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# A Unique Eschatological Interface: Bahá'u'lláh and Cross-cultural Messianism

by Christopher Buck

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Religions decline in fortune over time, between heyday and renaissance. Whether due to oppression from foreign conquerors, or to eclipse from the rise of a more popular movement, or to the threat of encroaching secularism, or to the decay of the social order itself, a religion will eventually face crisis. It is during such crucial periods that a peculiar type of scripture dawns on the historical horizon, that which we call apocalyptic.

The 1979 International Colloquium on Apocalypticism at Uppsala and the 1983 Princeton Conference on Maitreya Studies are two instances which show how interest in the apocalyptic is still quite alive.<sup>[1]</sup> Most religions, if not all, develop future-oriented “visions of the end.” In such eschatological dramas, cosmology is applied to the future, and these prophecies, often modelled on past events, may be regarded as a kind of projected or inverse history.<sup>[2]</sup> Central to most apocalypses is the messianic savior whose function is to effect a deliverance from oppression, after which will be the revitalization of religion—from lowest ebb to restored power. [End p. 157]

The morphological and historical nucleus of messianism is, on comparative grounds, defined by Lanternari as follows: “A messianic movement is, in general, a collective movement of escape from the present and of expectation of salvation, promoted by a prophet-founder, following a mystico-ecstatic inspiration: a movement which intends to start a renewal of the world which will be realized in an eschatological perspective as a return to a primordial and paradisaical age.”<sup>[3]</sup>

In all apocalyptic traditions eschatological associations are proclaimed by the charismatic aspirant to messianic office. Prophecy is drawn on for purposes of legitimation. This phenomenon repeats itself over and over in history. But when a new religion or messianic movement encounters diverse traditions beyond its own ideological milieu, what kind of cross-fertilization occurs?

The case of the Bahá'í Faith demonstrates the process, since it is both well-documented and ongoing. Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892), prophet-founder of the Bahá'í cause, has been heralded by his followers as the eschatological Imám Husayn (Shi'ism), Sháh Bahrám Varjávand (Zoroastrianism), the Spirit of Truth or Comforter (Christianity), Kalki Visnuyasas (Hinduism), Maitreya (Buddhism), as well as Viracocha (Peruvian Incan tradition). Other instances of messianic dignity conferred upon Bahá'u'lláh augment this eschatological constellation.<sup>[4]</sup>

The only important historical parallel to this example of what one might call a “multiple messiahship” is afforded by the prophetology of Mání. In a passage preserved by al-Bírúní from Mání’s now-lost *Sháhpúragán*, Mání proclaims:

Wisdom and deeds have always from time to time been brought to mankind by the messengers of God. So in one age they have been brought by the messenger of God called Buddha to India, in another by Zoroaster to Persia, in another by Jesus to the West. Thereafter this revelation has come down, this prophecy in this last [End p. 158] age, through me, Mání, the Messenger of the God of Truth to Babylonia.<sup>[5]</sup>

Mání, who evidently styled himself “the seal of the prophets”<sup>[6]</sup> (as later Muḥammad likewise would), was regarded by early followers (according to the newly discovered *Cologne Mání Codex*) as a manifestation of the “True Prophet” whose spirit enlightens a succession of revelators throughout the ages. Such prophetology echoes Elkasaite doctrine (as Mání was raised among Elkasaite baptists), and is strikingly evocative of the True-Prophet Christology of Ebionite Christianity as developed in the Pseudo-Clementine Romance.<sup>[7]</sup>

Thus a unique contribution of Mání to religious thought is the way in which he universalized prophetology through a federal ideology adapted to embrace wisdom-traditions outside the Abrahamic thought-world. So successful was Mání that during his own lifetime, the religion spread to Ctesiphon, Babylon, Armenia, India, Mesene, Susiana, and Edessa.<sup>[8]</sup>

Although Mání was probably the first person in history ever to have consciously pursued the role of a world-prophet, nineteenth-century civilization proved a far more auspicious time for such a figure. Like Mání, Bahá'u'lláh was a Persian, yet both transcended their own cultural boundaries. However, Bahá'u'lláh succeeded where Mání failed. Through a comparable, though perhaps more august proclamation, Bahá'u'lláh was a superior organizer of an optimistic rather than pessimistic spirituality. By formulating a code of laws replete with a clear structure for the future development of his community of believers, Bahá'u'lláh founded a Faith with the potential for becoming a world religion.<sup>[9]</sup>

As the “World-Reformer,” through whose “new World Order”<sup>[10]</sup> the peoples of the world would be universalized, Bahá'u'lláh began to articulate an ideology which relativizes all past apocalyptic visions as expressive of the same theme, hope, [End p. 159] mandate, and promise. Within a single vision, legitimated through Bahá'u'lláh’s federal prophetology, is developed a concept referred to as “progressive Revelation”:

Contemplate with thine inward eye the chain of successive Revelations that hath linked the Manifestation of Adam with that of the Báb [Bahá'u'lláh’s forerunner]. I testify before God that each one of these Manifestations . . . hath each been the bearer of a specific Message, that each hath been entrusted with a divinely-revealed Book and been commissioned to unravel the mysteries of a mighty Tablet . . . And when this process of progressive Revelation culminated . . . He hath arisen to proclaim in person His Cause unto all.<sup>[11]</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh taught as “fact that all the Prophets of God have invariably foretold the coming of yet another Prophet after them, and have established such signs as would herald the advent of the future Dispensation.”<sup>[12]</sup> Such tension of eschatological expectancy belonged to past religions, but in this age: “The Prophetic Cycle hath, verily, ended.”<sup>[13]</sup> Bahá'u'lláh announces: “Say: He Who is the Unconditioned is come, in the clouds of light, that He may . . . unify the world.”<sup>[14]</sup>

Of universal movement in Bahá'í prophetic history is Bahá'u'lláh’s advent as the “Promise of all the

Prophets of God, a heralded in all the sacred Scriptures.”<sup>[15]</sup> Augmenting the great announcement are the specific eschatological claims advanced by Bahá'u'lláh himself. Taking each eschatological association separately, Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed himself to be four messianic figures, correlative of course to the four religious traditions which then predominated in nineteenth-century Persia. This is the point of departure for the Bahá'í process of cross-acculturation of its own universal messianism.

Bahá'u'lláh's fourfold messiahship is interesting to document, since this proclamation in effect originated a Bahá'í teaching [End p 160] technique. Through these specific eschatological bridges, built to appeal to various apocalyptic traditions, potential converts were enabled to make the crucial connexion of faith between Bahá'u'lláh and an expected deliverer foretold in prophecy.

This eschatological interface was expanded through the missionary endeavors of Bahá'u'lláh's followers, and to some extent by the official pronouncements of the successive heads of the Faith. Now, as the Bahá'í teachings are increasingly promulgated among the world's tribal and minority cultures, new apocalyptic expectations are encountered by Bahá'í teachers, who seek to build appropriate eschatological bridges. A closer look at Bahá'u'lláh's inaugural role in this “Diffusion of the Bahá'í Faith,” (which topic was discussed by panelists at two conferences of the American Academy of Religion in 1984) is in order and calls for a systematic description.

Quite public about his intentional role as a universal apocalyptic figure, Bahá'u'lláh directed his proclamations to specific religious communities, informing us that:

At one time We address the people of the Torah and summon them unto Him Who is the Revealer of verses, Who hath come from Him Who layeth low the necks of men.... At another, We address the people of the Evangel.... At still another, We address the people of the Qur'án saying: “Fear the All-Merciful, and cavil not at Him through Whom all religions were founded.” . . . Know thou, moreover, that We have addressed to the Magians Our Tablets. ... We have revealed in them the essence of all the hints and allusions contained in their Books.<sup>[16]</sup>

To examine Bahá'u'lláh's specific claims within each of the four aforementioned traditions illustrates the appeal to prophecy which a charismatic aspirant to messianic office necessarily makes for purposes of legitimation. Such *testimonia* are naturally enlarged upon by later followers. Before we proceed to this secondary [End p. 161] process, let us look at Bahá'u'lláh's appeal to messianic expectations then current in Persia and elsewhere among Shí'í Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians.

***Shí'ih Islám:*** Bahá'u'lláh first acknowledges a popular belief in Imámí Shí'ism: that of the appearance or emergence (*zuhúr*) of the Hidden Twelfth Imám, who is called *qá'im*, followed by the return (*raj'át*) of other Imáms to eventually establish their rule. The return of the third, Imám Husayn, represents an apocalyptic vision which has been at times a very passionate longing in Shí'í folk beliefs. Among the bewilderingly numerous apocalyptic traditions in Shí'ism, the exegesis of the Qur'anic passage: “Then, returned We unto you the turn [to prevail] against them and aided you . . .” (Qur'án 17:6) attributed to the sixth Imám, Ja'far-i-Sádiq, was quite influential. Here, by “returned” is meant the return of Imám Husayn, who will be flanked by the seventy-two of his companions who were martyred with him on the field of Karbalá. These companions will announce the return of Husayn. At the same time, the *Qá'im* will be among the people. When the people have truly recognized Husayn, the *Qá'im* will die, and Husayn will perform the funeral rites and burial.<sup>[17]</sup> With this all-too-slight background, the relevant messianic claim is advanced by Bahá'u'lláh as follows:

Consider the eagerness with which certain peoples ... have anticipated the return of Imám-Husayn, whose coming, after the appearance of the *Qá'im*, hath been prophesied, by the

chosen ones of God, exalted be His glory. These holy ones have, moreover, announced that ... all the Prophets and Messengers, including the Qá'im, will gather together beneath the shadow of the sacred Standard which the Promised One will raise. That hour is now come. ... The seal of the choice Wine of His Revelation hath, in this Day ... been broken. Its grace is being poured out upon men. Fill thy cup, and drink.<sup>[18]</sup>

[End p. 162] Both Shí'í and Sunní Islám anticipate two expected deliverers, the first being the Mahdí (the "Divinely Guided One")—whom Shí'í tradition identifies with the hidden Twelfth Imám. Following the Mahdí is to be (in Sunní tradition) Jesus Christ, who returns to break crosses and to kill swine. In Shí'í tradition, this tradition is replaced by belief in the return of Imám Husayn, the Prince of the Imáms. The martyrdom of Husayn has moved the Persian psyche as powerfully as has the crucifixion of Jesus Christ for Christians down through the centuries. There is a particularly striking passage in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, where his identification as the Return of Husayn is achieved through an allusion to the martyrdom of this heroic figure. This passage is translated below, from a Tablet (the *Lawh-i-Nasír*) mostly in Persian and which was revealed during the Adrianople period (1863-68).

By God! This is He Who hath at one time appeared in the name of the Spirit [Jesus Christ], thereafter in the name of the Friend [Muhammad], then in the name of 'Alí [the Báb], and afterwards in this blessed, lofty, self-subsisting, exalted, and beloved Name. In truth, this is Husayn, Who hath appeared through divine grace in the dominion of justice, against Whom have arisen the infidels, with what they possess of wickedness and iniquity. Thereupon they severed His head with the sword of malice, and lifted it upon a spear in the midst of earth and heaven. Verily, that head is speaking from atop that spear, saying: "O assemblage of shadows! Stand ashamed before My beauty, My might, My sovereignty and My grandeur. Turn your gaze to the countenance of your Lord, the Unconstrained, so that you may find Me crying out among you with holy and cherished melodies."

**Christianity:** Since the chronological sequence of Bahá'u'lláh's initial proclamations is difficult to establish, apart from the extant datable writings, the order of the four religions given here is arbitrary. Wherever dates occur they will be noted. In Stiles's [End p. 163] study of the conversion of religious minorities to the Bahá'í Faith in Irán, she notes that while a significant Jewish conversion movement began in Hamadan around 1877, and while in the early 1880s, Zoroastrians were drawn to the Bahá'í Faith, no conversions among Persian Christians appear to have taken place.<sup>[19]</sup>

Yet this should not obscure the fact that Bahá'u'lláh and his followers were engaged in dialogue with Christians at an early date, as well as during later stages of contact. Stile's intriguing observation awaits further documentation.

While the psychological and theological changes which occurred in the Bábí/Bahá'í community between 1850 and 1875 prepared Bahá'ís to receive non-Muslims, those changes did not in themselves cause the conversions. Were this the case we might expect a close correspondence between conversion and Bahá'í outreach to certain groups. I did not find this to be the case. Of all non-Muslim religions, Christianity was addressed most frequently in Bahá'u'lláh's writings, and much earlier than Judaism and Zoroastrianism. Early Bahá'ís often approached Christians and requested their scriptures.<sup>[20]</sup>

Momen's survey of early relations between Christian missionaries and Bábí/Bahá'í communities is particularly interesting in this context.<sup>[21]</sup>

Returning to Bahá'u'lláh, we find him addressing a number of epistles or "Tablets" to Christians during the

'Akká period of his ministry (1868-1892).<sup>[22]</sup> Of these Tablets, the most important was the one to Pope Pius IX, written around 1869. In it there is what one might call a dual messianic claim. Specifically, it is:

This is indeed the Father (*al-wálid*), whereof Isaiah gave you tidings [Isa. 9:6b] and the Comforter (*al-mu'azzi*) whose coming was promised by the Spirit.<sup>[23]</sup>

[End p. 164] In Bahá'u'lláh's *Lawh-i-Aqdas*, often referred to as the "Tablet to the Christians" (late 1870s?), this dual claim is reaffirmed:

This is an Epistle from Our presence unto him whom the veils of names have failed to keep back from God.... Say, O followers of the Son! . . . Lo! The Father is come, and that which ye were promised in the Kingdom is fulfilled! ... Verily, He Who is the Spirit of Truth is come to guide you unto all truth.<sup>[24]</sup>

The same passage (Isa. 9:6b) again appears to be alluded to here, since Isaiah is the only Old Testament prophet explicitly referred to in the entire Tablet. Of the two, the Comforter/Spirit of Truth declaration seems to be the more important for Bahá'u'lláh, not only for establishing a prophetic relationship to, but also claiming an actual parallel with Jesus. This is intimated by such texts as follow:

The Comforter Whose advent all the scriptures have promised is now come that He may reveal unto you all knowledge and wisdom.<sup>[25]</sup>

This Day Jerusalem hath attained unto a new Evangel, for in the stead of the sycamore standeth the cedar.<sup>[26]</sup>

O concourse of Christians! Verily, He (Jesus) said: 'Come ye after Me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.' In this day, however, We say: 'Come ye after Me, that We may make you to become quickeners of mankind.'<sup>[27]</sup>

As Riesenfeld has pointed out,<sup>[28]</sup> currents in early Christianity looked upon Jesus as the Comforter. Evidence for such identification is found in I John 2:1, where Jesus is called *paráklétos* (albeit in a juridical sense). A further witness occurs in a fragment from the Acts of John discovered in one of the Oxyrhynchus papyri: "O Jesus, the Comforter . . ." (POxy 850, *verso* [End p. 165] 10).<sup>[29]</sup> It would make sense, therefore, that Bahá'u'lláh, far removed from Pentecostal presuppositions, could interpret the Johannine Jesus' promise of "another Comforter" (John 14:16) to be transparently a reference to a future advent of a Prophet like unto Jesus, parallel to Moses' promise of a Prophet like unto himself (Deut. 18:15-19).<sup>[30]</sup>

What is unclear, however, and deserves further enquiry, is how the Father is associated by Bahá'u'lláh with the messianic Spirit of Truth. The mere juxtaposing of two prophecies is possible, but does not account for Bahá'u'lláh's deliberately consistent juxtapositions in Christian contexts. Did Bahá'u'lláh see, in the subordinationist Christology of John 14:28, a prophecy of the coming of the Father, indicated as an eschatological event in verse 30 (as a possible reading), when "the prince of this world cometh"? One could see, however unconvincingly, how the occurrence of the term "Father" in the verse immediately following the later Spirit of Truth prophecy (John 16:12-14) could be viewed as a name for the second Comforter.<sup>[31]</sup> "For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father" (Matt. 16:27) also associates the name of the Father with the second Advent in glory.

Bahá'u'lláh's proclamation was not just theological; and its impact must be explained otherwise. Charismatic power was what rendered his claim to be the "Father" plausible. A case in point surrounds the conversion of

the first Christian Bahá'í, Fáris Effendi, the Syrian Protestant who was won over to the Faith by the Bahá'í poet and historian Nabíl-i-A'zam. This event took place in Egypt (rather than Persia, where a few Armenian Christians would later convert) in the year 1868. Fáris and Nabíl were cellmates in a prison in Alexandria. Like Hakim Masih, the first Jewish Bahá'í, Fáris was a physician; but he was a priest as well (hence his title, *Qasis-i-Súri*). Naturally, both of the prisoners tried to convert the other. Since Fáris was a priest, he must have encountered the claim that Bahá'u'lláh was the [End p. 166] “Father” with some astonishment, but he was able to make the eschatological connexion to become a Bahá'í.

It happened that Bahá'u'lláh, himself a prisoner, was anchored in the port of Alexandria in August 1868, en route to exile in the prison-city of 'Akká. So close was the steamer that it was visible from the rooftop of Fáris's prison. Fáris took this opportunity to dispatch a special messenger to deliver a letter to Bahá'u'lláh. The messenger was a Christian watchmaker named Constantine who, upon returning from Bahá'u'lláh's ship, exclaimed, “By God! I saw the Father of Christ.”

**Zoroastrianism:** Given the despised minority status of nineteenth-century Persian Zoroastrians, Bahá'u'lláh's open recognition of Zoroaster as a great Prophet (*yik-i az payghambarán-i-buzurg*) assumes considerable significance. Moreover, Bahá'u'lláh wrote directly to Persian Zoroastrians in a manner sympathetic to their traditions. Again, the leading Bahá'í teacher Mirzá Abú'l-Faḍl Gulpáygání was at pains to demonstrate that Bahá'u'lláh's lineage could be traced back to Yazdigird III, the last Zoroastrian monarch to occupy the throne of Persia.

Bahá'u'lláh wrote to particular Zoroastrians of prominence and to the *dasturs* (or high priests) as well. Cambridge Orientalist E. G. Browne published partial texts of three epistles of this kind.<sup>[32]</sup> The most celebrated Zoroastrian to whom Bahá'u'lláh wrote was Manakji Limji Hataria, known in Irán as Mánakjí Sáhib, who had met Bahá'u'lláh in 1854, while passing through Baghdád en route to Persia from India. As emissary from Parsi India, Manakjí did more for the amelioration of oppressive conditions for Zoroastrians in Persia than any other nineteenth-century figure. For several years Manakjí corresponded with Bahá'u'lláh through Mirzá Abú'l-Faḍl Gulpáygání, a newly-won Bahá'í who was in Manakjí's employ from early 1877 to late 1882, years between two major imprisonments for being a Bahá'í.<sup>[33]</sup>

[End p. 167] As with other letters from Bahá'u'lláh to Zoroastrians, some of the Tablets to Manakjí were composed in pure Persian, without a trace of Arabic. This was considered by all to be a literary feat. One of these Tablets advances a veiled messianic claim: “When the world was environed with darkness, the sea of generosity was set in motion and divine illumination appeared ... This is the same illumination which is promised in the heavenly books.”<sup>[34]</sup>

To Zoroastrian *dasturs* Bahá'u'lláh wrote: “O High Priests! ... The Incomparable Friend is manifest.... Whatsoever hath been announced in the Books hath been revealed and made clear.”<sup>[35]</sup> But the most specific of Bahá'u'lláh's proclamations to Zoroastrians was penned in a Tablet known as *Shír-Mard* (Lion of a Man) or *Lawh-i-Haft Pursish* (Tablet of Seven Questions), to Ustád Javán-Mard, principal of the Zoroastrian school of Yazd. In response to Javán-Mard's question, Bahá'u'lláh explicitly identifies himself as the eschatological Sháh Bahrám Varjávand, the expected Zoroastrian deliverer.<sup>[36]</sup>

**Judaism:** To the religious leaders of Christendom, Bahá'u'lláh shows preference for Isaianic imagery in messianic context: “O concourse of bishops! ... He Who is the Everlasting Father calleth aloud between earth and heaven.”<sup>[37]</sup> This preference is made clear in Bahá'u'lláh's direct declaration: “I am the One Whom the tongue of Isaiah hath extolled”<sup>[38]</sup> Allusion to Isaiah 9:6b has been indicated in the Tablet to the Pope (above). Appeal as well to the following verse (Isa. 9:7) is transparent from a call to the “people of the Torah” along with related passages which would no doubt be communicated to many Jews by Bahá'ís who would cull such of Bahá'u'lláh's claims as:

The Most Great Law is come, and the Ancient Beauty ruleth upon the Throne of David.<sup>[39]</sup>

The Promised Day is come and the Lord of Hosts hath appeared.<sup>[40]</sup>

[End p. 168] O concourse of the divines! The heaven of religions is split and the moon cleft asunder and the peoples of the earth are brought together in a new resurrection. . . The episode of Sinai hath been reenacted in this Revelation.<sup>[41]</sup>

Behold . . . all the testimonies of the Prophets in My grasp... I am He Who feareth no one.... This is Mine hand which God hath turned white for all the worlds to behold. This is My staff; were We to cast it down, it would, of a truth, swallow up all created things.<sup>[42]</sup>

Moses/Sinai typology is strong throughout Bahá'u'lláh's writings; in many other places, moreover, he is "the Voice of the Lord . . . coming from the Burning Bush."<sup>[43]</sup> This led to accusations that his followers believed in his "Divinity and Godhood," but Bahá'u'lláh responded: "O *Shaykh*! This station is the station in which one dieth to himself and liveth in God. Divinity, whenever I mention it, indicateth My complete and absolute self-effacement. This is the station in which I have no control over mine own weal or woe nor over my life nor over my resurrection."<sup>[44]</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh's denial of any personal claim to "Divinity and Godhood" did not preclude him from speaking in the voice or persona "of the Lord," however. Metaphors abound in his writings to express the unique position he affords at the intersection of the human and divine realms as the Theophany, or Manifestation of God:

Consider the goldsmith: Verily, he makes a ring, and although he is its maker, yet he adorns his finger with it. Likewise, God the Exalted appears in the clothing of the creatures.  
(*Lawhu'z-Zuhur*)

I am the royal Falcon on the arm of the Almighty. I unfold the drooping wings of every broken bird, and start it on its flight. (*Lawh-i-Maqsúd*)

[End p. 169] And elsewhere Bahá'u'lláh speaks of himself as the:

Youth who is riding high upon the snow-white She-Camel betwixt earth and heaven. (Tablet of the Hair)

Relative to past prophets, Bahá'u'lláh designates Muḥammad as the "Seal of the Messengers," the Báb as the "King of the Messengers" (*sultán al-rusúl*), and refers to himself as the "Sender of the Messengers" (*mursil al-rusul*). Since all past prophets were sent to progressively prepare the world for its eventual unity, the spirit which propels mankind toward its own unification is the same spirit that has empowered messengers of the past to fulfill their preparatory roles. Bahá'u'lláh's fourfold messiahship, therefore, functions not only as an ideology which can create eschatological bridges for winning converts, but also serves as a kind of theory of religious relativity.

**Conclusions:** Bahá'í messianism's cross-cultural expression at first appears to be an eschatologically eclectic and adaptive syncretism, with a messianic mixing of various apocalyptic traditions. Such a view has influenced both scholar and polemicist in various assessments of the Bahá'í Faith. Recalling E. G. Browne once again:

From what has been said above, the Western reader may be tempted to think of the Bábí [Bahá'í] doctrine as embodying, to a certain extent, the modern Western rationalistic spirit. No mistake could be greater. The belief in the fulfillment of prophecies; the love of apocalyptic sayings culled from the Jewish, Christian, and Muhammadan scriptures . . . [45]

And Browne goes on. Our purpose is not to prove this view wrong, but rather to refine it. Without a History of Religions perspective, the perceived necessity of such cross-cultural expression is not so obvious; but parallels in Christian and Islamic [End p. 170] missionary enterprise are clear. Since the rational spirit is strongly cultivated, with science given a status complementary in function to that of religion in Bahá'í principle, the superficiality of Browne's analysis comes into focus once the Bahá'í worldview is grasped. With Bahá'u'lláh's pronouncement that "all the Prophets of God proclaim the same Faith"<sup>[46]</sup> Bahá'ís are oriented towards a kind of *praeparatio messianica* appreciation of all past apocalyptic urges.

There is some validity to Browne's criticism, on the other hand, since Bahá'í appeal to prophecy to date has tended to be somewhat uncritical. This is characteristic of *testimonia* in all religious apologetics which in argument depend on apocalyptic proof-texts. As I have shown in two earlier papers, where I subjected Bahá'í appeals to prophecy within Hindu and Zoroastrian traditions to critical analysis, apocalyptic literatures are predominantly "prophecies from past events" when it comes to messianic predictions, are of priestly redaction, with typological dependence on past prophet/warrior deliverers, tend to be religiously and culturally ethnocentric (often with vengeful attitudes toward oppressors), and are discordant in their lack of uniformity.<sup>[47]</sup>

Positively, Bahá'ís have fostered renewed interest in past traditions. This in itself helps break down religious prejudices, since Bahá'ís embrace earlier world monotheisms as a part of a global heritage. Thus, Bahá'u'lláh, perhaps more than any other religious figure, has not only integrated eschatologies as convergent, but has cultivated a unific awareness of the parallel and complementary integrity of all faiths. [End p. 171]

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## Notes

[1] Vide: Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, at Uppsala, Sweden, August 1979, D. Hellholm, ed. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1983). Papers from the 1983 Princeton Conference on Maitreya Studies were kindly provided by Prof. D. Overmyer (University of British Columbia).

[2] The projection of the past into the future, so often the model for apocalyptic prophecy, was styled "inverse history" by historian F. Kazemzadeh of Yale.

[3] V. Lanternari, "Messianism: Its Historical Origin and Morphology," *History of Religions* 2 (1962) p. 70.

Relevant also is J. Collins' definition of apocalypse: "'Apocalypse' is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another supernatural world." ("Introduction," *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre, Semeia* 14 (1979) p. 9.

Towards a definition of "revelation," see G. Widengren, "Phenomenology of Revelation," *Studia Missionalia* 20 (1971) pp. 301-319.

[4] The classic Bahá'í position on the relation of past apocalyptic promises to Bahá'u'lláh was expressed by Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith and Bahá'u'lláh's great-grandson. "To Israel He [Bahá'u'lláh] was neither more nor less than .. the 'Everlasting Father', the 'Lord of Hosts' come down 'with ten thousands of saints'; to Christendom Christ returned 'in the glory of the Father'; to Shí'ih Islám the return of the Imám Husayn; to Sunnī Islám the descent of the 'Spirit of God' (Jesus Christ); to the Zoroastrians the promised Sháh Bahrám; to the Hindus the reincarnation of Krishna; to the Buddhists the fifth Buddha." (*The Bahá'í World* 14 (1963-1968) p. 31.)

Association of Bahá'u'lláh with Viracocha is documented in a photograph in *The Bahá'í World* 16 (1973-1976) pp. 445, where

Andean Quechua Indians are pictured beside a placard which reads: “Bahá'u'lláh el Returno de Viracocha.” This proclamation took place in Cuzco, Peru at the 1975 All-Quechua Bahá'í Conference.

[5] Cited in E. G. Browne's *A Literary History of Persia* (Cambridge University Press, 1902) vol. 1, p. 163.

[6] For sources, see F. Mojtabai, “Mání and Shapur,” *Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute* 46 (1978) p. 100.

[7] A. Henrichs, “Mání and the Babylonian Baptists: A Historical Confrontation,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 77 (1973) pp. 45-55. Also, E. Rose, *Die Manichaische Christologie* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harassowitz, 1979), reviewed in *Numen* 29 (1982) pp. 273-75. H. Klimkeit).

[8] A. Bausani, *The Persians* (London: Elek, 1971) p. 55.

[9] No formal comparison between the two religious systems has been undertaken. Clear documents designating succession, administrative structure, individual and social laws, come from Bahá'u'lláh's own pen.

[10] Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979) p. 63; Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982) p. 146.

[11] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971) pp. 74-75.

[12] Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán. The Book of Certitude* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, rev. ed., 1974) pp. 12-13.

[13] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 60.

[14] Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 46.

[15] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 5.

[16] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh to the Kings and Leaders of the World* (Haifa, Bahá'í World Centre, 1967) p. 87.

[17] A. Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of Mahdí in Twelver Shi'ism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981) pp- 168-69.

[18] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, p. 12; L. Vaglieri, who contributed the entry on Husayn for *Encyclopaedia of Islám*, singles out an eschatological account which approximates the tradition to which Bahá'u'lláh refers: “Among the eschatological accounts is the following: Husayn went to the Raḍwá mountains where he will remain on a throne of light, surrounded by the Prophets, with his faithful followers behind him, until the coming of the Mahdí [Qá'im]; then he will transfer himself to Karbalá, where all the celestial and human beings will visit him.”

[19] S. Stiles, “The Conversion of Religious Minorities to the Bábí Faith in Irán: Some Preliminary Observations” (unpublished paper, 1983) p. 1. See also: W. Fischel, “The Jews in Persia,” *Jewish Social Studies* 12 (1950) p. 156; Fischel, “The Bahá'í Movement and Persian Jewry,” *The Jewish Review* (1934) pp. 47-55; H. Cohen, *Jews of the Middle East* (1973) p. 201.

[20] Stiles' pp. 6-7.

[21] M. Momen, “Early Relations Between Christian Missionaries and the Bábí and Bahá'í Communities,” *Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History*, Vol. 1, ed. by Momen (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1983).

[22] S. Lambden, “A Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh to George David Hardegg: The *Lawḥ-i-i-Hirtíq*,” *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1983) pp. 32-62.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 47, rendered from the text of *Lawḥ-i-i-Páp*, in Bahá'u'lláh], *Alváh-i-názilay-i khítáb bi muluk va ru'asáy-i ard* (Tehran:

Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 124 Bahá'í Era [1967-681 p. 85.

[24] Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978) pp. 9, 12.

[25] Bahá'u'lláh, cited in *The Bahá'í World* 14 (1963-1969) p. 45.

[26] Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 145

[27] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 91.

[28] H. Riesenfeld, "A Probable Background to the Johannine Paraclete," *Ex Orbe Religionum: Studia Geo Widengren Oblata* (Leiden: Brill, 1972) vol. 1, pp. 266-76.

[29] "O Jesus, the Comforter" cited in *ibid.*, 273.

[30] Parallelism of Paraclete to Jesus has recently been examined by M. Isaacs, "The Prophetic Spirit in the Fourth Gospel," *The Heythrop Journal* 24 (1983) pp. 391-407. In the section, "Prophetic Functions ascribed to the Spirit-Paraclete" (393-99), the Spirit of Truth serves as: 1) Divine Messenger; 2) One who glorifies Jesus; 3) Teacher; 4) Witness; 5) Predictor; 6) One who is rejected; 7) The Abiding Spirit. Isaacs' parallelism is brought into bolder relief in the section, "Jesus as the Model for the Paraclete-Prophet" (pp. 402-404).

[31] Isaacs prefers the term "Counsellor" to "Comforter" in her rendering of John 15:26: "But when the Counsellor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father, he shall bear witness to me." Might not the cluster of titles, *Counsellor/Father/Prince* evoke Isaiah 9:6?

[32] Browne, "A Catalogue and Description of 27 Bábí Manuscripts," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 24 (1892), "Three Epistles to Zoroastrians" pp. 671-76. (To be precise, Browne provides the full text of the first epistle.) See also, J. C. Katrak, "Professor E. G. Browne's Reminiscences of the Zoroastrians of Irán," *Browne Centenary Volume* (Calcutta: Irán Society, 1963) pp. 38-45.

Browne documented the apocalyptic fervor of the Zoroastrians in Persia in his classic, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, (See S. Seawright's evaluation of the work, *The British in the Middle East* [New York: Atheneum, 1970] pp. 141-42). Browne recorded: "Their relations to one another [Zoroastrians and Bahá'ís] are of a much more friendly character than the relations of either of them towards the Muḥammadans, the Zoroastrians . . . regarding 'the virtuous of the seven climes' as their friends, and the Bábis [Bahá'í] being commanded by Behá [Bahá'u'lláh] to associate with men of all religions with spirituality and sweet savour". . . Moreover the Bábis recognise Zoroaster as a prophet . . . and are at some pains to conciliate and win over his followers to their way of thinking, as instanced by the epistles addressed by Behá from Acre to certain of their number; while some few at least of the Zoroastrians are not indisposed to recognize in Behá their expected deliverer, Sháh Bahrám, who, as Dastur Tir-andaz informed me, must appear soon if they were to be rescued from their abasement, and 'the Good Religion' re-established. The Dastur himself, indeed, would not admit that Behá could be this promised saviour, who, he said, must come before the next Naw-Rúz [Persian New Year] if he were to come at all . . ." (*A Year Amongst the Persians* [Cambridge University Press, 1970 (1893)] pp. 431-32).

[33] G. Aidun, "Manekji Limji Hataria and the Bahá'í Faith," *Bahá'í Studies Notebook 1* (1980) pp. 47-62; M. Boyce, "Manekji Limji Hataria in Irán," *Golden Jubilee Volume* (Bombay: K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, 19) pp. 21-26; M. Momen, "Abu'l-Fazl [sic] Golpaygání [sic]," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

[34] Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet to Mánackji Sáhíb, *Star of the West* 1 (1910) 5ff.; *Bahá'í Scriptures*, pp. 130-33.

[35] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 105-106.

[36] S. Stiles, *Zoroastrian Conversions to the Bahá'í Faith in Yazd, Irán* (M.A. Thesis in Oriental Studies, University of Arizona, 1983) p. 20; 27. H. Balyuzi, Bahá'u'lláh: *The King of Glory* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1980) p. 10. The text of *Lawḥ-i-Haft Pursish* (or *Shír-Mard*) was most recently published in Bahá'u'lláh, *Majmú'ihy-i-maṭbú'ihy-i-alváḥ-i-mubárakihy-i-ḥaḍrat-i-Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1978) where one finds the explicit association with Sháh Bahrám on p. 240.

- [37] Bahá'u'lláh, cited in Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1961) pp. 104-5.
- [38] Bahá'u'lláh, cited in *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 34.
- [39] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 89.
- [40] Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 239.
- [41] Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 247-48.
- [42] Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawh-i-Mubáhilih*, cited in A. Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh: Adrianople, 1863-68* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1977) p. 293.
- [43] Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 265. A parallel proclamation is ventured by Bahá'u'lláh when he writes: "O people! The Sun of Utterance beameth forth in this day, above the horizon of bounty, and the radiance of the Revelation of Him Who spoke in Sinai flasheth and glisteneth before all religions." (*Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 65)
- [44] Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 41. An illuminated tablet in Bahá'u'lláh's own cursive, a facsimile of which forms the frontispiece to *The Bahá'í World*, Vol. 14 (1963-68), reinforces this important distinction: "When I contemplate, O My God, the relationship that bindeth me to Thee, I am moved to proclaim to all created things, 'Verily I am God!'; and when I consider my own self, lo, I find it coarser than clay!"
- [45] Browne, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. by J. Hastings: (Edinburgh, 1908-14) vol. 2, p. 306. Broadcast proclamation of the advent of Bahá'u'lláh on the part of Bahá'ís has led one critic's evaluation of the Faith to include negative as well as positive assessment. Bahá'ís are taken to task for having bordered on creating "a magnified cult of the founder." (J. Nijenuis, "Bahá'í: World Faith for Modern Man?" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 10 [1973] p. 532.) In contrast, the personality inventory of Bahá'ís, conducted by J. Keene, deserves notice: "Bahá'í World Faith: Redefinition of Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 6 (1967) pp. 221-35.
- [46] Bahá'u'lláh, *Iqán*, pp. 135-54. The full text states: "...all the Prophets are Temples of the Cause of God, who have appeared clothed in divers attire. If thou wilt observe . . . thou wilt behold them all abiding in the same tabernacle, soaring in the same heaven, seated upon the same throne.... and proclaiming the same Faith.... Wherefore, should any one of these Manifestations of Holiness proclaim, 'I am the return of all the Prophets', He verily speaketh the truth."
- [47] Buck, Christopher. "The Mystery of the Sworded Warrior in Hindu Apocalypse: Was Kalki Visṇuyasas Bahá'u'lláh?" AAR/SBL, PacNW Region, 1981; Buck, "Was Bahá'u'lláh *Sháh Bahrám Varjávand* despite Zoroastrian 'Prophecies'?" AAR/SBL PacNW Region 1982. For the summary of a further study in Bahá'í prophetology, see Buck, "Illuminator vs. Redeemer: A 'Trajectory' of Ebionite Christology from Prophet Messianism to Bahá'í Theophanology" *Abstracts: American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting* 1983 (Scholars Press, 1983) p. 86.
- Other references to specific messianisms include: *Kalki Visṇuyasas*: K. Jayaswal, "The Historical Position of Kalki and his Identification with Yasodharman," *The Indian Antiquary* 46 (1917) pp. 145-53; H. Bhide, "Is Kalkirāja an Historical Personage?" *The Indian Antiquary* 48 (1919) pp. 123-28; D. Mankad, "Kalki - The Earliest Check to Buddhism," *The New Indian Antiquary* (1942) pp. 337-43; D. Kosambi, "The Avatára Syncretism and Possible Sources of the Bhagavad-Gita," *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*. 24-25 (1948-49) pp. 121-34; P. Eggermont, "The &acute;aka Era and the Kanīṣka Era," *Papers on the Date of Kanīṣka*, ed. by A. Basham; (Leiden: Brill, 1968) pp. 87-93 (89).
- Sháh Bahrám Varjávand***: K. Czeglédy, "Bahrám Cóbin and the Persian Apocalyptic Literature," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 8 (1958) pp. 21-43; M. Biró, "Bahrám bbin and the Establishment of the Principality in Kartli," *Acta Orientalia* 33 (1979) P. 177; Czeglédy, "Bahrám Cóbin," *Antik Tanulmányok* 4 (1957) p. 301; R. Frye, *Neue Methodologie in der Iranistik* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1974) p. 66; Frye, "The Charisma of King ship in Ancient Irán," *Iranica Antiqua* 6 (1964) pp. 36-54; S. Eddy, *The King is Dead: Studies in the Near Eastern Resistance to Hellenism, 334-331 B. C.* (University of Nebraska, 1961) pp. 343-49 (343; 348 n 45).

**Maitreya:** Papers from the 1983 Princeton Conference on Maitreya Studies: P. Jain, "Stages in the Bodhisattva Career of the

Tathagáta Maitreya”; J. Barbaro, “On the Meanings of the Maitreya Myth: A Preliminary Typology.” J. Kitagawa, “The Career of Maitreya,” *History of Religions* 21 (1981) pp. 107-25; P. Eggermont, “The Origin of the Saka-Era,” *Indo-Iranian Journal* 2 (1958) pp. 225-28; H. Ui, “Maitreya as an Historical Personage,” *Indian Studies in Honor of C. R. Lanman* (Harvard, 1929) pp. 95-102. On all three (Saosyant/Kalki/Maitreya) messianisms: Abegg, *Der Messiasglaube in Indien und Irán* (Berlin, 1929).

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