, and the duly appointed Guardian of the Faith) are accorded the stature of "authorized interpretations" of the Writings of Baha'u'llah, and must therefore be viewed as both complementary and integral to any study of the Baha'i Revelation.¹⁰⁵ The reader can then expect the appearance, in the main body of this work, of quotations from both these central Figures. With this in mind we now propose, as we did in the case of Islam, to provide a general synopsis of what appear to be the most salient features of Baha'i Revelation.

pp. 753-756; "Baha'u'llah's Best-Known Writings," The Baha'i World, Vol. XIII, pp. 1061-1062.

¹⁰⁵ Infra, pp. 119-123.

CHAPTER VI

BAHA'I REVELATION: CENTRAL THEMES

At the very heart of the Baha'i Revelation lies the concept of the "Unity of God." As in the case of Islam, this Unity demands the absolute Singleness of God as both Creator and Ruler of the universe ('and all that abides therein').

Indeed the following quotation might well be from the Qur'an:

...Beware, beware, lest thou be led to join partners with the Lord, thy God. He is, and hath from everlasting been, one and alone, without peer or equal, eternal in the past, eternal in the future, detached from all things, ever abiding, unchangeable, and self-subsisting. He hath assigned no associate unto Himself in His Kingdom, no counsellor to counsel Him, none to compare unto Him, none to rival His Glory...¹⁰⁶

He, Baha'u'llah, continues in the very same section to speak of the oneness of God's attributes (a cause of some dispute in the Islamic community) in the following terms:

He, in truth, hath, throughout eternity, been one in His Essence, one in His attributes, one in His works. Any and every comparison is applicable only to His creatures, and all conceptions of association are conceptions that belong solely to those that serve Him...The birds of men's hearts however high they

¹⁰⁶ Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, compiled and trans. by Shoghi Effendi (Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1956), p. 192.

soar, can never hope to attain the heights of His unknowable Essence...¹⁰⁷

This last statement can be compared with the traditional sunni approach to the positioning of God within the framework of human understanding.

The Originator of the world is God Most High: the One, the Eternal, the Living, the Powerful, the Knowing, the Hearing, the Seeing, the Willing, the Deciding. He is not an attribute, not a body, not an essence, not formed, not bounded, not numbered, not divided, not compounded, not limited; He is not described by what-ness, nor by how-ness; He does not have a position in a place, and time does not pass for Him. Nothing resembles Him. And nothing is outside His Knowledge and His Power.¹⁰⁸

It is then fair to say that a prerequisite of both Baha'i and Islamic metaphysics is the absolute distinction, or separateness, of God from His creation. Unlike orthodox Islam however, which limits existence to the duality of Divinity and humanity, we find Baha'u'llah proposing a three-fold vision of existence:

Know that the conditions of existence are limited to the conditions of servitude, of prophethood, and of Deity...¹⁰⁹

As illustrated in the foregoing, the realm of Deity

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 193.

¹⁰⁸ McGill University, Institute of Islamic Studies, "A Statement of Islamic Theology: The Creed of al-Nasafi," p. 1. (Mimeographed.)

¹⁰⁹ Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'i World Faith: Selected Writings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha (Compilation. Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1956), p. 328.

is seen to lie at the center of all existence, yet to be absolutely and eternally distinct from it. Deity alone can lay claim to absolute existence.¹¹⁰ From the realm of Deity the two spheres of Prophethood and servitude draw their existence. These last two levels are designated in the Writings of Baha'u'llah as the "Greater" and "Lesser" worlds.¹¹¹

The Lesser world is held to be an "emanation" from the world of Deity, and is explained as "...the coming forth from an actor, of the writing from the writer...in the same way the human spirit emanates from God. It is not that it manifests God--that is to say, no part has been detached from the Divine Reality to enter the body of men."¹¹²

It is further proposed that man occupies a unique station within the Lesser world, in that he alone was created in God's image. As the foregoing would indicate, this is to be understood in the sense of man containing not the Essence, or form, of Divinity, but that his soul possesses the ability to reflect the attributes and characteristics of God.

Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, He, through the direct operation of His unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to

¹¹⁰ Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings*, p. 157.

¹¹¹ Baha'u'llah, *Baha'i World Faith*, pp. 70-71.

¹¹² Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions*, trans. by Laura Clifford Barney (Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1970), p. 239.

confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him--a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation.... Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes. Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. Alone of all created things man hath been singled out for so great a favour, so enduring a bounty.¹¹³

As in Islam, man has the "freedom" to accept or reject, to seek out or to remain apathetic toward, this "knowledge," the possession or acceptance of which allows him to structure his material and spiritual life according to the Divine Will (and by so doing ensure the continued progress of his soul toward God).

Yet while the "generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation" is that man should "know and love God," great emphasis is placed on the fact that such knowledge cannot stem from the direct intercourse of man with God.¹¹⁴ Human knowledge, at the height of its potential, is restricted to the knowledge of the "qualities" or "attributes" of God.¹¹⁵ It must be stated that man, being an emanation from God, can never lay claim to possession of "Absolutes." That is, no matter how pure the

¹¹³ Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, p. 65.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 66.

¹¹⁵ 'Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'i World Faith, p. 321.

mirror of the human soul it can never reflect in full the Perfection of the qualities, or attributes, of God, and, as such, precludes the possibility of any man totally "knowing" God's Will.¹¹⁶ This completely rejects the claims of Sufism, and, in addition, is contrary to the traditional Islamic understanding of Revelation, in which we find God speaking, albeit through an Angel, to Muhammad who retained at all times a completely human station.¹¹⁷

At this juncture we find Baha'i Revelation positing the necessity of an intermediary level of existence known as the Greater world. The Greater world is held to be "manifested" by God (as versus the emanation of the Lesser world). The term "manifested" is not seen as referring to the division of Deity into parts, but rather as the appearance of His

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 321.

¹¹⁷ Baha'u'llah, *The Book of Certitude*, trans. by Shoghi Effendi (Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1970), pp. 140-141: "...Now, if by 'attainment unto the Presence of God' is meant attainment unto the knowledge of such revelation, it is evident that all men have already attained unto the presence of the unchangeable Countenance of that peerless King. Why, then, restrict such revelation to the Day of Resurrection?

And were they to maintain that, by 'divine Presence' is meant the 'Specific Revelation of God,' expressed by certain Sufis as the 'Most Holy Outpouring,' if this be in the Essence Itself, it is evident that it hath been eternally in the divine Knowledge. Assuming the truth of this hypothesis, 'attainment unto the divine Presence' is in this sense obviously possible to no one, inasmuch as this revelation is confined to the innermost Essence, unto which no man can attain. 'The way is barred, and all seeking rejected.' The minds of the favourites of heaven, however high they soar, can never attain this station, how much less the understanding of obscured and limited minds."

attributes in another form. The analogy is used that proceeding through manifestation is "like the coming forth of this tree from the seed of the tree...for it is the seed itself which appears in the form of the branches, leaves, and flowers."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ 'Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 239.

CHAPTER VII

THE MANIFESTATION OF GOD

The discussion in the last chapter emphasized a structure of existence which allows Deity to retain absolute distinction from creation, but simultaneously allows for the manifestation of Deity in another level of existence, namely, the Greater World. As the following quotation will show, the Greater World is in turn connected, or tied, to the Lesser World:

Wishing to reveal Thyself, Thou didst call into being the Greater and the Lesser Worlds, and didst choose Man above all Thy creatures, and didst make Him a sign of both these worlds...

.....
Thou didst raise Him up to occupy Thy throne before all the people of Thy Creation. Thou didst enable Him to unravel Thy mysteries, and to shine with the lights of Thine inspiration and Thy Revelation, and to manifest Thy names and Thine attributes...¹¹⁹

It is evident that the sole tie which connects all three levels is Revelation, and that such Revelation can only enter the Lesser world through the "Man." This Man is known as the Prophet, or Manifestation, of God (since He alone manifests God's attributes). It is through the Manifestation

¹¹⁹ Baha'u'llah, Baha'i World Faith, pp. 70-71.

that knowledge of God, in the form of Revelation, is given to man.

In the Manifestation of God, the perfectly polished mirror, appear the qualities of the Divine in a form that man is capable of comprehending.¹²⁰

The Baha'i Writings posit a duality with regards "perfection."

The Manifestation is seen to have essential sinlessness, or, inherent Perfection:

Essential sinlessness is peculiar to the Universal Manifestation, for it is his essential requirement, and an essential requirement cannot be separated from the thing itself. The rays are the essential necessity of the sun, and are inseparable from it.¹²¹

Men, on the other hand, can only aspire to acquired sinlessness, or perfection that is acquired through an effort on their part. Acquired sinlessness, in other words, is not a natural necessity inherent in man's nature, but comes through both individual effort and the bounty and mercy of God.¹²²

While the Baha'i Sacred Writings would parallel the traditional Islamic classification of Prophets into those who are Rasul's (Muhammad, Jesus, Moses etc.,) and those who are Nabi's (Isaiah, David etc.,), it is obvious that they differ on the crucial issue of the "station" or "nature" of the Prophet.

¹²⁰ 'Abdu'l-Baha, Paris Talks (11th ed. ; Baha'i Publishing Trust, National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the British Isles, London, 1971), p. 26.

¹²¹ 'Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 197.

¹²² Ibid., p. 198.

as Manifestation (which latter title is, incidentally, accorded only to the Rasul). This should not be viewed as a claim toward the incarnation of God in the Rasul, but towards the appearance of God's attributes in the form of the Rasul.

Know thou of a certainty that the Unseen can in no wise incarnate His Essence and reveal it to men...¹²³

Yet there is the definite statement of a Divine aspect to the Manifestation's existence:

And since there can be no tie of direct intercourse to bind the one true God with His creation, ..., He hath ordained that in every age and dispensation a pure and stainless Soul be made manifest in the kingdom of earth and heaven. Unto this subtle, this mysterious and ethereal Being He hath assigned a twofold nature; the physical, pertaining to the world of matter, and the spiritual, which is born of the substance of God Himself. He hath, moreover, conferred upon Him a double station. The first station, which is related to His innermost reality, representeth Him as One Whose voice is the voice of God Himself. The second is the human station, exemplified by the following verses: 'I am but a man like you.' ¹²⁴

As might be expected, and as in the case of Islam, the Manifestation lays no personal claim to the Authorship of the Revelation:

By My Life! Not of mine own volition have I revealed Myself, but God, of His own choosing, hath manifested Me. ¹²⁵

or,

¹²³ Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, p. 49.

¹²⁴ Ibid., pp. 66-67.

¹²⁵ Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 102, quoting Baha'u'llah.

Whenever I chose to hold My peace and be still, lo, the Voice of the Holy Spirit, standing on My right hand, aroused Me, and the Most Great Spirit appeared before My face, and Gabriel overshadowed Me, and the Spirit of Glory stirred within My bosom, bidding Me arise and break My silence.¹²⁶

or again,

Their word is the word of God, Their commandment is the commandment of God, Their prohibition is the prohibition of God.... Their movement and repose come from divine inspiration, not from human passions.¹²⁷

In connection with the authorship of Revelation, we find the Baha'i Writings dividing knowledge into two categories--"acquired" and "essential."

Acquired knowledge is that knowledge which is gained through sensual perception, and stored in the memory for recall and use at the appropriate moment. This type of knowledge is universal to all men.

Essential knowledge, is knowledge held without effort or study, with no recourse to sensual perception. It is knowledge of the "essence" of a thing or things, and, as such, is held to be the sole property of the Manifestation of God. Essential knowledge is, in other words, held to be divine in nature and available, therefore, in the world of men only through Revelation.

He bade Me lift up My voice between earth and heaven, The learning current amongst men I studied not;

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 193.

their schools I entered not....This is but a leaf which the winds of the will of thy Lord, the Almighty, the All-Praised, hath stirred...¹²⁸

and,

...their heavenly condition embraces all things, knows all mysteries, discovers all signs, and rules over all things;....¹²⁹

The essential knowledge of the Manifestation is seen to be synonymous with knowledge of the Word of God as found in the Mother Book, or Tablet--a concept which we have already broached in the section on Islam, and which is related as follows in the Baha'i Writings:

Every single letter proceeding out of the mouth of God is indeed a mother letter, and every word uttered by Him Who is the Well-Spring of Divine Revelation is a mother word, and His Tablet a Mother Tablet.¹³⁰

or,

...This verily, is the most exalted Word which the Mother Book hath sent down and revealed unto you.¹³¹

It is the Manifestation, through the power of the Holy Spirit, Who mediates the Word of God to men. The analogy is often drawn of God representing the physical sun, the Holy Spirit being the rays of the sun, and, as such, the vehicle of its light and warmth. The Manifestation is seen as a pure

¹²⁸ Baha'u'llah, The Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p.11.

¹²⁹ Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p.254.

¹³⁰ Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, p.142.

¹³¹ Ibid., p.217.

and stainless mirror which reflects, or translates, those "rays" into a form acceptable to men. In this connection we find the Holy Spirit personified in the Utterances of Baha'u'llah as a Maiden,¹³² the Angel Gabriel,¹³³ the wind, or simply as being received during a dream ("...I lay asleep on my couch, O my God, when lo, the gentle winds of Thy grace and Thy loving kindness passed over me, and wakened me through the power of Thy sovereignty and Thy gifts, and bade me arise before Thy servants, and speak forth Thy praise, and glorify Thy word...")¹³⁴

The direct implication is that the Manifestation, through His words and actions in the Lesser world, converts "primary" Revelation, or essential knowledge of God, into "secondary" Revelation, which is comprehensible to men.¹³⁵ In other words, the Baha'i concept of the Prophet, or Manifestation, sees Him as the Perfect Man, through Whose Person the Word of God finds expression in the world of men. Epiphenomenally He is seen as the sole source of such knowledge:

The knowledge of Him, Who is the Origin of all

¹³² Baha'u'llah, *Surat'ul Hykl* (Behais Supply and Publishing Board, Chicago, Illinois, 1900), p.10.

¹³³ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p.102.

¹³⁴ Baha'u'llah, *Prayers and Meditations* by Baha'u'llah, Compiled and trans. by Shoghi Effendi (Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1969), pp.306-307.

¹³⁵ Baha'u'llah, *The Book of Certitude*, pp.141-142.

things, and attainment unto Him, are impossible save through knowledge of, and attainment unto, these luminous Beings who proceed from the Sun of Truth. By attaining, therefore, to the presence of these holy Luminaries, the 'Presence of God' Himself is attained. From their knowledge, the knowledge of God is revealed, and from the light of their countenance, the splendour of the Face of God is made manifest...¹³⁶

In the case of Baha'u'llah, we find that He used several methods to transmit secondary Revelation to men. He might recite it during, or after, the actual moment that the Holy Spirit prompted Him to speak. Generally speaking, the "verses" were recorded by several amanuenses.

... 'Day and night,' an eye-witness has written, 'the Divine verses were raining down in such number that it was impossible to record them. Mirza Aqa Jan wrote them as they were dictated, while the Most Great Branch was continually occupied in transcribing them. There was not a moment to spare.' 'A number of secretaries,' Nabil has testified, 'were busy day and night and yet they were unable to cope with the task. Among them was Mirza Baqir-i-Sharazi.... He alone transcribed no less than two thousand verses every day. He laboured during six or seven months. Every month the equivalent of several volumes would be transcribed by him and sent to Persia. About twenty volumes, in his fine penmanship, he left behind as a remembrance for Mirza Aqa Jan.' Baha'u'llah, Himself, referring to the verses revealed by Him, has written: 'Such are the outpourings... from the clouds of Divine Bounty that within the space of an hour the equivalent of a thousand verses hath been revealed.' 'So great is the grace vouchsafed in this day that in a single day and night, were an amanuensis capable of accomplishing it to be found, the equivalent of the Persian Bayan would be sent down from the heaven of Divine holiness.' 'I swear by God!' He, in another connection has affirmed, 'In those days the equivalent of all that hath been sent down aforetime unto the Prophets hath been revealed.' 'That which hath already been

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 142.

revealed in this land (Adrianople), 'He, furthermore, referring to the copiousness of His writings, has declared, 'secretaries are incapable of transcribing. It has, therefore, remained for the most part untranscribed.'¹³⁷

On occasion the Revelation was actually penned by Baha'u'llah Himself. This latter method of transcription is unique among the Prophets to Baha'u'llah, and, as such, is one of the truly distinctive features of His Revelation.

In expansion and support of this, one may turn to the following passage from God Passes By:

The enormous expansion in the scope and volume of Baha'u'llah's writings, after His return from Sulaymaniyah, is yet another distinguishing feature of the period under review. The verses that streamed during those years from His pen, described as 'a copious rain' by Himself, whether in the form of epistles, exhortations, commentaries, apologies, dissertations, prophecies, prayers, odes or specific Tablets, contributed, to a marked degree, to the reformation and progressive unfoldment of the Babi community, to the broadening of its outlook, to the expansion of its activities and to the enlightenment of the minds of its members. So prolific was this period, that during the first two years after His return from His retirement, according to the testimony of Nabil, who was at that time living in Baghdad, the unrecorded verses that streamed from His lips averaged, in a single day and night, the equivalent of the Qur'an! As to those verses which He either dictated or wrote Himself, their number was no less remarkable than either the wealth of material they contained, or the diversity of subjects to which they referred. A vast, and indeed the greater, proportion of these writings were, alas, lost irretrievably to posterity. No less an authority than Mirza Aqa Jan, Baha'u'llah's amanuensis, affirms, as reported by Nabil, that by the express order of Baha'u'llah, hundreds of thousands of verses, mostly written by His own hand,

¹³⁷ Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, pp. 170-171.

were obliterated and cast into the river. 'Finding me reluctant to execute His orders,' Mirza Aqa Jan has related to Nabil, 'Baha'u'llah would reassure me saying: "None is to be found at this time worthy to hear these melodies." ...Not once, or twice, but innumerable times, was I commanded to repeat this act.' A certain Muhammad Karim, a native of Shiraz, who had been a witness to the rapidity and the manner in which the Bab had penned the verses with which He was inspired, has left the following testimony to posterity, after attaining, during those days, the presence of Baha'u'llah, and beholding with his own eyes what he himself had considered to be the only proof of the mission of the Promised One: 'I bear witness that the verses revealed by Baha'u'llah were superior, in rapidity, in the ease with which they flowed, in their lucidity, their profundity and sweetness to those which I, myself saw pour from the pen of the Bab when in His presence. Had Baha'u'llah no other claim to greatness, this were sufficient, in the eyes of the world and its people, that He produced such verses as have streamed this day from His pen.'¹³⁸

The effect of the Prophet and His Revelation on those around Him was no less remarkable, as these passages will show:

'Most of those who surrounded Baha'u'llah,' wrote Nabil, describing the spirit that animated the reformed Babi community in Baghdad, 'exercised such care in sanctifying and purifying their souls, that they would suffer no word to cross their lips that might not conform to the will of God, nor would they take a single step that might be contrary to His good-pleasure.' 'Each one,' he relates, 'had entered into a pact with one of his fellow-disciples, in which they agreed to admonish one another, and, if necessary, chastise one another with a number of blows on the soles of the feet, proportioning the number of strokes to the gravity of the offense against the lofty standards they had sworn to observe.' Describing the fervor of their zeal, he states that 'not until the offender had suffered the punishment he had solicited, would he consent to either eat or drink.'

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 137-138.

The complete transformation which the written and spoken word of Baha'u'llah had effected in the outlook and character of His companions was equalled by the burning devotion which His love had kindled in their souls. A passionate zeal and fervor, that rivalled the enthusiasm that had glowed so fiercely in the breasts of the Bab's disciples in their moments of greatest exaltation, had now siezed the hearts of the exiles of Baghdad and galvanized their entire beings. 'So inebriated,' Nabil, describing the fecundity of this tremendously dynamic spiritual revival, has written, 'so-carried away was every one by the sweet savours of the Morn of Divine Revelation that, methinks, out of every thorn sprang forth heaps of blossoms, and every seed yielded innumerable harvests,' 'The room of the Most Great House,' that same chronicler has recorded, 'set apart for the reception of Baha'u'llah's visitors, though dilapidated, and having long since outgrown its usefulness, vied, through having been trodden by the blessed footsteps of the Well Beloved, with the Most Exalted Paradise. Low-roofed, it yet seemed to reach to the stars, and though it boasted but a single couch, fashioned from the branches of palms, wheron He Who is the King of Names was wont to sit, it drew to itself, even as a loadstone, the hearts of the princes.'

.....
 Numerous and striking are the anecdotes which have been recounted by those whom duty, accident, or inclination had, in the course of these poignant years, brought into direct contact with Baha'u'llah. Many and moving are the testimonies of bystanders who were privileged to gaze on His countenance, observe His gait, or overhear His remarks, as He moved through the lanes and streets of the city, or paced the banks of the river; of the worshippers who watched Him pray in their mosques; of the mendicant, the sick, the aged, and the unfortunate whom He succored, healed, supported and comforted; of the visitors, from the haughtiest prince to the meanest beggar, who crossed His threshold and sat at His feet; of the merchant, the artisan, and the shopkeeper who waited upon Him and supplied His daily needs; of His devotees who had perceived the signs of His hidden glory; of His adversaries who were confounded or disarmed by the power of His utterance and the warmth of His love; of the priests and laymen, the noble and learned, who besought Him with the intention of either challenging His authority, or testing His knowledge, or investigating

His claims, or confessing their shortcomings, or declaring their conversion to the Cause He had espoused.

From such a treasury of precious memories it will suffice my purpose to cite but a single instance, that of one of His ardent lovers, a native of Zavarih, Siyyid Isma'il by name, surnamed Dhabih (the sacrifice), formerly a noted divine, taciturn, meditative and wholly severed from every earthly tie, whose self-appointed task, on which he prided himself, was to sweep the approaches of the house in which Baha'u'llah was dwelling. Unwinding his green turban, the ensign of his holy lineage, from his head, he would, at the hour of dawn, gather up, with infinite patience, the rubble which the footsteps of his Beloved had trodden, would blow the dust from the crannies of the wall adjacent to the door of that house, would collect the sweepings in the folds of his own cloak, and, scorning to cast his burden for the feet of others to tread upon, would carry it as far as the banks of the river and throw it into its waters. Unable, at length, to contain the ocean of love that surged within his soul, he, after having denied himself for forty days both sleep and sustenance, and rendering for the last time the service so dear to his heart, betook himself, one day, to the banks of the river, on the road to Kazimayn, performed his ablutions, lay on his back, with his face turned towards Baghdad, severed his throat with a razor, laid the razor upon his breast, and expired. (1275 A.H.)

Nor was he the only one who had meditated such an act and was determined to carry it out. Others were ready to follow suit, had not Baha'u'llah promptly intervened, and ordered the refugees living in Baghdad to return immediately to their native land....¹³⁹

The only person of European extraction to attain to Baha'u'llah's presence was Professor E. G. Browne. Professor Browne has recorded his meeting in the following words:

Of the culminating event of this my journey some few words at least must be said. During the morning of the day after my installation at Behjé one

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp. 134, 135 and 136.

of Beha's younger sons entered the room where I was sitting and beckoned to me to follow him. I did so, and was conducted through passages and rooms at which I scarcely had time to glance to a spacious hall, paved, so far as I remember (for my mind was occupied with other thoughts) with a mosaic of marble. Before a curtain suspended from the wall of this great ante-chamber my conductor paused for a moment while I removed my shoes. Then, with a quick movement of the hand, he withdrew, and, as I passed, replaced the curtain; and I found myself in a large apartment, along the upper end of which ran a low divan, while on the side opposite to the door were placed two or three chairs.

Though I dimly suspected whither I was going and whom I was to behold (for no distinct intimation had been given to me), a second or two elapsed ere, with a throb of wonder and awe, I became definitely conscious that the room was not untenanted. In the corner where the divan met the wall sat a wondrous and venerable figure, crowned with a felt head-dress, of the kind called taj by dervishes (but of unusual height and make), round the base of which was wound a small white turban. The face of him on whom I gazed I can never forget, though I cannot describe it. Those piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow; while the deep lines on the forehead and face implied an age which the jet-black hair and beard flowing down in indistinguishable luxuriance almost to the waist seemed to belie. No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh in vain!

A mild dignified voice bade me be seated, and then continued:- 'Praise be to God that thou hast attained! ...Thou hast come to see a prisoner and an exile.... We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations; yet they deem us a stirrer up of strife and sedition worthy of bondage and banishmentThat all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled--what harm is there in this? ...Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the "Most Great Peace" shall come....Do not you in Europe need this also? Is not this that which Christ foretold?....Yet

do we see your kings and rulers lavishing their treasures more freely on means for the destruction of the human race than on that which would conduce to the happiness of mankind...These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men be as one kindred and one family....Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind....

Such, so far as I can recall them, were the words which, besides many others, I heard from Beha. Let those who read them consider well with themselves whether such doctrines merit death and bonds, and whether the world is more likely to gain or lose by their diffusion.¹⁴⁰

Such then were the effects produced in believer and non-believer alike when they entered the presence of this Prophet.

As stated earlier, the Baha'i Prophet assumes a double station about His personage. We now wish to turn to an examination of this claim in its relation to Revelation itself.

¹⁴⁰ E. G. Browne, trans. A Traveller's Narrative, "Introduction," pp. xxxix-xl.

CHAPTER VIII

PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

In keeping with the concept of the Unity of God, we find the double station of the Manifestation carrying the implication that while the physical reality of each Manifestation must of necessity differ, there must, nevertheless, remain a "singleness" in the Source of their Revelation. That is, the Source of the Revelation, for each and every Manifestation, regardless of His physical location, or any other material and/or human consideration, is the same God.

...these Birds of the Celestial Throne are all sent down from the heaven of the Will of God, and as they all arise to proclaim His irresistible Faith, they therefore are regarded as one, soul and the same person...each (have) a twofold station. One is the station of pure abstraction and essential unity. In this respect, if thou callest them all by one name, and dost ascribe to them the same attributes thou hast not erred from the truth. Even as He hath revealed: 'No distinction do we make between any of His Messengers! For they one and all summon the people of the earth to acknowledge the Unity of God,....'

.....
The other, is the station of distinction, and pertaineth to the worlds of creation and to the limitations thereof. In this respect, each Manifestation of God hath a distinct individuality, a definitely prescribed mission, predestined Revelation, and special attribute, fulfils a definite Mission, and is entrusted

with a particular Revelation....¹⁴¹

Baha'u'llah goes on to state that whatever differences have been made to appear between past Revelations must be attributed solely to mankind's failure to grasp the significance and nature of this "duality" in the station of the Prophetic figure.

He further emphasizes that Revelation is of a "progressive" nature. That is to say, that there has never been a time when God has not sent Revelation, through a Manifestation, to mankind. Indeed, He states unequivocally that each and every people of the world have received their own Manifestation with a Message suited both to the requirements of the age in which they lived, and to their individual capacity to comprehend it.¹⁴²

In addition, He states that each Revelation is composed of two distinct yet mutually dependent parts.¹⁴³ The first is that portion of the Revelation which deals with Spiritual Laws: such laws include, love of God, fear of God, worship of God, sacrifice, giving, etc. The Spiritual Laws are held to be eternal and essential verities, and, as such, to form the kernel of all Revelation. They do not change

¹⁴¹ Baha'u'llah, *The Book of Certitude*, pp. 153, 176.

¹⁴² Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings*, pp. 79, 87.

¹⁴³ Abdu'l-Baha, *The Proclamation of Universal Peace* (Baha'i Publishing Committee, Wilmette, Illinois, 1943), pp. 397-398.

with the passage of time, and/or, the advent of new Manifestations. In keeping with the capacity of the recipients, however, we find some Revelations contain more Spiritual Laws than others--normally speaking, the addition of new Spiritual Laws, related as they are to the evolution of mankind, closely parallels the passage of historical time.

The second unit, or part, of Revelation is seen in the Writings of Baha'u'llah as those prescriptions and proscriptions associated with the material side of life--namely such matters as dietary laws, marriage, divorce, inheritance, and in general those matters allied to social interaction. Contrary to the Spiritual Laws, which as we saw are held to be eternal, the Material or Social Laws are temporal, subject to abrogation by the next "Revelation," and, therefore, differ in accordance with the particular requirements of the various recipient peoples.

When we consider that "religion" is held by Baha'u'llah to be "the chief instrument for the establishment of order in the world, and of tranquillity amongst its peoples,"¹⁴⁴ and that it (religion) is the "outer expression of the divine reality,"¹⁴⁵ it is not surprising that Revelation should be seen as "progressive" in nature, and, of necessity, the sole

¹⁴⁴ Baha'u'llah, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 28.

¹⁴⁵ Baha'u'llah, Baha'i World Faith, p. 224.

and essential generating impulse behind mankind's proper spiritual and material evolution as human beings. 'Abdu'l-Baha has this to say on the subject:

The Holy Manifestations of God are the centers of the light of Reality....The enlightenment of the world of thought comes from these centers of light and sources of mysteries. Without the bounty of the splendour, and the instructions of these Holy Beings, the world of souls and thoughts would be opaque darkness. Without the irrefutable teachings of these Sources of mysteries, the human world would become the pasture of animal appetites and qualities, the existence of anything would be unreal, and there would be no true life.¹⁴⁶

It is of interest and significance to note, at this juncture, that in conjunction with its concept of the Unity of God, the Baha'i Revelation accepts not only those Revelations which might loosely be classed as belonging to the Judaic-Christian-Islamic genealogy, but embraces, in turn, those of Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, as well as some specifically mentioned lesser known religious traditions. The point is, however, that as a claimant to universal significance the Baha'i Revelation cannot, and does not, deny the authenticity, and, therefore, the inherent "correctness," or Divine Basis of every one of the world's religious traditions. This significant point of "contact" reduces, if not entirely eliminates, what resistance might be expected from those whose religious background is other than Judaic-Christian-

¹⁴⁶ 'Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, pp. 185-186.

Islamic, in that it does not, as do the other major Revelatory Religions, deny the basic authenticity of the other's faith, but rather confirms and consummates the spiritual aspects of that faith, while yet rejuvenating and re-applying the material, or social, principles, in accordance with the requirements of the current age.

While Progressive Revelation is significant in and of itself, it must, however, be appreciated as a mere expression of, or vehicle for, the much deeper and ultimately central concept of the "Covenant." It is to that concept and its ramifications that I now wish to turn my attention.

CHAPTER IX

THE COVENANT

Quite simply a "Covenant" can be defined as a promise, by God in this context, of a blessing to be fulfilled on compliance with a stated condition or conditions.

Three basic types of Covenant are found in the Baha'i Writings: the Ancient or Greater Covenant; the Covenant between God and His Manifestation; and the new or lesser Covenant between the Manifestation and His followers.

The Ancient, or Greater Covenant forms the basis of all other types of Covenant that are to be found in the Writings of Baha'u'llah, and is none other than the promise, made by God to Adam, on behalf of the entire human race, that He would never leave humanity devoid of His love and Guidance.

Baha'u'llah states that this promise has been ongoingly maintained through the advent, in every age, and to every people, of His Manifestation bearing another unit of Progressive Revelation.¹⁴⁷

In this connection we find Baha'u'llah making the

¹⁴⁷ Baha'u'llah, Baha'i World Faith, p.9.

claim that whereas in previous Revelations the full accumulated blessings promised by God in the Ancient Covenant could not be revealed or fulfilled, that in Him, as the "Lord of the Day of the Covenant," we can find that exact fulfillment:¹⁴⁸

I testify, O my God, that this is the Day whereon Thy testimony hath been fulfilled, and Thy clear tokens have been manifested, and Thine utterances have been revealed, and Thy signs have been demonstrated, and the radiance of Thy countenance hath been diffused, and Thy proof hath been perfected, and Thine ascendancy hath been established, and Thy mercy hath overflowed, and the Day-Star of Thy grace hath shone forth with such brilliance that Thou didst manifest Him Who is the Revealer of Thyself and the Treasury of Thy wisdom and the Dawning-Place of Thy majesty and power. Thou didst establish His Covenant with every one who hath been created in the kingdoms of earth and heaven and in the realms of revelation and creation.¹⁴⁹

More specifically in another context He states:

The Revelation which, from time immemorial, hath been acclaimed as the Purpose and Promise of all the Prophets of God, and the most cherished Desire of His Messengers, hath now, by virtue of the pervasive Will of the Almighty and at His irresistible bidding been revealed unto men....¹⁵⁰

...Verily I say, this is the Day in which mankind can behold the Face, and hear the Voice, of the Promised One. The Call of God hath been raised, and the light of His countenance hath been lifted up upon men.... Great indeed is this Day! The allusions made to it in all the sacred Scriptures as the Day of God attest to its greatness.. The

¹⁴⁸ Baha'u'llah, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 133.

¹⁴⁹ Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations, pp. 35-36.

¹⁵⁰ Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, p. 5.

soul of every Prophet of God, of every Divine Messenger, hath thirsted for this wondrous Day.¹⁵¹

It should be stressed that this is not to be understood as the end of God's guidance through Manifestation (as we saw in the Muslim interpretation of Muhammad as the Seal of the Prophets), but rather as the culmination of the Adamic cycle of the Ancient Covenant, and the subsequent advent of the Baha'i cycle as the era in which mankind is to partake fully of the blessings promised at the commencement of the Adamic cycle--namely, the Kingdom of God upon earth. It is the end of the Prophetic cycle and the beginning of the Era of Fulfillment:

It is evident that every age in which a Manifestation of God hath lived is divinely ordained, and may, in a sense, be characterized as God's appointed Day. This Day, however, is unique, and is to be distinguished from those preceeding it. The designation 'Seal of the Prophets' fully revealeth its high station. The Prophetic Cycle hath, verily, ended. The Eternal Truth is now come. He hath lifted up the Ensign of Power, and is now shedding upon the world the unclouded splendor of His Revelation.¹⁵²

Just as Revelation is the sole link between God and His creation, so too it is the common factor in the cycles through which men, under the shelter of the Ancient Covenant, must pass. The Ancient Covenant is renewed with the advent of each new Manifestation. In order to accomplish this

¹⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

¹⁵² Baha'u'llah, Baha'i World Faith, p. 28.

renewal, God makes a Covenant with each Manifestation as to the specifics of His particular Revelation:

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 the almighty Tablet. The measure of the Revelation with which every one of them hath been identified had been definitely fore-ordained...¹⁵³

Stated in another manner, this type of Covenant is the basis of the absolute authority of the Manifestation over men.¹⁵⁴ This authority allows the Manifestation, on behalf of God, to enter into a Lesser Covenant with men. The Lesser Covenant usually entails an "ethical Covenant of faith and obedience,"¹⁵⁵ a Covenant concerning the advent of the next Manifestation,¹⁵⁶ and a Covenant appointing an immediate Successor to the Manifestation (who in turn may Covenant concerning continuing "succession" on his own death).

While each of the foregoing types of Covenant are integral to the Baha'i Revelation, it is the latter type which has the most bearing upon my final area of discussion, namely

¹⁵³ Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, p. 74.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 80.

¹⁵⁵ Baha'u'llah, A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, issued by the Universal House of Justice (Broadwater Press, Hertfordshire, 1973), p. 11.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

the problem of how historic Revelation speaks to modern man.

As we saw in the case of Islam, the singular absence of a direct, unambiguous, unanimously accepted, statement by the Prophet, as to who, on His death, was to lead the community, was a dilemma which rapidly produced the Sunni and Shi'a, and later the "other" lesser schisms with their attendant interpretations of the Qur'an, and the ahadith, as applied to "modern" circumstances.

In light of those discussions and the designation therein of the crucial role played by "non-authoritative" interpretation in the generation of the current Islamic dilemma, the benefit of a "Covenant of Succession" should be only too evident. It is of interest to note at this point, that Baha'u'llah came from a Shi'ite background, and was therefore brought up in the tradition of Ali as the only legitimate successor to Muhammad as head of the community. Baha'is would be quick to point out, however, that as a Prophet of God, His background has no possible influence on His Revelation-- Revelation being, of course, a completely external "event" over which the Prophet has no control whatsoever. Nevertheless, we find that Revelation giving confirmation to the legitimacy of Ali's claim to succession:

O My Friends!

Call ye to mind that covenant ye have entered into with Me upon Mount Paran, situate within the hallowed precincts of Zaman. I have taken to witness the concourse on high and the dwellers in the city of etern-

ity, yet none do I find faithful unto the covenant. Of a certainty pride and rebellion have effaced it from the hearts, in such wise that no trace thereof remaineth. Yet knowing this, I waited and disclosed it not.¹⁵⁷

In the case of His own succession, Baha'u'llah, in both the Kitab-i-'Ahd and the Tablet of the Branch, appointed a "Center of His Covenant" toward Whom all were to turn:

God's Will and Testament enjoins upon the Aghsan, the Afnan, and My kindred, one and all, to turn their faces towards the Most Mighty Branch. Consider that which We have revealed in Our Most Mighty Book: 'When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.' The object of this sacred verse is none other than the Most Mighty Branch.¹⁵⁸

Of paramount importance to such an appointment is the fact that it was written and sealed by the Prophet Himself, and, as such, precluded any dispute as to who was to succeed Him as leader of the Faithful, and interpreter of His Word. It was, as we have seen, this very issue which, as the core or heart of the situation, produced the original divisions of understanding with regard to the continuation of the new-born Islamic Faith.

¹⁵⁷ Baha'u'llah, *The Hidden Words*, trans. by Shoghi Effendi (Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1954), p. 46.

¹⁵⁸ Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-'Ahd, in *The Baha'i Revelation* (Baha'i Publishing Trust, National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the British Isles, London, 1970), pp. 162-163; also the reader may refer to: Baha'u'llah, *Synopsis and Codification of the Kitab-i-Aqdas*, pp. 24, 27.

Returning to the above quoted passage from the Kitab-i-'Ahd, we find that the one designated by the title "the Most Mighty Branch," was Baha'u'llah's son, 'Abdu'l-Baha (1844-1921 C.E.). On this matter of interpretation we find 'Abdu'l-Baha making the following statement:¹⁵⁹

...if any soul asks concerning the station of the Servant, the answer is--'Abdu'l-Baha. If he inquires after the meaning of the Branch, the answer is--'Abdu'l-Baha. If he desires to know the significance of the verse regarding the Branch, the answer is--'Abdu'l-Baha. If he insists upon the explanation of the meaning of the 'Branch extended from the Ancient Root,' the answer is--'Abdu'l-Baha.¹⁶⁰

and again, in another context, he reaffirms that appointment,

...No one is permitted to give these verses any other interpretation. I am according to the explicit texts of the Kitab-i-Aqdas and the Kitab-i-'Ahd, the manifest Interpreter of the Word of God....Whoso deviates from my interpretation is a victim of his own fancy.¹⁶¹

While 'Abdu'l-Baha is not to be accorded the station of a Manifestation of God, it must be understood that Baha'is do not look to Him as solely the authorized Interpreter of His Father's teachings, but in addition, regard Him as the Perfect Exemplar of those Teachings.

¹⁵⁹ For biographical material, the reader may refer to the following sources: World Order: A Baha'i Magazine, VI, (Fall 1971); H. M. Balyuzi, 'Abdu'l-Baha The Center of the Covenant of Baha'u'llah (George Ronald, London, 1971).

¹⁶⁰ 'Abdu'l-Baha, The Mystery of God, compiled by Mrs. I. F. Muhajer (Baha'i Publishing Trust, New Delhi, 1971), p. 22.

¹⁶¹ Shoghi Effendi, The Dispensation of Baha'u'llah (Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1970), p. 46.

He is, and should for all time be regarded, first and foremost, as the Center and Pivot of Baha'u'llah's peerless and all-enfolding Covenant, His most exalted handiwork, the stainless Mirror of His light, the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring Interpreter of His Word, the embodiment of every Baha'i ideal, the incarnation of every Baha'i virtue, the Most Mighty Branch sprung from the Ancient Root, the Limb of the Law of God, the Being 'round Whom all names revolve,' the Mainspring of the Oneness of Humanity, the Ensign of the Most Great Peace, the Moon of the Central Orb of this most holy Dispensation--styles and titles that are implicit and find their truest their highest and fairest expression in the magic name 'Abdu'l-Baha. He is, above and beyond these appellations, the 'Mystery of God'--an expression by which Baha'u'llah Himself has chosen to designate Him, and which, while it does not by any means justify us to assign to him the station of Prophethood, indicates how in the person of 'Abdu'l-Baha the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized.¹⁶²

This can be viewed in Baha'i contexts as in one sense the human equivalent to the ahadith literature of Islam. I state "in one sense," because, in reality, there is a world of difference in the manner that such literature came to be the source of knowledge of "how" man should conduct his human affairs, and the "divine" appointment of "how" that should be achieved in the case of the Baha'i Revelation.¹⁶³ Indeed, those early followers of Baha'u'llah who wished to be considered steadfast and faithful to the Covenant of Baha'u'llah

¹⁶² Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, p.134.

¹⁶³ *Supra*, pp.118-120.

had to give complete authority to 'Abdu'l-Baha in all matters of interpretation and application of the Baha'i Scriptures to their daily existence.

Were it not for the protecting power of the Covenant to guard the impregnable fort of the Cause of God, there would arise among the Baha'is, in one day, a thousand different sects as was the case in former ages. But in this Blessed Dispensation, for the sake of the permanency of the Cause of God and the avoidance of dissension amongst the people of God, the Blessed Beauty (may my soul be a sacrifice unto Him), has through the Supreme Pen written the Covenant and the Testament; He appointed a Center, the Exponent of the Book and the annuller of disputes. Whatever is written or said by Him is conformable to the truth and under the protection of the Blessed Beauty He is infallible. The express purpose of this last Will and Testament is to set aside disputes from the world.¹⁶⁴

The unambiguous, written appointment of such a Center of the Covenant then precluded the advent of division among the followers of Baha'u'llah. This is not meant to suggest that such schism was not attempted, but rather, having no authority in Revelation, could not lay any legitimate claim to being a continuation of that Revelation, and, as such, all attempts have perished in sterility.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ 'Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'i World Faith, pp. 357-358.

¹⁶⁵ For a detailed account of at least the salient features of the early attempts at "covenant-breaking" the reader may refer to: Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, pp. 244-251, 263-266 (following Baha'u'llah's death); pp. 317-320 (their sterility); also, Ruhiiyyih Rabbani, The Priceless Pearl (Baha'i Publishing Trust, London, 1969), pp. 49-54, 69-71, 118-124 (following 'Abdu'l-Baha's death). *Infra* pp. 129ff. for a discussion of covenant-breaking activities following Shoghi Effendi's passing in 1957.

At some point prior to His own passing, we find 'Abdu'l-Baha, in His Will and Testament, establishing His own Covenant of Succession through the office of the Guardianship. The man whom 'Abdu'l-Baha designated in that same document as the first Guardian of the Faith, was the great grandson of Baha'u'llah, His own grandson, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani (1897-1957).¹⁶⁶

O My loving friends! After the passing away of this wronged one, it is incumbent upon the...loved ones of the Abha Beauty to turn unto Shoghi Effendi ...as he is the sign of God, the chosen branch, the Guardian of the Cause of God, he unto whom all the Aghsan, the Afnan, the Hands of the Cause of God and His loved ones must turn. He is the expounder of the words of God and after him will succeed the first born of his lineal descendants.¹⁶⁷

In this provision of 'Abdu'l-Baha's Will and Testament, we find the authority necessary for the ongoing, unbroken, interpretation of those portions of Revelation not already interpreted by Baha'u'llah or 'Abdu'l-Baha. It is important to stress, however, that the office of Guardianship is not to be accorded the station of Prophethood, or even that of the Center of the Covenant. Neither is it accorded the status of perfect Exemplar, but solely as the office, or channel, through

¹⁶⁶ For biographical material the reader may refer to the following sources: Ruhiyyih Rabbani, The Priceless Pearl; Amatu'l-Baha Ruhiyyih Khanum, "The Guardian of the Baha'i Faith," The Baha'i World, 1954-1963, XIII, pp. 59-205.

¹⁶⁷ 'Abdu'l-Baha, Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha (Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1968), p. 11.

which "official" interpretation might flow. Shoghi Effendi expresses his station in these words:

No Guardian of the Faith, I feel it my solemn duty to place on record, can ever claim to be the perfect exemplar of the teachings of Baha'u'llah or the stainless mirror that reflects His light. Though overshadowed by the unfailing, the unerring protection of Baha'u'llah and of the Bab, and however much he may share with 'Abdu'l-Baha the right and obligation to interpret the Baha'i teachings, he remains essentially human and cannot, if he wishes to remain faithful to his trust, arrogate to himself, under any pretense whatsoever, the rights, the privileges and prerogatives which Baha'u'llah has chosen to confer upon His Son. In light of this truth to pray to the Guardian of the Faith, to address him as lord and master, to designate him as his holiness, to seek his benediction, to celebrate his birthday, or to commemorate any event associated with his life would be tantamount to a departure from those established truths that are enshrined within our beloved Faith. The fact that the Guardian has been specifically endowed with such power as he may need to reveal the purport of the utterances of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha does not necessarily confer upon him a station of co-equal with those whose words he is called upon to interpret. He can exercise that right and discharge this obligation and yet remain infinitely inferior to both of them in rank and different in nature.¹⁶⁸

As we saw in the second to last of the above quotations, the right to Covenant concerning the Succession to the office of the Guardian was accorded to the first Guardian. This right was not exercised by Shoghi Effendi, who, upon his death in London in 1957, left no Will and Testament (or similar document), and therefore no legitimate successor to that Office. What this in effect meant, was that according

¹⁶⁸ Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, p.151.

to the explicit Words of Baha'u'llah there could be no further interpretation of His Revelation:

...They who are its appointed interpreters, they whose hearts are the repositories of its secrets, are, however, the only ones who can comprehend its manifold wisdom. Whoso, while reading the Sacred Scriptures, is tempted to choose therefrom whatever may suit him with which to challenge the authority of the Representative of God among men, is, indeed, as one dead, though to outward seeming he may walk and converse with his neighbours, and share with them their food and their drink.¹⁶⁹

What this meant, in terms of interpretation of the Writings of Baha'u'llah, was that for the first time in 113 years (from the Declaration of the Bab¹⁷⁰), the Baha'i community was bereft of both "single" leadership and authorized Interpretation. There being no Will and Testament, or similar type of document; the fact that the Aghsan and the Afnan¹⁷¹ were one and all dead, or, declared as "covenant-breakers" by Shoghi Effendi (for their faithlessness to the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha), meant that there could be no further succession to the office of Guardian.

While the Writings of the Prophet did provide for the

¹⁶⁹ Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, pp. 175-176.

¹⁷⁰ It is of interest to note that the Bab inaugurated a new Calender, which was ratified by Baha'u'llah in the Kitab-i-Aqdas. For the details of this Calender, the reader may refer to: The Baha'i World 1954-1963, XIII, pp. 749-752.

¹⁷¹ Literally the sons and descendants of the Bab and Baha'u'llah. For the complete geneologies of the Bab and Baha'u'llah, the reader may refer to: The Baha'i World 1932-1934, V, 1936, pp. 202, 204.

establishment of a twin Institution to the Guardianship, namely, the Universal House of Justice, that Body was not in existence in 1957.¹⁷²

The events that transpired in the days following the passing of Shoghi Effendi did, however, see the continuing unity of the world Baha'i community. Following a "Proclamation," on November 25, 1957, by the Hands of the Cause, that Community endorsed their interim powers of leadership until such time as the Universal House of Justice might be formed.¹⁷³

In our capacity of Chief Stewards of the embryonic world Commonwealth of Baha'u'llah, we Hands of the Cause have constituted a body of nine Hands to serve at the Baha'i World Center. This body of nine Hands will energetically deal with the protection of the Faith whenever attacks, whether from within or outside the Baha'i community, are reported by Hands from their areas or by National or Regional Assemblies or whether they arise within the Holy Land. Correspondence will likewise be maintained with the Hands of the Cause working in the several continents. This same body will correspond with National Assemblies on matters connected with the prosecution of the objectives of the Ten year Plan. On matters involving administrative questions this same body will assist National Assemblies by citing those passages of the Baha'i Sacred Literature which direct the Assemblies to a sound solution.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Infra, p. 135.

¹⁷³ For a full discussion of the Institution of the Hands of the Cause of God, the reader may refer to: The Baha'i World 1954-1963, XIII, pp. 333-378.

¹⁷⁴ "Proclamation by the Hands of the Cause to the Baha'is of East and West," The Baha'i World 1954-1963, XIII, p. 342.

The interim nature of their assumed leadership, devoid, it should be emphasized, of any claim to the acquirement of the powers and prerogatives of the Guardianship, hinged around their capacity of "Chief Stewards of the embryonic world Commonwealth of Baha'u'llah," the functions laid upon them in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha,¹⁷⁵ and the existence of an "International Baha'i Council." This Council was both appointed and heralded by the Guardian, in a January 9, 1951 cablegram to the Baha'i world,¹⁷⁶ as

¹⁷⁵ Following is an extract from the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha, pp. 12-13, which possibly indicates the basis of the actions taken by the Hands following Shoghi Effendi's untimely passing:

"The Hands of the Cause of God must elect from their own number nine persons that shall at all times be occupied in the important services in the work of the Guardian of the Cause of God. The election of these nine must be carried either unanimously or by majority from the company of the Hands of the Cause of God and these, whether unanimously or by majority vote, must give their assent to the choice of the one whom the guardian of the Cause of God hath chosen as his successor. This assent must be given in such wise as the dissenting voices may not be distinguished (i.e., secret ballot). O friends! The Hands of the Cause of God must be nominated and appointed by the guardian of the Cause of God. All must be under the shadow and obey his command. Should any, within or without the company of the Hands of the Cause of God disobey and seek division, the wrath of God and His vengeance will be upon him, for he will have caused a breach in the true Faith of God.

The obligations of the Hands of the Cause of God are to diffuse the Divine Fragrances, to edify the souls of men, to promote learning, to improve the character of all men and to be, at all times and under all conditions, sanctified and detached from earthly things. They must manifest the fear of God by their conduct, their manners, their deeds and their words."

¹⁷⁶ Shoghi Effendi, Messages to the Baha'i World, 1950-1957 (Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1958), p. 7.

the body which, in the course of time, would "fulfill its purpose through the formation of the Universal House of Justice,..."¹⁷⁷

Meanwhile the entire body of the Hands assembled by the nine Hands of the World Center will decide when and how the International Baha'i Council is to evolve through the successive stages outlined by the Guardian, culminating in the call to election of the Universal House of Justice by the membership of all National Spiritual Assemblies.

When that divinely ordained body comes into existence, all the conditions of the Faith can be examined anew and the measures necessary for its future operation determined in consultation with the Hands of the Cause.¹⁷⁸

The uniform response from the Baha'i world paralleled those sentiments expressed in the following excerpts from a letter written to the Canadian Baha'i Community, December 4, 1957:

"Your National Spiritual Assembly transmits to you herewith, and to every other Canadian Baha'i, a message of transcendent importance prepared by the twenty-six Hands of the Cause recently assembled at the World Center of our Faith.

"Their Proclamation to the Bahá'i world assures all believers that following our tragic loss of the beloved Guardian, the World Faith established by Baha'u'llah will have continuity and direction.

"On behalf of the entire Canadian Baha'i community, the actions taken by the body of the Hands appointed by the Guardian have received the grateful affirmation of your National Assembly and our whole-hearted pledge of unqualified support.

.....
 "Let us cherish in our hearts the conviction that the Guardianship remains with us in Shoghi Effendi's

¹⁷⁷ "Proclamation by the Hands of the Cause to the Baha'is of East and West," The Baha'i World 1954-1963, p. 342.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

elucidation of the administrative order, his interpretation of the Baha'i Sacred Writings, and his example of supreme sacrifice to the Call of God addressed to this crucial age.

"Sincerely

"National Spiritual Assembly." ¹⁷⁹

Just four years later we find the unilateral declaration by one Mason Remey, that he was the second Guardian of the Baha'i Faith. In a statement addressed to the Baha'is of the world, through the annual convention of the Baha'is of the United States of America, he advanced both the claim that "the line of the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith is unbroken for I have been the Guardian of the Faith since the death of the Beloved Guardian Shoghi Effendi," ¹⁸⁰ and the reason held by him to be the basis of that claim.

In the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha we find the statement that the Guardian is the "...sacred head and the distinguished member for life..." of the Universal House of Justice. ¹⁸¹ While relying on that statement, Remey, nevertheless, dismisses, within the same Document, the explicit statement that the Guardian was to be of the "first born

¹⁷⁹ Letter from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada, Toronto, December 4, 1957. (Mimeographed.)

¹⁸⁰ Mason Remey, "Proclamation to the Baha'is of the World through the Annual Convention of the Baha'is of the United States of America assembled at Wilmette, Illinois, Ridvan 117 Baha'i Era from Mason Remey The Second Guardian of the Baha'i Faith." (Lithographed, no publishing data.)

¹⁸¹ 'Abdu'l-Baha, Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p. 14.

of his lineal descendents"--a condition to which Mr Remy could never aspire.¹⁸² Nevertheless, he reasoned his claim to the Guardianship, albeit in direct contradiction to the declaration by the Hands of the Cause, signed by him, which affirmed that in fact there could be no "second Guardian," on the following basis:

The Beloved Guardian chose me to be the President of the Baha'i International Council that is according to his explanation the President of the Embryonic (sic) Universal House of Justice. Therefore I am the President of the Embryonic House of Justice.... Therefore, inasmuch as the Beloved Guardian in His Infallibility has thus placed me in command of the Faith to protect and to guard the Faith, I can do nothing but to assume my place that he has given me..., therefore by his infallible orders I now alone, after him command the cause and guard its integrity.¹⁸³

The overwhelming response by the Baha'i community to these assertions was one of complete rejection. The solidarity of the Community in the face of such a declaration is advanced by Baha'is as one more proof of the inviolable nature and power of the Covenant within Baha'i Revelation. For, as stated, and in contrast to the effects achieved, under somewhat similar circumstances, by claimants to the leadership of the Faith within previous Revelatory Dispensations, no schism was affected.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Ibid., pp. 11, 12.

¹⁸³ Mason Remy, "Proclamation."

¹⁸⁴ E.g., from the Shi'a position, the claim advanced on behalf of Abu Bakr was based on his position as the chosen

The response by the Canadian National Spiritual Assembly (which we choose to quote solely in its relevance and proximity to us as citizens and/or residents of that country), to the general announcement of Mr Remey's claim, echoed the repudiations voiced by twenty-six out of the twenty-seven then existing National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies.¹⁸⁵ The following letter from the Canadian National Spiritual Assembly, May 2, 1960, to the Canadian Baha'i community, clearly indicates the stance of not only the Baha'is of that Community, but those of the world Baha'i community as well.

"To All the Believers in Canada:

leader of the Community prayers, immediately before the Prophet's death. The Sunni have, of course, the opposite opinion with regards that selection. They view Ali's claim to leadership as false, or at least the less viable of the two claims. The end result was, as we know, the irreconcilable division of Islam.

¹⁸⁵ The following excerpts from the Baha'i News, No. 128, September, 1960, as published by the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, clearly depicts the conditions that followed Mr Remey's claim:

"As soon as Mason Remey's 'proclamation' was distributed, 26 of the 27 existing National and Regional Assemblies immediately forwarded to the Hands in the Holy Land their complete repudiation of this heretical claim and assurances of their loyalty to the Faith of Baha'u'llah and the institution of the Hands and their determination to fulfil the Crusade as laid down by the Guardian....

Among the handful of believers throughout the world who were led astray by the Remey claim were five members of the National Assembly of France. Since these members refused to fulfil their responsibilities, the Hands of the Cause, for the protection of the Faith, dissolved the Assembly and called for a new election on the Day of the Ascension of Baha'u'llah. At this time the believers of France elected a loyal Assembly."

"Dear Friends:

"A sad and shocking event has occurred which the National Spiritual Assembly feels should be shared with the believers.

"Just before the Convention, the N.S.A. received a lengthy statement headed "Proclamation to the Baha'is of the World" from Hand of the Cause, Mason Remey. In this statement, Mr. Remey declared himself the second guardian of the Baha'i Faith and called on the Hands of the Cause, the Assemblies and the believers to desist from the plans for 1963 and to acknowledge him as 'their Commander-in-Chief...the Infallible Guardian of the Baha'i Faith.'

"The National Assembly unanimously agreed to consult with the Hands present, Ruhiiyyih Khanum and John Robarts, to assure the Hands in the Holy Land of our repudiation of this preposterous claim, to present the statement at the Convention and to inform the Canadian friends of the action taken.

"Meanwhile, the following cable was received from Haifa:

"'DEEPLY REGRET NECESSITY INFORM BAHAI WORLD HAND CAUSE MASON REMEY NOW ASSERTING HE IS GUARDIAN FAITH STOP THIS PREPOSTEROUS CLAIM CLEARLY CONTRARY SACRED TEXTS CAN ONLY BE REGARDED AS EVIDENCE CONDITIONS PROFOUND EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE STOP CALL UPON BELIEVERS EVERYWHERE JOIN HANDS HOLY LAND COMPLETE REPUDIATION THIS MISGUIDED ACTION STOP SHARE THIS MESSAGE FRIENDS HANDSFAITH'

"To this the National Spiritual Assembly replied as follows:

"'ASSURE HANDS HOLY LAND UNDIVIDED SUPPORT COMPLETE REPUDIATION REMEY PROCLAMATION STOP CANADIAN CONVENTION INFORMED (AND) UNANIMOUSLY VOTED SIMILAR ACTION STOP WRITING ALL CANADIAN BELIEVERS IMMEDIATELY CONFIDENT THEIR FULL UNALTERED LOYALTY SHOGHI EFFENDI (AND) HANDS HAIFA'

"During the Friday morning session of the Convention, Mr. Remey's statement and the cable from the Hands were read to the assembled delegates and friends. The falsity of the claim was so self-evident that the delegates saw no need to discuss it but unanimously agreed to send the following cable:

"'DELEGATES (AND) FRIENDS ASSEMBLED NATIONAL CANADIAN CONVENTION OVERJOYED INSPIRING MESSAGE HANDS (OF THE) CAUSE (IN THE) HOLY LAND. THRILLED (BY) MIRACULOUS GROWTH, UNSHAKEABLE UNITY BAHAI WORLD. WISH EXPRESS

HEARTFELT GRATITUDE, LOVING GUIDANCE (BY) HANDS (OF THE) FAITH (IN THE) HOLY LAND (IN THE) PROGRESSIVE UNFOLDMENT BELOVED GUARDIAN'S PLAN. ASSURE (YOU OUR) LOYALTY (AND) CONSECRATION, SUSTAINED (BY) YOUR PRAYERS FOR US (AT) HOLY SHRINES (TO) COMPLETE ALL (OUR) OBJECTIVES'

"The National Assembly deeply regrets the proclamation of this delusion on the part of an aged and revered servant of the Cause and is confident that it speaks for every believer in this country in assuring the Hands of the Cause of our unqualified loyalty to Shoghi Effendi and to the institutions he developed in accordance with the Sacred Texts,...

"Sincerely yours,

"National Spiritual Assembly." 186

In July of 1960, with the unequivocal backing of the vast majority of believers, the Hands of the Cause, in strict keeping with the mandate given in 'Abdu'l-Baha's Will and Testament, exercised their function and duty of protection of the Faith, by formally declaring the expulsion of Mason Remey from the Faith of Baha'u'llah, as well as attesting to the complete falsity of his claims.

"ENTIRE BODY (OF) HANDS OBEDIENT (TO) PROVISIONS (OF) WILL (AND) TESTAMENT (OF) CENTER (OF) COVENANT (AND) COMMUNICATIONS (FROM) BELOVED GUARDIAN ENJOINING THEM (TO) PROTECT HOLY CAUSE (FROM) ATTACKS (OF) ENEMIES (BOTH) WITHIN (AND) WITHOUT ANNOUNCE (TO) BAHAI WORLD (THAT) MASON REMEY (IS) COVENANT BREAKER (AND) EXPELLED (FROM) FAITH STOP ACTION BOLLOWS LONG PERIOD (OF) PATIENCE (AND) FORBEARANCE (WHILE) OPPORTUNITY (WAS) GIVEN TO HIM (TO) WITHDRAW (HIS) SHAMEFUL PRETENSION (TO) SACRED STATION (OF) GUARDIANSHIP CONSTITUTING HERETICAL CLAIM CONTRARY (TO) EXPLICIT PROVISIONS (OF) WILL (OF) MASTER STOP DESPITE UNIVERSAL REPUDIATION (AND) DENUNCIATION BY ALL HANDS (AND THE) INTERNATIONAL

186. Unpublished letter from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada, May 2, 1960, to the Canadian Baha'i Community.

BAHA'I COUNCIL (AND) ALL NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES REMEY (IS) CONTINUING (TO) AGITATE (FOR HIS) UNFOUNDED CLAIM (IS) ACTIVELY SEEKING (TO) CREATE DIVISION (AMONGST) RANKS (OF) FAITHFUL, (TO) SOW SEEDS (OF) DOUBT (IN) HEARTS (OF) BELIEVERS (AND TO) UNDERMINE ACTIVITIES (OF) INSTITUTION (OF THE) HANDS (THE) CHIEF STEWARDS DEDICATED (TO THE) FULFILLMENT (OF OUR) BELOVED GUARDIAN'S TEN YEAR PLAN STOP (IN) ACCORDANCE (WITH) INJUNCTION (IN) WILL (AND) TESTAMENT (OF) 'ABDU'L-BAHA CALL UPON FRIENDS EVERYWHERE (TO) SHUN REMEY AND EVERYONE ASSOCIATING WITH HIM OR ACTIVELY SUPPORTING HIS CLAIMS STOP CONFIDENT (THAT) COMMUNITY (OF THE) MOST GREAT NAME UNITED (IN) WHOLEHEARTED CONDEMNATION (OF) THIS LATEST ILL-FATED ATTEMPT (TO) DISRUPT GOD'S HOLY CAUSE WILL EMERGE TRIUMPHANT STRENGTHENED GALVANIZED (TO) ISSUE FORTH (AND) WIN REMAINING GOALS (OF) GLORIOUS WORLD ENCIRCLING CRUSADE STOP CABLE MESSAGE (TO) ALL NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES "HANDSFAITH" 187

The sequel to this attempt at schism is found in the following cablegram from the now existent, and fully functioning, Universal House of Justice,

"CHARLES MASON REMEY WHOSE ARROGANT ATTEMPT USURP GUARDIANSHIP AFTER PASSING SHOGHI EFFENDI LED TO HIS EXPULSION FROM RANKS FAITHFUL HAS DIED IN FLORENCE ITALY IN HUNDREDTH YEAR OF HIS LIFE BURIED WITHOUT RELIGIOUS RITES ABANDONED BY ERSTWHILE FOLLOWERS STOP HISTORY THIS PITIABLE DEFECTION BY ONE WHO RECEIVED GREAT HONOURS FROM BOTH MASTER AND GUARDIAN CONSTITUTES YET ANOTHER EXAMPLE FUTILITY ALL ATTEMPTS UNDERMINE IMPREGNABLE COVENANT CAUSE BAHA'U'LLAH "Universal House of Justice." 188

In order to fully comprehend both the scope of the Baha'i Revelation and whatever implications there might

¹⁸⁷ Baha'i News, No. 128, September, 1960.

¹⁸⁸ Canadian Baha'i News, No. 278, May/June, 1974,

have been in the decision of Shoghi Effendi not to provide for a Successor, it is necessary to turn our examination to the establishment and function of the twin Institution of the Universal House of Justice.

The Universal House of Justice, a Body of nine men "...elected by secret ballot by the members of all National Spiritual Assemblies at a meeting to be known as the International Baha'i Convention," finds its basis and authority in the Kitab-i-Aqdas.¹⁸⁹ As in the case of the Center of the Covenant and the Guardianship, such authority, based as it is directly in Revelation, is deemed Divine in nature. It is not, therefore, surprising to find that when dealing with those matters within its "given" frame of reference that its "pronouncements" are seen as both Divinely inspired and infallible.

While Baha'u'llah posits the Authority of the Universal House of Justice, He does not provide, in any but the broadest terms, for the detailed establishment, and/or, functioning of that Body. For the main part it was 'Abdu'l-Baha, through authorized interpretation of His Father's Writings, Who laid down, in His Will and Testament, the basic framework of the duties and functions of the Universal House of Justice.

¹⁸⁹ Universal House of Justice, The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice (The Broadwater Press, Hertfordshire, 1972), p. 11.

Shoghi Effendi, as Guardian, set about the task of "building" up the Administrative Order to the point where, in accordance with the Kitab-i-Aqdas and the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha, the Universal House of Justice could be elected. His untimely death in 1957 saw the final realization of the Universal House of Justice handled by the Hands of the Cause, who, on November 5, 1961 issued the following summons to the Baha'i world:

The Chief Stewards of the Faith are therefore calling a convention in the Holy Land for the election of the Universal House of Justice on the first, second, and third days of Ridvan 1963. The members of all national and regional spiritual assemblies elected by the Baha'is in Ridvan 1962 will, in conformity with the teachings, constitute the electoral body empowered to vote for this crowning unit of the embryonic World Order of Baha'u'llah, upon whose deliberations the unique bounty of receiving divine inspiration has been bestowed, and whose decisions are infallibly guided by both the Bab and Baha'u'llah.¹⁹⁰

On April 26, 1963 the following cable was sent by the Hands of the Cause to the world Baha'i Community:

"(ON THE) OCCASION (OF) WORLDWIDE CELEBRATIONS (OF THE) MOST GREAT JUBILEE COMMEMORATING (THE) CENTENARY (OF THE) ASCENSION (OF) BAHU'U'LLAH (TO THE) THRONE (OF) HIS SOVEREIGNTY WITH HEARTS OVERFLOWING (WITH) GRATITUDE (FOR) HIS UNFAILING PROTECTION (AND) OVERFLOWING BOUNTIES (WE) JOYOUSLY ANNOUNCE (TO THE) FRIENDS (OF THE) EAST (AND) WEST (THE) ELECTION (OF THE) SUPREME LEGISLATIVE BODY ORDAINED BY HIM IN HIS MOST HOLY BOOK (AND) PROMISED BY HIM (TO) RECEIVE HIS INFALLIBLE

¹⁹⁰ "Chief Stewards Call for Election of First Universal House of Justice," The Covenant and Administration (Compilation, Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1969), p. 93.

GUIDANCE"¹⁹¹

In His Will and Testament, 'Abdu'l-Baha enunciated that the Universal House of Justice must be elected by "universal suffrage" and that "It enacteth all ordinances and regulations that are not to be found in the explicit Holy Text."¹⁹² This is understood to mean that the Universal House of Justice is responsible for the "legislation" of laws and regulations not specifically revealed by Baha'u'llah. Unlike the laws revealed by Baha'u'llah, those legislated by the Universal House of Justice are contingent as opposed to absolute in nature. That is, they can be revised in part, or, repealed in whole, by a future Universal House of Justice--or, for that matter, by the same Universal House of Justice as enacted the legislation in question--in accordance with the exigencies of the moment.¹⁹³

Three things are significant in the above contexts. First, the fact that the Universal House of Justice finds its origin and, therefore, authority, in the Writings of the Manifestation, posits the unchallengeable divine nature of laws enacted under its auspices. This forms one of the distinctive characteristics of the Baha'i Revelation, for it is the first wherein the actual form of the administration of the

¹⁹¹ "First Historic House of Justice is Elected," The Covenant and Administration, p.93.

¹⁹² 'Abdu'l-Baha, Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha, p.14.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p.20.

affairs of the "faithful" was unambiguously designed by the Prophet Himself. Baha'i Law is then Holy Law; it is the earthly enactment of the Will of God.

The second point of significance is that the Universal House of Justice is limited in expression to matters of legislation, and has, therefore, no authority to "interpret" the Writings of Baha'u'llah. Interpretation of those Writings not clarified by 'Abdu'l-Baha, in His capacity of Center of the Covenant, rests solely on the institution of the Guardian.

It should be understood by the friends that before legislating upon any matter the Universal House of Justice studies carefully and exhaustively both the Sacred Texts and the writings of Shoghi Effendi on the subject. The interpretations written by the beloved Guardian cover a vast range of subjects and are equally as binding as the Text itself. There is a profound difference between the interpretations of the Guardian and the elucidations of the House of Justice in exercise of its function to "deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure, and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book." The Guardian reveals what the Scripture means; his interpretation is a statement of truth which cannot be varied. Upon the Universal House of Justice, in the words of the Guardian, "has been conferred the exclusive right of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the Baha'i Writings." Its pronouncements, which are susceptible of amendment or abrogation by the House of Justice itself, serve to supplement and apply the Law of God. Although not invested with the function of interpretation, the House of Justice is in a position to do everything necessary to establish the World Order of Baha'u'llah on this earth. Unity of doctrine is maintained by the existence of the authentic texts of Scripture and the voluminous interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi, together with the absolute prohibition against anyone propounding "authoritative" or "inspired" interpretations or usurping the functions of Guardian. Unity of administration is assured by the authority

of the Universal House of Justice.¹⁹⁴

An example of such legislation might be seen in the contents of the recently published Constitution of the Universal House of Justice.

Another example might be seen in the Universal House of Justice's handling of the realization, in 1964, that... "there is no way to appoint, or to legislate to make it possible to appoint, Hands of the Cause of God."¹⁹⁵ In a letter, June 24, 1968, addressed to the Baha'i World, they announced their legislation of the Institution of the Continental Boards of Counsellors "...to reinforce and supplement the work of the Hands of the Cause..."¹⁹⁶

The Baha'i Faith presents a unique relationship between the elected Universal House of Justice, with its powers of legislation, and the hereditary office of the Guardianship, with its inherent power of interpretation. In no other religious system do we find such twin administrative "tools" ordained in Revelation itself.

...these twin institutions of the Administrative Order of Baha'u'llah should be regarded as divine in origin, essential in their functions and complementary in their aim and purpose. Their common,

¹⁹⁴ The Universal House of Justice, Wellspring of Guidance--Messages 1963-1968 (Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1969), pp. 52-53.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 141.

their fundamental object is to ensure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of our Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings. Acting in conjunction with each other these two inseparable institutions administer its affairs, coordinate its activities, promote its interests, execute its laws and defend its subsidiary institutions. Severally, each operates within a clearly defined sphere of jurisdiction; each is equipped with its own attendant institutions--instruments designed, for the effective discharge of its particular responsibilities and duties. Each exercises, within the limitations imposed upon it, its powers, its authority, its rights and prerogatives. These are neither contradictory, nor detract in the slightest degree from the position which each of these institutions occupies. Far from being incompatible or mutually destructive, they supplement each other's authority and functions, and are permanently and fundamentally united in their aims.¹⁹⁷

Shoghi Effendi continues in the very next paragraph of the above quotation to elaborate just how fine the balance between these two institutions really is. "Divorced from the institution of the Guardianship," he states that, "the World Order of Baha'u'llah would be mutilated and permanently deprived of that hereditary principle which, ..., has been invariably upheld by the Law of God.... Without such an institution the integrity of the Faith would be imperilled, and the stability of the entire fabric would be gravely endangered." He continues that... "its prestige would suffer, the means required to enable it to take a long, an uninterrupted view over a series of generations would be completely

¹⁹⁷ Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 148.

lacking, and the necessary guidance to define the sphere of the legislative action of its elected representatives would be totally withdrawn." On the other hand, he continues, that severed from the institution of the Universal House of Justice, the Guardian would be unable to provide for those matters of legislation which, by definition, fall outside of his jurisdiction.

As previously stated, the Baha'i world now finds itself bereft of a living Guardian. As such, the Baha'i Faith is faced with the complete cessation of interpretation (a fact that is openly recognized and accepted by the "believers"). While drastic in and of itself, the open acceptance that interpretation has ended, must prove infinitely wiser than the allowance of indiscriminate (unauthorized) interpretation by the faithful, and/or, the adoption of a second Guardian, or system, not provided in the original Revelation. To follow any of the foregoing alternatives would be, in Baha'i terminology, to break the Covenant, and in so doing pave the way for the subsequent schisms which must unavoidably arise. Surely another of the distinguishing marks of the Baha'i Faith must be its undivided singleness, or unity of belief. No schism has arisen in one hundred and thirty years of existence. No other religion can lay a similar claim to such unity of belief. Baha'is, it would appear, attribute their undivided survival to not only the grace and protection of God,

but to the power of the Covenant made by Baha'u'llah, and its provision of the institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice--both of which, as demonstrated by the absence of the Universal House of Justice during the full thirty-six years of Shoghi Effendi's Guardianship, can survive, albeit bound by the limitations of their defined spheres of operation, without the support of the other.

The third point hinges around the sphere of action prescribed in the Baha'i Writings for the Universal House of Justice. The fact that those Writings have allowed this arm of the Administrative Order of Baha'u'llah to change the auxiliary, or day to day, laws associated with the well being of the Community, has, in its divinely ordained origins, for the first time infused Revelation with an ongoing organic nature. In other words, there should be no future "problem" of reconciling "old" unchangeable laws (meant for a day and age with radically different requirements) to "new" situations--which, as we have seen was one of the great difficulties that faced Islam. Baha'i law, under the auspices of the Universal House of Justice, has the ability to change to meet the exigencies of the moment while yet retaining its "divine sanction."

Communications with local and national Communities is provided for by the establishment (in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, and in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha) of local and national Houses of Justice (at this time referred to as local and

national Spiritual Assemblies).¹⁹⁸

Unlike the Universal House of Justice, the local and national Houses of Justice are not considered infallible in their judgements, but nevertheless, must be implicitly obeyed by the Community members in all their decisions: the Community incidentally possesses the individual right of appeal to the Universal House of Justice where they disagree with any one decision passed on by either of these institutions--such "reconsideration" and any judgement it yields is, of course, of necessity, final and absolute.¹⁹⁹

The Local Spiritual Assembly is elected democratically by secret ballot, with elected members serving in an unsalaried capacity for a period of one year (at which time an election is called; members may serve as many terms of office as the Community members are willing to elect them). No electioneering is permitted. Individual members are called upon to vote, after prayer and careful reflection, "without the least trace of passion and prejudice, and irrespective of any material consideration, for those adult members of their Community who can best combine the necessary qualities of unquestioned loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well trained mind, of

¹⁹⁸ For a discussion of the present status of Local and National Houses of Justice, the reader may refer to: Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, pp. 5-7; also Appendix B, *infra*, p. 191.

¹⁹⁹ By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly, Article X.i (1950). (Mimeographed.)

recognized ability and mature experience."²⁰⁰

The National Spiritual Assembly is elected by proportionate representation. The representatives, or delegates, are elected from the adult believers residing in a specific geographic region, by secret ballot, to in their turn elect the nine members of the National Assembly from the adult members of the entire national Community. Again no electioneering is permitted.²⁰¹

These Bodies must, in addition, stand absolutely neutral in political matters while yet entirely obedient to whatever secular powers are in authority.²⁰² Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written in 1932, addressed to the Baha'is of the

²⁰⁰ Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Administration (Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1968), p. 88; for a detailed discussion of the Institution of the Local Spiritual Assembly, the reader may refer to: The Local Spiritual Assembly, compiled by the Universal House of Justice (Published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada, 1970).

²⁰¹ For a detailed discussion of the process whereby the National Spiritual Assembly is to be elected, as well as the considerations to be given to the delegates and incoming National Assembly, as well as the prerequisites for election, the reader may refer to: Shoghi Effendi, Baha'i Procedure, compiled by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States and Canada (Baha'i Publishing Committee, Wilmette, Illinois, 1942), pp. 77-94; in addition, for a detailed discussion of the Institution of the National Spiritual Assembly, the reader may refer to: The National Spiritual Assembly: An Institution of the Baha'i Administrative Order, compiled by the Universal House of Justice (Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1972).

²⁰² Baha'u'llah, "Kitab-i-'Ahd," The Baha'i Revelation, p. 162.

United States and Canada, has the following statements to make on this relationship:

Let them refrain from associating themselves, whether by word or by deed, with the political pursuits of their respective nations, with the policies of their governments and the schemes and programs of parties and factions... Let them affirm their unyielding determination to stand, firmly and unreservedly, for the way of Baha'u'llah, to avoid the entanglements and bickerings inseparable from the pursuits of the politician, and to become worthy agencies of that Divine Polity which incarnates God's immutable Purpose for all men.

It should be made unmistakably clear that such an attitude implies neither the slightest indifference to the cause and interests of their own country, nor involves any insubordination on their part to the authority of recognized and established governments. Nor does it constitute a repudiation of their sacred obligation to promote, in the most effective manner, the best interests of their government and people. It indicates the desire cherished by every true and loyal follower of Baha'u'llah to serve, in an unselfish, unostentatious and patriotic fashion, the highest interests of the country to which he belongs, and in a way that would entail no departure from the high standards of integrity and truthfulness associated with the teachings of his Faith.²⁰³

They are, however, notwithstanding that directive, commissioned to function at the executive, legislative and judicial levels on such matters as the Kitab-i-Aqdas, and the Universal House of Justice, state fall within their jurisdiction (providing that such action(s) is not in opposition to the existing secular laws of the country in which they reside).

Let them proclaim that in whatever country they reside, and however advanced their institutions, or profound their desire to enforce the laws, and

apply the principles, enunciated by Baha'u'llah, they will, unhesitatingly, subordinate the operation of such laws and the application of such principles to the requirements and legal enactments of their respective governments. Theirs is not the purpose, while endeavoring to conduct and perfect the administrative affairs of their Faith, to violate, under any circumstances, the provisions of their country's constitution, much less to allow the machinery of their administration to supersede the government of their respective countries.

...How else, might I ask, could such a far-flung Faith, which transcends political and social boundaries, which includes within its pale so great a variety of races and nations, which will have to rely increasingly, as it forges ahead, on the good-will and support of the diversified and contending governments of the earth--how else could such a Faith succeed in preserving its unity, in safeguarding its interests, and in ensuring the steady and peaceful development of its institutions?²⁰⁴

There remains at this juncture, however, the question as to whether such an Administrative structure as exists in Baha'i Revelation, will eventually assume full control, as was the case from the start with Islam (at least within its limited boundaries), of all matters currently within the domain of the respective national secular authorities. While an examination of the recently formulated Constitution of the Universal House of Justice shows no precise provisions for the enforcement or implementation of "law" in anything but traditionally religious matters, it should be remembered that the East and West differ markedly on the role that the Law, as the "divine path," must play in the governing of society.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 66.

Recognition of this can be found in an early (1929) letter written by Shoghi Effendi, in which he relates to the Western believers the attempts of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Egypt, to secure recognition from the Egyptian government of its full status as the sole authorized source of adjudication of the Laws found in the Kitab-i-Aqdas.²⁰⁵ Such a petition would not, due to the inclusion of matters under strictly secular control, be possible in the western hemisphere. As late as 1936 Shoghi Effendi was still impressing this vital distinction on the Baha'is of the West.

The day may not be far distant when in certain countries of the East, in which religious communities exercise jurisdiction in matters of personal status, Baha'i Assemblies may be called upon to assume the duties and responsibilities devolving upon officially constituted Baha'i courts. They will be empowered, in such matters as marriage, divorce, and inheritance, to execute and apply, within their respective jurisdictions, and with the sanction of civil authorities, such laws and ordinances as have been expressly provided in their Most Holy Book.²⁰⁶

In anticipation of the recognition by Western governments of these same Bodies, a program of "incorporation" of local and national Spiritual Assemblies was adopted as early as 1897 in the West. Such incorporation, of course, gives full legal status to these Bodies in the conduct of the affairs of the Baha'i community with their non-Baha'i counterparts--the

²⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 10-12.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 200.

right to buy and sell property, etc. In addition, we find the "Foreword" to the 1927 Declaration of Trust, made by the Baha'is of the United States and Canada, as certified by the United States Department of State, contains the preliminary scope and flexibility that these administrative Bodies may, in relation no doubt to anticipated growth and expansion, be called upon to exercise.

The 1926-27 National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States and Canada completed a task which, while pertaining to the outer and more material aspects of the Cause, nevertheless has a special significance for its spirit and inward sacred purpose. This task consisted in creating a legal form which gives proper substance and substantial character to the administrative processes embodied in the Baha'i Teachings. The form adopted was that known as a Voluntary Trust, a species of corporation recognized under the common law.... The Declaration, in fact, is nothing more or less than a legal parallel of those moral and spiritual laws of unity inherent in the fulness of the Baha'i Revelation and making it the fulfillment of the ideal of Religion in the social as well as spiritual realm. Because in the Baha'i Faith this perfect correspondence exists between spiritual and social laws, the Baha'is believe that administrative success is identical with moral success; and that nothing less than the true Baha'i spirit of devotion and sacrifice can inspire with effective power the world-wide body of unity, revealed by Baha'u'llah.²⁰⁷

At the same time it must be understood that the overriding purpose of the Baha'i Faith, the end toward which its Administrative units must openly strive, is the unification

²⁰⁷ "Documentation of the Baha'i Administrative Order," The Baha'i World 1954-1963, XIII, p. 545.

of mankind in "universal recognition of one God and, ... allegiance to one common Revelation."²⁰⁸ The achievement of these aims would, as anticipated by 'Abdu'l-Baha, and detailed by Shoghi Effendi, see the establishment of a world commonwealth, consisting of a world legislature ("whose members will, as trustees of the whole of mankind, ultimately control the entire resources of all the component nations, and will enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples,"²⁰⁹); a world executive, with the necessary international "military police" backing to enforce and apply the laws enacted by the world legislature; a world tribunal, before which all problems of a universal nature can be brought for adjudication.²¹⁰ In short, the Baha'i Revelation sees the establishment of a world federal system, "ruling the whole earth and exercising unchallengeable authority over its unimaginably vast resources, blending and embodying the ideals of both the East and the West,"²¹¹

To unilaterally state that the Universal House of Justice will automatically, or by "legislation," assume full

²⁰⁸ Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 203.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 204.

or partial control, or even act as the "guiding" force behind such a world system, would be no more than speculation, for nowhere in those sources reviewed by the writer has such a statement been found. On the other hand, there must remain the possibility that as the supreme institution of the Administrative Order of Baha'u'llah, and the Head of the Faith²¹² through whose revelatory force and influence Baha'is believe the foregoing world system is even now being erected (albeit as yet materially separated from it), and in keeping with the statement from the "Preamble" to the By-Laws of the Universal House of Justice, that,

This Administrative Order is the nucleus and pattern of the World Order adumbrated by Baha'u'llah. In the course of its divinely propelled organic growth its institutions will expand, putting forth auxiliary branches and developing subordinate agencies, multiplying their activities and diversifying their functions, in consonance with the principles and purposes revealed by Baha'u'llah for the progress of the human race.²¹³

it is plausible to hypothesize that the Universal House of Justice could in the long run assume a position around which world affairs revolve. This would seem to be confirmed in the following excerpt from a letter of Shoghi Effendi, written February 1929,

...as the Baha'i Faith permeates the masses of the

²¹² Universal House of Justice, The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice, p.4.

²¹³ Ibid., p.8.

peoples of East and West, and its truth is embraced by the majority of the peoples of a number of the Sovereign States of the world, will the Universal House of Justice attain the plenitude of its power, and exercise, as the supreme organ of the Baha'i Commonwealth, all the rights, the duties, and responsibilities incumbent upon the world's future super-state.²¹⁴

In support of these speculations we might add that taken in the context of our earlier discussions of the basis of Law as the point beyond which one cannot pass, to the fact that Law is held in the Baha'i Revelation to be divinely revealed and maintained, and finally in relation to the statement by Shoghi Effendi that the "world federal system" would rule the entire earth with "unchallengeable authority," that such authority must be based in Revelation and, therefore, of necessity fall under, in one form or another, the undisputed jurisdiction of the Universal House of Justice.

While it is of interest to offer such speculations as to the eventual outcome, in terms of the function of the Administrative Order of the Baha'i Faith, it must, nonetheless, under the circumstances of our position in historical time, and the absence of a direct statement by the duly recognized "Authorities," remain speculation. In a more positive vein it serves, however, to emphasize the flexibility and organic ongoing nature of the Baha'i Revelation in its capacity to adapt to, and thereby meet through "legislation" of new divine

²¹⁴ Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 7.

laws, the exigencies of an open ended future. The fact that the "interpretive" arm of that Order has been permanently closed,²¹⁵ may offer, as previously noted, some possible "problems" in regard to the boundaries between "interpretation" and "legislation." The fact nevertheless remains that in accord with the terms of the Covenants made by Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, such "problems" can never be the cause of schism within the Faith. Alternatively stated, the faithful possess no individual, or collective, right to interpretation of what those boundaries may or may not be, and, therefore, no authority in Revelation upon which to form a splinter or schism. On this basis it can be stated that within the logic of Baha'i belief as it exists, there is not now, nor can there ever be, a "problem" of interpretation.

Freed from the divisions that such interpretive problems have inevitably, and predictably, wrought in other "Revelations," endowed by its Founder with the capacity to ongoingly and organically provide "Divine Guidance" in accord with the exigencies of an open-ended future, accepted in full, and practiced in unison, by millions of people from every conceivable race, culture and religious background in the modern world, Baha'is feel that the Baha'i Revelation truly claim

²¹⁵ Universal House of Justice, The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice, p.4; Universal House of Justice, Wellspring of Guidance, p.82; see also pp.83-84.

to have guaranteed for its continued undivided expansion, survival and relevance, in a manner that other religious Communities, bound in their self-made confines, cannot embrace or duplicate. It should further be emphasized, as clearly indicated in the Writings of Shoghi Effendi, that such a Structure cannot in all justice be compared to the institutions of Islam, for no matter how closely the Baha'i Institutions may appear to resemble, or to stem from, those of Islam, it must be recognized that the acceptance of either Islam or the Baha'i Faith as Revelation, entails the acceptance of the divine basis of their outward expression.

Where and how does this Order established by Baha'u'llah, which to outward seeming is but a replica of the institutions established in Christianity and Islam, differ from them? Are not the twin institutions of the House of Justice and the Guardianship, the institution of the Hands of the Cause of God, the institution of the national and local Assemblies, the institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, but different names for the institutions of the Papacy and the Caliphate, with all their attending ecclesiastical orders which the Christians and Moslems uphold and advocate? What can possibly be the agency that can safeguard these Baha'i institutions, so strikingly resemblant in some of their features, to those which have been reared by the Fathers of the Church and the Apostles of Muhammad, from withstanding the deterioration in character, the breach of unity, and the extinction of influence, which have befallen all organized religious hierarchies? Why should they not eventually suffer the self-same fate that has overtaken the institutions which the successors of Christ and Muhammad have reared?

.....
Baha'u'llah, we should readily recognize, has not only imbued mankind with a new and regenerating Spirit. He has not merely enunciated certain universal prin-

ciples, or propounded a particular philosophy, however potent, sound and universal these may be. In addition to these He, as well as 'Abdu'l-Baha after Him, has, unlike the Dispensations of the past, clearly and specifically laid down a set of Laws, established definite institutions, and provided for the essentials of a Divine Economy. These are destined to be a pattern for future society, a supreme instrument for the establishment of the Most Great Peace and the one agency for the unification of the world, and the proclamation of the reign of righteousness and justice upon earth. Not only have they revealed all the directions required for the practical realization of those ideals which the Prophets of God have visualized, and which from time immemorial have inflamed the imagination of seers and poets in every age. They have also, in unequivocal and emphatic language, appointed those twin institutions of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship as their chosen Successors, destined to apply the principles, promulgate the laws, protect the institutions, adapt loyally and intelligently the Faith to the requirements of progressive society, and consummate the incorruptible inheritance which the Founders of the Faith have bequeathed to the world. Should we look back upon the past, were we to search out the Gospel and the Qur'an, we will readily recognize that neither the Christian nor the Islamic Dispensations can offer a parallel either to the system of Divine Economy so thoroughly established by Baha'u'llah, or to the safeguards which He has provided for its preservation and advancement. Therein, I am profoundly convinced, lies the answer to those questions to which I have already referred.²¹⁶

Baha'is would contend, in other words, that one of the distinguishing features of the Baha'i Revelation is the Divine Basis, firmly and unambiguously ensconced within the Writings of the Prophet Himself, upon which the Community is to progress.

²¹⁶ Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, pp. 18-20; see also p. 152.

CHAPTER X

EPILOGUE

While much ongoing comparison was attempted during the main body of this work, it will, nevertheless, be of value to restate the more important points of contact between Islamic and Baha'i understanding of Revelation.

One conclusion that may be drawn from the foregoing study is that both Revelations appeared to a people at a time when unprecedented moral and spiritual degeneracy were only too evident within the individual and community lives of those people.

It should be stressed that it is not the writer's intention to suggest that other "peoples" then existent were not equally degenerate, but rather that both Revelations claim that such moral and spiritual decay had turned the masses to the point where they were incapable of recognizing true religion (in favour of the vain imaginings and idle fancies concocted and served by their own human condition). While Islam would be content with this statement, the Baha'i Faith would, as the following quotation from Shoghi Effendi illustrates, go one step further:

How often have the Prophets of God, not excepting Baha'u'llah, chosen to appear, and deliver their Message in countries and amidst peoples and races, at a time when they were either fast declining, or had already touched the lowest depths of moral and spiritual degradation. The appalling misery and wretchedness to which the Israelites had sunk, under the debasing and tyrannical rule of the Pharaohs, in the days preceding their exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moses; the decline that had set in in the religious, the spiritual, the cultural, and the moral life of the Jewish people, at the time of the appearance of Jesus Christ; the barbarous cruelty, the gross idolatry and immorality, which had for so long been the most distressing features of the tribes of Arabia and brought such shame upon them when Muhammad arose to proclaim His Message in their midst; the indescribable state of decadence, with its attendant corruption, confusion, intolerance, and oppression, in both the civil and religious life of Persia, so graphically portrayed by the pen of a considerable number of scholars, diplomats, and travelers, at the hour of the Revelation of Baha'u'llah--all demonstrate this basic and inescapable fact. To contend that the innate worthiness, the high moral standard, the political aptitude, and social attainments of any race or nation is the reason for the appearance in its midst of these Divine Luminaries would be an absolute perversion of historical facts, and would amount to a complete repudiation of the undoubted interpretation placed upon them, so clearly and emphatically, by both Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha. How great, then, must be the challenge to those who, belonging to such races and nations, and having responded to the call which these Prophets have raised, to unreservedly recognize and courageously testify to this indubitable truth, that not by reason of any racial superiority, political capacity, or spiritual virtue which a race or nation might possess, but rather as a direct consequence of its crying needs, its lamentable degeneracy, and irremediable perversity, has the Prophet of God chosen to appear in its midst, and with it as a lever has lifted the entire human race to a higher and nobler plane of life and conduct. For it is precisely under such circumstances, and by such means that the Prophets have, from time immemorial, chosen and were able to demonstrate their redemptive power to raise from the depths of abasement and of misery, the people of their own race and nation,

empowering them to transmit in turn to other races and nations the saving grace and the energizing influence of their Revelation.

In light of this fundamental principle, it should always be borne in mind, nor can it be sufficiently emphasized that the primary reason why the Bab and Baha'u'llah chose to appear in Persia, and to make it the first repository of their Revelation, was because, of all the peoples and nations of the civilized world, that race and nation had, as so often depicted by 'Abdu'l-Baha, sunk to such depths of ignominy, and manifested so great a perversity, as to find no parallel among its contemporaries. For no more convincing proof could be adduced demonstrating the regenerating spirit animating the Revelation proclaimed by the Bab and Baha'u'llah than their power to transform what can be truly regarded as one of the most backward, the most cowardly, and perverse of peoples into a race of heroes, fit to effect in turn a similar revolution in the life of mankind. To have appeared among a race or nation which by its intrinsic worth and high attainments seemed to warrant the inestimable privilege of being made the receptacle of such a Revelation would in the eyes of an unbelieving world greatly reduce the efficacy of that Message, and detract from the self-sufficiency of its omnipotent power.²¹⁷

The advent of the Prophet is seen by both Revelations as the point at which the principles of religion are re-established and a new social and spiritual life infused into the body of mankind. Few would argue that where men have faithfully followed the principles revealed in Revelation, their moral and spiritual lives have greatly benefitted. It can then be stated that one of the prime functions of Revelation as brought by the Prophet is the regeneration and elevation of men's moral and spiritual lives, both individually, and as

²¹⁷ Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice (Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1956), pp. 14-15.

members of the Community of God.

A second point of interest is that both Islam and the Baha'i Faith view the regeneration of men through Revelation as being progressive in nature. That is, that God, in sending Guidance to men, does, so in accordance with the needs and exigencies of man's existence in historical space and time. Both view the Judaic-Christian religious traditions as being part of the progressive chain of Revelation.

In the case of Islam, we find the Qur'an mentioning the names of Prophets, such as Hud and Salih, who fall outside the Judaic-Christian line of prophesy. By the same token, however, Islam makes no mention of the Founders of the other major religious traditions now extant in the world. The only indication that such other religious traditions might be linked to Islam is the Qur'anic references to every people having received its own Prophet of God.

The Baha'i Revelation, on the other hand, explicitly states its relationship to not only Judaism, Christianity and Islam, but sees Baha'u'llah as the consummation of all previous Dispensations:

... 'In this most mighty Revelation,' He moreover, states, 'all the Dispensations of the past have attained their highest, their final consummation.' And again: 'None among the Manifestations of old, except to a prescribed degree, hath ever completely apprehended the nature of this Revelation.' Referring to His own station He declares: 'But for Him

no Divine Messenger would have been invested with the Robe of Prophethood, nor would any of the sacred Scriptures have been revealed.²¹⁸

To Israel He was neither more nor less than the incarnation of the 'Everlasting Father,' the 'Lord of Hosts' come down 'with ten thousand saints'; to Christendom Christ returned 'in the glory of the Father,' to Shi'ah Islam the return of the Imam Husayn; to Sunni Islam the descent of the 'Spirit of God' (Jesus Christ); to the Zoroastrians the promised Shah-Bahram; to the Hindus the reincarnation of Krishna; to the Buddhists the fifth Buddha.²¹⁹

In the same source we find the following summation of the

Baha'i understanding of its position in the chain of

Progressive Revelation:

...it should be stated that the Revelation identified with Baha'u'llah 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 abating the spiritual ideas 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

²¹⁸ Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 99.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 94.

with the precepts, of a divinely conceived, a world-unifying, a world-redeeming Order.²²⁰

It is of interest to note that in addition to the major Prophetic Religious traditions the Baha'i Faith posits the Divine Foundation of every Religion--no matter how primitive its present expression may appear. While it would quickly distinguish, and disclaim, the various "ecclesiastical" or man-made forms of religious trapping which have through time found their way into men's practice of nearly every known religion, it would, nonetheless, insist that at some point in the past such religions had their origin in a Revelation sent from God. It does not, of course, seek to deny the existence of false religions, formed around false prophets, but states simply that such false religions, having no basis in Divine Revelation, cannot and do not last for more than a few generations at most.²²¹ Revelation is seen to be composed of two mutually dependent, but easily discernable, units or segments. The first segment forms the central core of all Revelation, and is composed of the Spiritual Laws, or Teachings, of God as revealed through

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 100.

²²¹ For references to such false prophets as they apply to Islam, the reader may refer to: R. A. Nicholson, A Literary History of the Arabs, pp. 274, 304; Gustave E. von Grunebaum, Medieval Islam, p. 71. For reference to false prophets as they apply to the Baha'i Faith, the reader may refer to: Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, pp. 131, 163-182.

His Prophet. These Laws are eternal, and basic to each and every Revelation sent by God. They form, in one sense, the "Golden Rules" of Revelation, and although expressed differently in each Revelation, they are, nonetheless, seen as identical in content and purpose. The second unit of Revelation is composed of the Social or Material Laws which govern man's communal interactions. While they are held to be divine in origin, nature and expression, they are not viewed as eternal in duration. In other words, they vary according to the particular requirements of the age and the people to whom the Revelation is sent. It is, according to Baha'i understanding, this latter portion of Revelation, in conjunction with the man-made rites, rituals and "priestly" interpretations (all of which have gradually accrued with the passage of time), that have sparked such disputes among men as to allow them to reject the validity of other Religions (to say nothing of the internal chaos wrought by man's shallow understanding of these temporary units of Revelation).

The direct implication is that the Baha'i Faith sees Revelation as the sole power capable of fostering the maturation of mankind. In a world devoid of Revelation, man would be incapable of progress, he would be left to his animal instincts.

Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as

within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light. Methinks, but for the potency of that revelation, no being could ever exist...

.....
 ...Man, the noblest and most perfect of all created things excelleth them all in the intensity of this revelation, and is a fuller expression of its glory. And of all men, the most accomplished, the most distinguished, and the most excellent are the Manifestations of the Sun of Truth. Nay, all else besides these Manifestations, live by the operation of their Will, and move and have their being through the outpourings of their grace.²²²

The Prophet is the vehicle through which Revelation flows. He is, in both Islamic and Baha'i understanding, the chosen Messenger of God--the Revealer of His Word and Will as found in the archetypal or Mother Book. Revelation is Guidance sent by God to aid men reach their highest potential as His "noblest and most perfect" creation. Revelation must then be in accord with the specific requirements, spiritual and material, and the developed capacities of the particular recipients (in their space time environment).

While it can be stated that both Islam and the Baha'i Faith view their respective Prophets as both the consummation and culmination of past Revelations, it must be noted that the Islamic concept would close the "doors" of Progressive Prophetic Revelation at Muhammad (according to the traditional Muslim interpretations of Muhammad as the Seal of the Prophets), while

²²² Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, pp. 177, 179.

the Baha'i concept would ongoingly preserve the channel of Revelation by openly acknowledging that another Manifestation will, at some point in the future, reveal Himself to men.²²³

According to the Baha'i Revelation this prophecy, or Covenant of the next Manifestation, forms an integral part of each and every Revelation sent from God, and, as such, is one of the signs of authentic Revelation. Baha'is would further insist that the advent of a Prophet must be foretold in the prophecies of previous Revelations.²²⁴

While there is no specific mention of the relevancy of such prophecy in the Qur'an itself, it is, nevertheless, interesting to note that Muslims have with the passage of time made use of, for example, the report that the Jewish community of Muhammad's time were expecting a Prophet called Ahmad. Indeed, the Jewish community of Medina is reported to have witnessed the rise of a new star in the heavens at the moment of Muhammad's birth (which some of them interpreted as the herald of the awaited Ahmad):

...'I was a well-grown boy of seven or eight, understanding all that I heard, when I heard a Jew calling

²²³ The next Manifestation is heralded in the Kitab-i-Aqdas (refer to A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, p.14), as due at some point after the expiration of not less than one thousand years (presumably dated from 1844).

²²⁴ For coverage of the major prophecies foretelling the advent of the Baha'i Revelation the reader may refer to: Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Iqan; William Sears, Thief in the Night (George Ronald, London, 1961).

out at the top of his voice from the top of a fort in Yathrib "O company of Jews" until they all came together and called out "Confound you, what is the matter?" He answered: "Tonight has a star risen under which Ahmad is to be born."²²⁵

Another instance of the importance of "confirmation" through other Scriptures, can be seen in the following quotation from the Muslim magazine, Al-Jihadul Akbar:

The Advent of the Prophet Muhammad
(Peace Be Upon Him)
As Foretold By Jesus Christ
(Peace Be Upon Him).

Then said the PRIEST,
"How shall the Comforter be called
And what sign shall reveal his coming?"
Jesus answered:
The name of the Comforter
Is Admirable
For God gave him the name
When He had created his Soul,
And placed it in Celestial Splendour.
God said: Await Muhammad,
For thy sake I will create
Paradise, the World, and
A great multitude of creatures,
Whereof I make thee a present,
Insomuch that whoso
Shall bless thee shall be blessed,
And whoso shall curse thee
Shall be accursed.
When I shall send thee
As my Messenger of Salvation,
And thy word shall be true,
Insomuch that Heaven and Earth
Shall fail,
But thy faith shall never fail.
MUHAMMAD is his blessed name,
Then the crowd lifted up
Their voice saying:
"O God, send us THY Messenger.
O Muhammad, come quickly for

²²⁵ Ibn Ishaq, Sirat Rasul Allah, p. 70

The salvation of the world."²²⁶

It is of significance to note that Islam and the Baha'i Faith share many thoughts with regards the recognition of Revelation by men.

First, they would hold that Revelation must be brought by a Prophet who claims that His Message comes from God, and, therefore, that such Revelation is a true representation of God's Will as found in the Mother Book (which resides in the Paradise of God's Presence). The Prophet must, if the Source of past Revelation is to be seen as single, reinforce previous Revelations as brought by previous Prophets. By the same token the Prophet is able, as the chosen Representative of God on earth, to interpret the meaning of past Revelation.²²⁷ This is normally accomplished without the benefit of a formal education--a proof that the Prophet is not influenced in His Revelation by learning current among men, but receives Revelation from outside the human environment. The Prophet must, in addition, be impeccable and unrepachable in His private and public conduct. He must be the first to live His Faith as revealed in God's Revelation. This entails unswerving

²²⁶ "Gospel of Barnabas: The Advent of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) as Foretold by Jesus Christ (Peace Be Upon Him)," Al-Jihadul Akbar, May, 1974, p. 24.

²²⁷ For examples of such "interpretations" the reader may refer to: Baha'u'llah, Kitab-i-Iqan, pp. 76, 78-79, 143-144, et al.

constancy in the face of severe tests and trials, and even open persecution.²²⁸

The status of "miracles" as a proof of Revelation, although not introduced to Islam by the Prophet, was one that did eventually find its way into the Muslim mind.

Throughout his career Mohammed had been careful to emphasize his human nature. By the undeserved and unaccountable grace of God he has been selected as his messenger, but beyond this distinction there is nothing to set him apart from his fellow-men. His knowledge of the hidden is limited to what God chooses to teach him. Wherever he is not guided by revelation, he may go astray. He has no power to work miracles. However often his enemies challenge him to prove his assertions by a miracle, he refuses in the face of sneers and skeptical disappointment. His very mission is his sign. "They say: 'Why are not signs from his Lord sent down to him?' Say: 'Signs are with Allah only and I am only a manifest warner.' Hath it not sufficed them that We have sent down to thee the Book to be recited to them? Surely in that is a mercy and a reminder to a people who believe."

.....
Mohammed's discretion was, however, to no avail. No denial of his could persuade the Arabs that he lacked supernatural insight into the hidden and into the future. And he had been dead only for a short while when popular fancy, overruling the very wording of the revelation as well as the somewhat feeble protests of the more conscientious theologians, retold the Prophet's life as that of a powerful thaumaturge....²²⁹

In the Baha'i Revelation the Prophet is also regarded as capable of performing miracles, but such miracles are not

²²⁸ For examples of such "constancy" the reader may refer to: Ibn Ishaq, Sirat Rasul Allah, pp. 161-167, et al.; Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, pp. 89-234, et al.

²²⁹ Gustave E. von Grunebaum, Medieval Islam, pp. 91-92.

regarded as a necessary proof of His authenticity as a Messenger of God.

I do not wish to mention the miracles of Baha'u'llah, for it may perhaps be said that these are traditions, liable both to truth and to error, like the accounts of the miracles of Christ in the Gospel, which come to us from the apostles and not from any one else, and are denied by the Jews. Though if I wish to mention the supernatural acts of Baha'u'llah, they are numerous; they are acknowledged in the Orient, and even by some strangers to the Cause. But these narratives are not decisive proofs and evidences to all; the hearer might perhaps say that this account may not be in accordance with what occurred, for it is known that other sects recount miracles performed by their founders...., miracles are proofs for the bystander only, and even he may regard them not as a miracle but as an enchantment. Extraordinary feats have also been related of some conjurors.²³⁰

or again further on in the same source,

The Holy Manifestations are the sources of miracles and the originators of wonderful signs. For them, any difficult and impracticable thing is possible and easy. For through a supernatural power wonders appear from them, and by this power, which is beyond nature, they influence the world of nature. From all the Manifestations marvellous things have appeared. But in the Holy Books an especial terminology is employed; and for the Manifestations these miracles and wonderful signs have no importance; they do not even wish to mention them. For, if we consider miracles a great proof, they are still only proofs and arguments for those who are present when they are performed, and not for those who are absent.²³¹

The fact remains, however, that both Faiths see the mightiest proof of a Revelation as being the Revelation itself.

²³⁰ 'Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, pp. 44-45.

²³¹ Ibid., pp. 114-118.

In other words, Revelation is self-authenticating in its Authority. It is the Word of God. It is, in terms of our earlier discussions, the point beyond which there is no passage: Revelation is the Absolute basis upon which Law, under Divine instruction, can be formulated. Indeed, it is this aspect of Revelation which gives Islamic Revelation, on one level, its ongoing relevancy to historical man.

Islamic Law, the agency through which Muslims have attempted to apply Revelation to the exigencies of the moment, finds its basis, at least within the framework of Islamic belief, in Revelation. It is the writer's contention that no matter how desirable this belief may be, it is one which is impossible of real substantiation, for nowhere in the Qur'an do we find the authorization for men to "legislate" on matters not covered in that Book. Nowhere in that Book do we find anything that even begins to resemble a methodology of jurisprudence under which men might, with Divine consent and guidance, bring forth Law. In the absence within the Qur'an of either the authority or the methodology for jurisprudence, the early Muslims took it upon themselves (out of extreme necessity it should be stated) to formulate their own system of law-making.

Their prime basis was (even if not in the very early period) the Qur'an. Next to the Qur'an the ahadith was held to be an authoritative or legitimate basis for Law. A third

basis was, of course, "reason."²³²

We have seen in the main body of this work that whereas the content of the Qur'an has come through the centuries in its "original" form, the ahadith suffered greatly from both falsification and fabrication. With regards the Law (even were we to concede that while the Qur'an does not authorize men to formulate Law neither does it explicitly deny them that prerogative or duty, as the case may be), these two factors must, in the light of logic, cast aspersions on the authenticity of the ahadith as a basis upon which Law might be formulated. At least those portions of the Law which are based on the ahadith must then be viewed with such suspicion as to render them inoperative- there cannot be Law where there is the slightest doubt as to its Absolute basis. As previously stated, however, to question the authenticity of the ahadith is to question the authenticity of the Qur'an, for both are seen as transmitted through the same vehicle, namely, the communal memory. Nevertheless, "questions" are painfully prominent. The real problem lies in the oriental understanding of the transmission of "knowledge" and the confusion of the product of fiqh, with Law as found in Revelation. In other words, the best that can be made of the situation lies in the recognition that man has "made" with the assistance of reason, all those

²³² *Supra*, p. 42ff.

laws not specifically found in the Qur'an. In other words, fiqh (in its modern sense of both the process whereby law is made known to men as well as that whereby it is applied to their lives) can be seen as no more than man's attempt to provide, in the absence of a divinely revealed Formula, a method of determining and applying law in a manner that allows for its equality with Law revealed in and through Prophetic Revelation. The optimum outcome of such attempts, however, cannot realistically be classed as anything but law which the Prophet might possibly have revealed under those given circumstances. Recognition of the fact that Islam has developed, that it is not, nor was it ever, a fait accompli, that it is a product of human experience in historical space and time, contains the key whereby the modern Muslim might reopen a direct path to historic Revelation, and in so doing reapply it in terms of the needs of the modern world. This is not to overlook the fact that such an action would require a complete about-face in the Muslim understanding of the Shari'ah--a transition which is likely to require many generations of gradual acceptance, and, of course, entails the generation of its own inherent, yet new, problems. There seems no escape from the fact that even had there been no fabrication, and/or, falsification of ahadith, and therefore no cause for animadversion, the fact remains that the Qur'an in no way provides men with any direction, authority or foundation upon

which to ongoingly formulate Divine Law--that man has assumed this prerogative is defensible only in the urgency of his need and the frailty of his human condition--Islam remains, however, between Scylla and Charybdis.²³³

While no doubt the dilemma of modern Islam is manifested in the seeming "inappropriateness" of certain portions of the Shari'ah to the conditions of the modern world, the core of the problem lies, in the writer's opinion, in the traditionally established Muslim understanding of the role and practice of "interpretation" of Revelation. While the main body of this work pointed to the fact that for Revelation to have "meaning," men must be able to both relate and apply it to their lives and environment and that such "application" of necessity entails interpretation of Revelation, there must, however, under no circumstances be an erasure, consciously or unconsciously, of the knowledge that the Qur'an is completely devoid of a statement as to the proper, and therefore divinely authorized, vehicle of such interpretation. The historical evidence is that in turning a blind eye to this fact, or in the assumption that such "rights" are his implicit birthright, he has in reality allowed for the formation of splinters or schisms within the ranks of Islam. In essence, the absence

²³³ If such arguments are true with regards the basis of law in the ahadith, how much more might "reason," as a basis of law, be said to suffer from the vagaries of man's material condition--so much so that it warrants no further discussion.

of such a statement in Revelation would imply that each man has the right (at the risk of course of his life and limb--but hardly his soul) to disagree with the traditional understanding or interpretation of any given point in Islam--the existence of the Sunni, Shi'a, Sufi, modernist, westernist etc., divisions only serve to confirm this fact.

The issue can perhaps be better understood if viewed in relation to the provisions within the Baha'i Revelation for both interpretation and formulation (or legislation of Law). First however, we wish to preface any direct remarks with a discussion of the station of the Prophet, both in the Islamic as well as the Baha'i contexts.

Islam sees the Prophet, through its interpretation of the Qur'an, as a man pure and simple. He has no inherent divinity. He is merely the channel through which God, in His Mercy and wisdom, elects to send Guidance to men. Tradition, on the other hand, has accorded the Prophet at least some form of divinity in rendering Muhammad "sinless."

Of absolutely central significance to the Baha'i understanding of the Prophet, as found in their Revelation, as well as in the Writings of its authorized Interpreters, is the duality of the Prophet's nature. Baha'i Revelation posits the Prophet, at one and the same time, as Divine and human. He is a Man who is capable of reflecting or conveying the Attributes of God in such a manner as are comprehensible to the

minds of men. He is a Manifestation of God. Baha'i Revelation states that this station must be accorded to all the Prophets of God--including of course Muhammad. Within the context of "Revelation" both Muhammad and Baha'u'llah were given, as God's Messengers, the right to Covenant with mankind on behalf of God.

While the concept of the Covenant is of crucial and central importance for an understanding of Baha'i Revelation, it is by comparison, not an integral unit of Islamic Revelation--indeed it is of minor significance. Other than its natural existence within the commitment to "Islam," its sole moment of importance might well be the concern generated by the desertion of the Bedouin tribes at the time of Muhammad's passing--they held that their commitment or covenant had been temporal and personal to the person of Muhammad the man, and not, through Muhammad the Representative of God, to God.

One of the distinctive features of the Baha'i Revelation must be its reliance upon the concept of the Covenant as a direct Covenant, through Baha'u'llah, with God. The power of the Covenant is clearly and unequivocally defined and elucidated in the Baha'i Writings as the "pivot of the oneness of mankind."²³⁴ So central is this concept that it has been

²³⁴ 'Abdu'l-Baha, Covenant and Administration (Baha'i Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1969), p. 34.

the fulcrum upon which the Baha'i Revelation, when faced with dissension from within, has withstood and preserved its unity as a Revelation. In adherence to the tenets of the Covenant, the Laws of God as revealed by the Manifestation in and through His Revelation, men provide for the ongoing organic growth of a Divinely guided and protected Community.

In ignoring, disobeying, or disagreeing on the terms of the Covenant they ensure the division of their Faith. They short circuit Revelation by introducing their own human personalities into Revelation. They deprive the Community of God's Guidance by the conscious substitution of their own invented systems.

It would appear, for example, in the case of Islam that the disunity and dissension of the early believers, in the apparent absence of a clear and unequivocal statement by the Prophet as to the manner in which the Community was to be governed, led the Muslims to permanent and irreconcilable division. It is not therefore surprising to find the advent of ahadith (and its subsequent fabrication), kalam, sufism etc., (if only in their capacity of "alternatives" or supplements to Revelation) as the basis of ongoing division and disunity.

In contrast, the Baha'i Revelation remains single and united in its Form and expression (both through the body of its followers, as well as through its Administrative Institutions). There are no orthodox-reformed-modernist-mystic,

Eastern-Western, black-white, conservative-liberal, etc., Baha'is.

There are only Baha'is.

The official Baha'i statement on this matter may be gleaned from the following words of Shoghi Effendi:

In the Muhammadan Revelation, . . . , although His Faith as compared with that of Christ was, so far as the administration of His Dispensation is concerned, more complete and more specific in its provisions, yet in the matter of succession, it gave no written, no binding and conclusive instructions to those whose mission was to propagate His Cause. For the text of the Qur'an, the ordinances of which regarding prayer, fasting, marriage, divorce, inheritance, pilgrimage, and the like, have after the revolution of thirteen hundred years remained intact and operative, gives no definite guidance regarding the Law of Succession, the source of all the dissensions, the controversies, and schisms which have dismembered and discredited Islam.

Not so with the Revelation of Baha'u'llah. Unlike the Dispensation of Christ, unlike the Dispensation of Muhammad, unlike all the Dispensations of the past, the apostles of Baha'u'llah in every land, wherever they labor and toil, have before them in clear, in unequivocal and emphatic language, all the laws, the regulations, the principles, the institutions, the guidance, they require for the prosecution and consummation of their task. Both in the administrative provisions of the Baha'i Dispensation, and in the manner of succession, as embodied in the twin institutions of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship, the followers of Baha'u'llah can summon to their aid such irrefutable evidences of Divine Guidance that none can resist, that none can belittle or ignore. Therein lies the strength of the unity of the Faith, of the validity of a Revelation that claims not to destroy or belittle previous Revelations, but to connect, unify, and fulfill them. This is the reason why Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha have both revealed and even insisted upon certain details in connection with the Divine Economy which they have bequeathed to us, their followers. This is why such an emphasis has been placed in their Will and Testament upon the powers and prerogatives of the ministers of their Faith. For nothing short of the explicit directions of their

Book, and the surprisingly emphatic language with which they have clothed the provisions of their Will, could possibly safeguard the Faith for which they have both so gloriously labored all their lives. Nothing short of this could protect it from the heresies and calumnies with which denominations, peoples, and governments have endeavored, and will, with increasing vigor, endeavor to assail it in the future. We should also bear in mind that the distinguishing character of the Baha'i Revelation does not solely consist in the completeness and unquestionable validity of the Dispensation which the teachings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha have established. Its excellence lies also in the fact that those elements which in past Dispensations have, without the least authority from their Founders, been a source of corruption and of incalculable harm to the Faith of God, have been strictly excluded by the clear text of Baha'u'llah's writings. Those unwarranted practices, in connection with the sacrament of baptism, of communion, of confession of sins, of asceticism, of priestly domination, of elaborate ceremonials, of holy war and of polygamy, have one and all been rigidly suppressed by the Pen of Baha'u'llah; whilst the rigidity and rigor of certain observances, such as fasting, which are necessary to the devotional life of the individual, have been considerably abated.²³⁵

As stated, both above and in the main body of this work, the Baha'i Revelation explicitly provides for the authorized interpretation of Revelation, as well as the legislation of those Laws not found within the Revelation itself. In other words, through the Center of the Covenant and the institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice, the Baha'i Revelation has provided a living organism capable of meeting the interpretative and legislative needs of a growing

²³⁵ Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, pp. 21-22.

Community in an ever changing world.²³⁶ Its creation and authority have their undisputable basis in the Revelation of the Prophet, Baha'u'llah. Therein lies a "safety mechanism" not found in Islamic Revelation.

²³⁶ For a discussion of the implications of the cessation of the Guardianship see supra, pp. 124ff.

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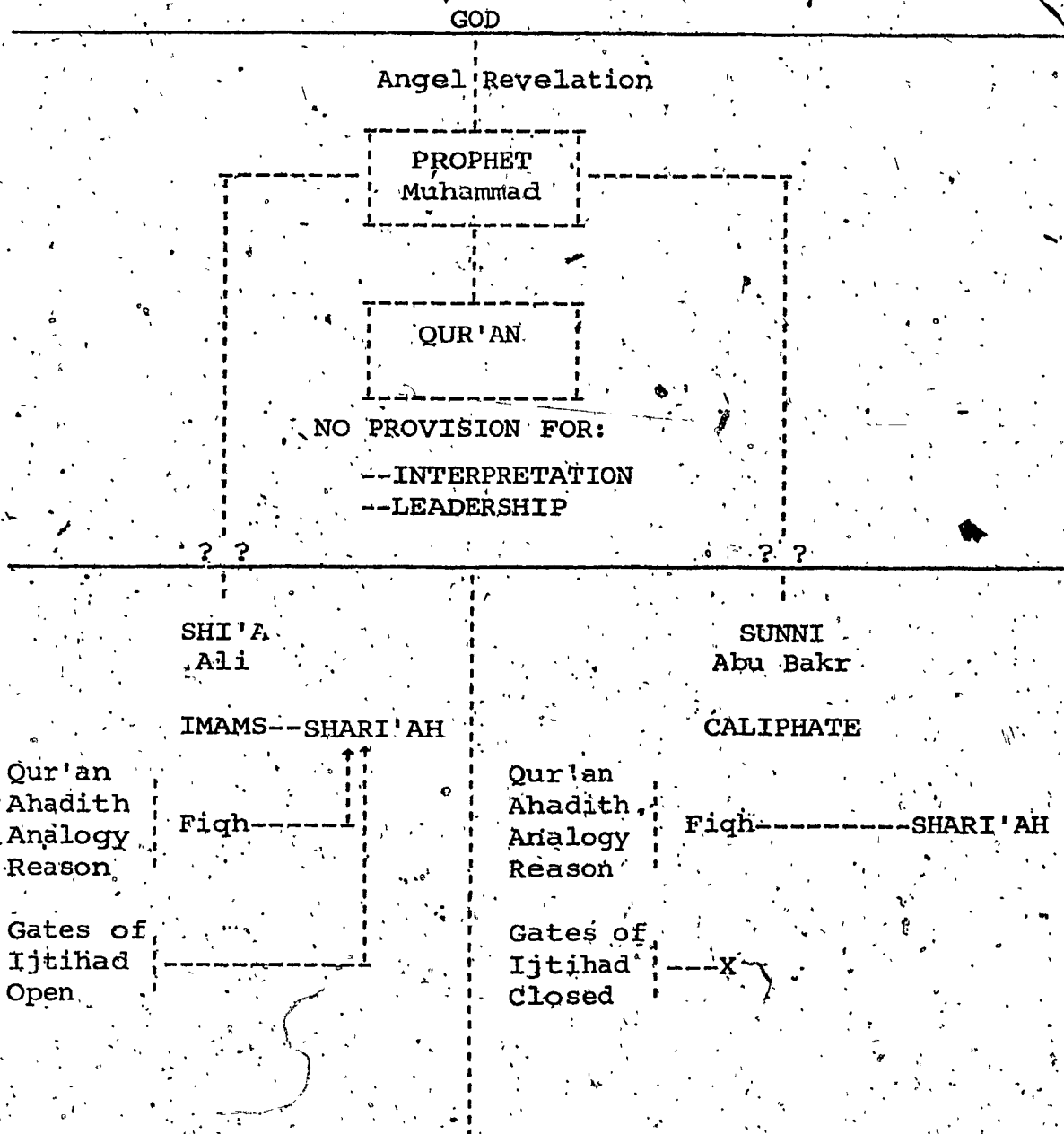
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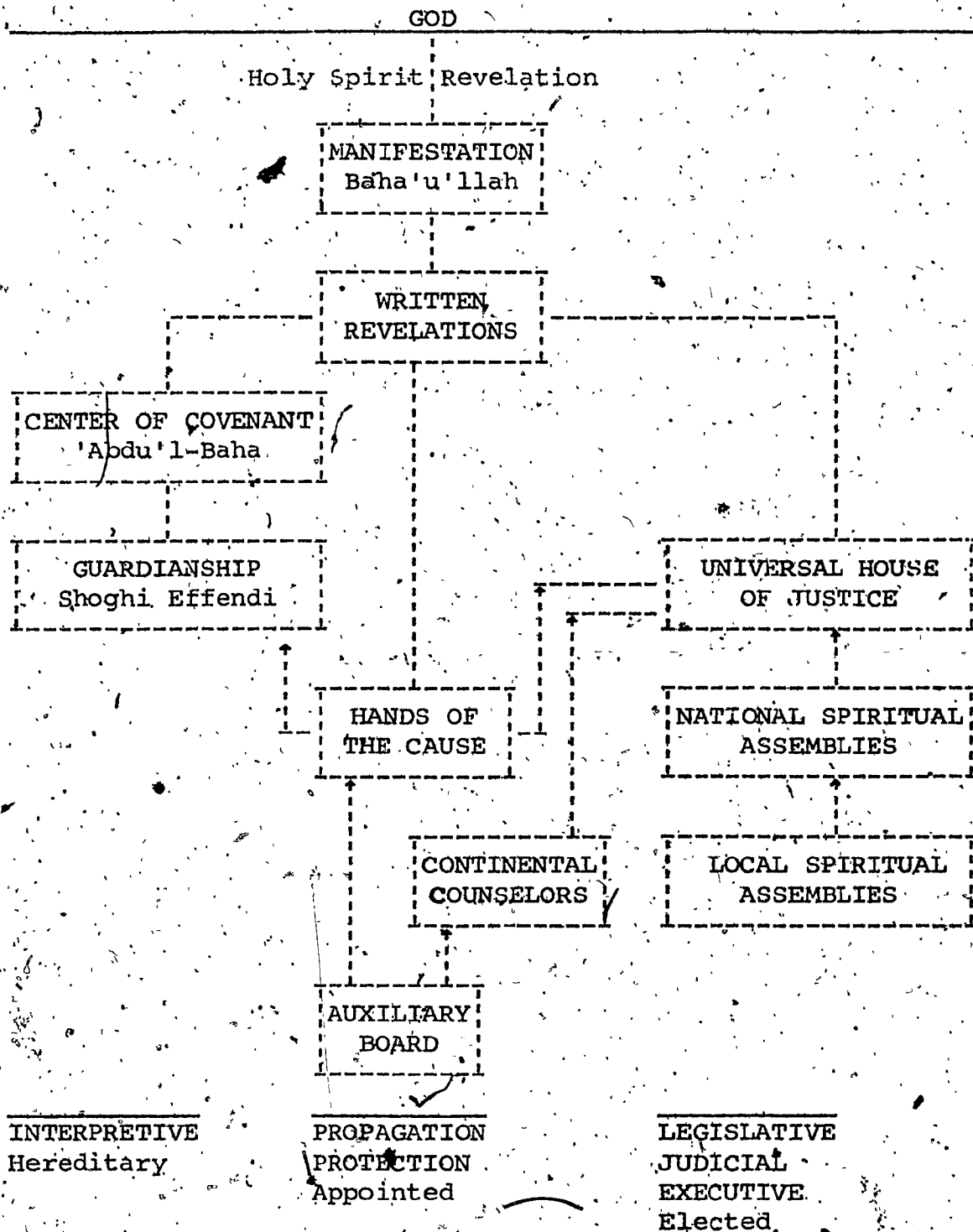
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APPENDIX A

ISLAMIC ADMINISTRATION



BAHA'I ADMINISTRATION



APPENDIX B

GROWTH OF THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH²³⁸

1844--1973

	<u>1937</u>	<u>1944</u>	<u>1953</u>	<u>1963</u>	<u>1973</u>
COUNTRIES	?	60	100	259	335
LOCALITIES	300	1,000	2,425	11,071	70,000
NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES	11	8	12	56	113
LOCAL ASSEMBLIES	?	52	611	3,551	17,000

COUNTRIES OPENED:

BAB (1844-1850)	2
BAHA'U'LLAH (1853-1892)	13
'ABDU'L-BAHA (1892-1921)	35
SHOGHI EFFENDI (1921-1957)	200
UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE (1963-Present)	335

²³⁸

Canadian Bahá'í News, No. 276, Jan/Feb, 1974, p. 2.