

Manifestation "arise under his shadow" and all the previous Manifestations in that cycle were sent in anticipation of his advent. `Abdu'l-Bahá asserts that we are now in the Universal Cycle beginning with Adam and that Bahá'u'lláh

is its Universal Manifestation (Foundations of World Unity 54).

Thus the Manifestations that have appeared before Bahá'u'lláh can be considered

to have been part of a cycle leading up to Bahá'u'lláh, a cycle called the Adamic Cycle (or Cycle of Prophecy) which lasted about six thousand years, and the Manifestations that will appear after Bahá'u'lláh are part of the Bahá'í Cycle (or Cycle of Fulfillment, CF 80). This Bahá'í Cycle initiated by Bahá'u'lláh, during which many further Manifestations of God will arise and lasting about five hundred thousand years, should not be confused with the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, which is expected to be a period of a thousand years or more during which the specific teachings given by Bahá'u'lláh will hold sway until the coming of the next Manifestation

of God. The Bab is seen as being at the interface between the Adamic and Bahá'í Cycles--at one and the same time the conclusion of the first and the start of the second (GPB 54).

Hence each individual Manifestation of God has his own individual cycle, in which his religion grows, matures, and declines; is part of a larger cycle, either the Adamic Cycle or the Bahá'í Cycle; and these larger cycles are in turn set within the overall Universal Cycle. Although time is thus in some ways cyclical, the cycles that occur within each Universal Cycle do not result in a return to the initial point. Rather there is also an element of progression. Each Manifestation of God has the function of guiding humanity in its social and spiritual evolution (see "Progressive Revelation").

2. Ages within the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh. Shoghi Effendi has divided the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh into three ages. The first of these, the "Primitive," "Heroic," or "Apostolic Age" began with the Declaration of the Bab in 1844. It is divided into three epochs corresponding

to the ministries of the Bab (1844-53), Bahá'u'lláh (1853-92), and `Abdu'l-Bahá

(1892-1921). Shoghi Effendi states that this first age concluded with the death of `Abdu'l-Bahá in 1921 and "more particularly" with the death of Bahiyyih Khanum in 1932 (WOB 98).

The second age is called the "Formative" or "Iron Age." It also divided into epochs. The first of these lasted until 1944 (CF 5) or 1946 (MBW 19) and covers the period during which the Bahá'í administrative order was being set up by Shoghi Effendi. The second epoch, which lasted until 1963, was marked by the global spread of the Bahá'í Faith. The third epoch, which lasted until 1986 was characterized by the emergence of the Bahá'í Faith from obscurity and the initiation of social and economic development plans.

The present epoch, which is the fourth epoch of the Formative Age, is considered

to have begun in 1986 and is to be marked by the national Bahá'í communities taking on the responsibility for their own development.

3. Epochs and stages of the Divine Plan. In his writings, Shoghi

Effendi has also marked out various stages in the evolution of the process of the spread of the Bahá'í Faith and the establishment of its administrative institutions throughout the world set in motion by `Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablet of the Divine Plan (q.v.). He writes of a twenty-year delay in the implementation

of this plan while the administrative institutions of the Bahá'í Faith were being established (CF 32). The first epoch of the Divine Plan thus began in 1937. The first stage of this epoch constituted the first American Seven Year Plan (1937-44) and was marked by the spread of the Bahá'í Faith in Latin America. The second American Seven Year Plan (1946-53) constituted the second stage and was marked by activities spreading the Bahá'í Faith throughout Europe. The Ten Year Crusade (1953-63) marked the third stage of the first epoch and took the Bahá'í Faith to most of the rest of the world. The second epoch of the Divine Plan began in 1964 and includes successive

stages marked by the Nine Year Plan (1964-73), the Five Year Plan (1974-79),

the Seven Year Plan (1979-86), the Six Year Plan (1986-92), and the Three Year Plan (1993-96). (MBW 153; CF 62, 113-14; WG 25).

Bibliography. SAQ 160-61; PUP 220; GPB 100; CF 4-6; `Abdu'l-Bahá, Foundations of World Unity 54

TABLE: BAHAI SACRED HISTORY

I. PREVIOUS UNIVERSAL CYCLES - of which no trace remains

II. PRESENT UNIVERSAL CYCLE

A. ADAMIC CYCLE, CYCLE OF PROPHECY - lasted approximately 6,000 year

1. Adam 1. Indian religious figures

2. Noah - Krishna

3. Abraham

4. Moses 2. Zoroaster

5. Jesus 3. Buddha

6. Muhammad

+ Other unknown or unspecified prophets

B. BAHAI CYCLE, CYCLE OF FULFILLMENT - to last 500,000 years

1. The Bab

2. Bahá'u'lláh - Universal Manifestation for this Universal Cycle

a. Heroic, Primitive, or Apostolic Age - 1844-1921 (or 1932 - the death of Bahiyyih Khanum)

i. Ministry of the Bab (1844-53)

ii. Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh (1853-92)

iii. Ministry of `Abdu'l-Bahá (1892-1921)

b. Formative, Transitional, or Iron Age - 1921 -

i. First Epoch (1921-44/46) - Erection of the Administrative Order

ii. Second Epoch (1946-63) - spread of the Faith beyond the confines of the Western Hemisphere

iii. Third Epoch (1963-86) - emergence of the Faith from obscurity and initiation of social and economic development plans

iv. Fourth Epoch (1986-) - national communities taking on the responsibility for their own development

v. Successive further Epochs

c. Golden Age

Successive Epochs leading to the Most Great Peace

3. Further Manifestations - under the shadow of Bahá'u'lláh

END OF PRESENT UNIVERSAL CYCLE

III. FURTHER UNIVERSAL CYCLES

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