

From Sect to Church: A Sociological Interpretation of the

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Chapter 1: Proclamation

1. Historical Background

Bahá'ism and its predecessor, Babism, grew out of the peculiar religious environment of Shi'ite Islam in Persia. As will become clearer later, Bahá'ism cannot be regarded as simply another Shi'ite sect and, indeed, any attempt to understand it merely from the point of view of Islamics is bound to misrepresent it. It is necessary, however, that we be aware of the environment from which this movement sprang. We must consider especially two trends in Shi'ite Islam which have an important bearing on the origin of our movement and which we shall call the chiliastic and the gnostic motifs. While these motifs had merged before in Shi'ite history, they came together with particular power in the Babi explosion in the first half of the 19th century.

Both Sunnite and Shi'ite Islam possess well-developed eschatologies, but the chiliastic motif, the urgent expectation of imminent eschatological events, is much stronger in the latter. Muhammad himself appeared from the beginning as the messenger of a coming day of judgement, one whose task, in the words of one of the early Meccan suras, was to "arise and warn".[1] It has been held that this warning of approaching judgement was perhaps the most powerful new element in Muhammad's message.[2] In the Koran the day of judgement is described with terrible details.[3] In contrast with Biblical eschatology, however, this day is not advertised by any signs and portents. It is always present in terrible nearness, placing each moment of life in the shadow of eternal decision.[4]

With the worldly victory of Islam after the death of the Prophet the terrible simplicity of this message grew into an eschatology both more complicated and more comfortably remote. In this period we find the development of the conception of the Mahdi.[5] The word itself (from the Arabic al-mahdi, "the one who is led") does not occur in this form in the Koran. All speculations and doctrines concerning the Mahdi are part of the hadith, the sacred tradition containing revealed truth outside the Koran. In early times the term was often used without eschatological

implications in reference to the first four Caliphs and, indeed, was used in this way in later times too. Soon, however, it came to refer specifically to one from the family of Muhammad who is to appear shortly before the end of the world to renew faith and establish the universal empire of Islam with the assistance of Isa (Jesus). The hadith attributes to the Prophet himself several prophecies concerning the Mahdi.

The conception of the Mahdi remained quite marginal in Sunnite hadith.⁶ It was more important as a figure in the popular imagination than as a theological doctrine. In Shi'ite theology, however, the doctrine of the Mahdi occupies a central position.^[7] Here the coming of the Mahdi is identified with the return (raj'a) of the Hidden Imam.^[8] According to orthodox Shi'ite doctrine the 12th Imam, Muhammad ibn Hasan, went into concealment (ghaibat) shortly after the death of his father Hasan al-Askari, the 11th Imam. For a period of about 70 years the 12th Imam was represented on earth by four consecutive agents (wakils, also known as "gates", abwab). This is the period of the "Lesser Concealment", during which the Hidden Imam does not communicate with his people at all, except through occasional dreams of holy men. This period, during which the Hidden Imam is still the "Lord of the Age" (sahibu'l-saman), will come to an end with his glorious return as the Imam-Mahdi. At this return he will be accompanied not only by Isa but by many others, making it a kind of preliminary day of resurrection. Among the returning will be Yazid ibn Muawiyya, the hated founder of the 'Umayyad dynasty, and Husain ibn 'Ala, the Holy Martyr, who will now take bloody vengeance on the former. Finally, 'Ali and Muhammad will also return to earth and defeat Satan himself in a tremendous battle.

The expectation of the Mahdi expressed itself in recurrent chiliastic eruptions in the history of Shi'ite Islam. This expectation, as is to be expected, was always strongest in periods of great distress, as at the time of the Mongol invasions. Madhist traditions, however, were already used politically in the 8th century by the Abbassids, who wished to rally the support of the strongly Shi'ite east of the Arab empire to overthrow the 'Umayyad Caliphate in Damascus. Making use of a prophecy put in the mouth of Muhammad by the hadith, the Abbassids advanced towards Syria under the black banners signifying the coming of the Mahdi.^[9] In the 10th century the Shi'ite Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt was established by 'Ubejdallah, claiming the title of Mahdi.^[10]

The gnostic motif in Shi'ite Islam is to be traced back largely to the Neoplatonist influences under which the Arabs came after their first contact with Greek thought.^[11] A number of systems of

theosophy (tawasuf) which were developed within Islam may go back to Indian as well as Greek sources. The Neoplatonist influence early found expression in Sufism.[12] But the Sufis, mystics rather than gnostics, were more interested in the experiences of the inner life than in the formation of theosophist systems. The latter became an important characteristic of Shi'ite thought, whether strongly oriented towards Sufism or not, especially in heterodox groups.

The development of the Isma'ili sect is the most important example of the gnostic motif in Shi'ite Islam.[13] The Isma'ilis built their doctrine around the Neoplatonist idea of periodic emanations of the world intellect. The Imams were incorporated in this scheme in such a way as to appear as incarnations of the logos. The Mahdi in Isma'ili thinking now becomes the coming manifestation of the world intellect, exceeding even that of the very foundations of Islam, going as far in some of its branches as an explicit understanding of raj'a in terms of transmigration. All branches of the Isma'ili sect are characterised by abstruse allegorical interpretations of the Koran and complicated numerological speculations.

The Isma'ilis are important for our considerations because they represent an early combination of chiliastic and gnostic motifs which, like that of the Babis, resulted in powerful historical events. The history of the Isma'ili origins of the Fatimids, Druzes[14] and Assassins[15] afford ample evidence of this.

The essential characteristic of the Isma'ili heresy is its allegorical approach to the historical religions, especially, of course, to the Koran.[16] Distinguishing between the inner meaning (batin) and the outer meaning (zahir) of the revealed writings, the Isma'ilis increasingly included all historical revelations under the latter, that is, interpreted them as temporary constructions for the benefit of the uninitiated. In the final step of gnostic initiation the Isma'ili disciple learns to transcend Islam itself. The Isma'ilis called their method of interpretation and dissolution of the substance of the Koran ta'wil al-ta'wil, "the secret interpretation of the secret interpretation", leading in a number of steps of initiation to the final gnosis. They shared this concept with the Sufis, who, however were largely interested in finding Koranic justification for their mystical experiences and were, therefore, less dangerous from the point of view of Muslim orthodoxy. Interesting to us is an outgrowth of the Isma'ili sect known as the school of the Hurufi ("Interpretation of Letters"), who engaged in the most fantastic numerological speculations of all Isma'ili groups.[17] It should be pointed out that, in spite of their wide departures from Shi'ite orthodoxy, these groups share with the latter two psychological traits, a blind faith in religious authority (as already expressed in the initial Shi'ite doctrine of the Imamate as against the secular-democratic conception of the Sunnite Caliphate) and a fierce intolerance towards those of other religious convictions (the fanaticism of the

fundamental Shi'ite religious experience, the "Weeping for Husain").[18]

The trends discussed above found an important expression just before the Babi explosion in the Shaikhi sect.[19] This group was founded by Shaikh Ahmad Ahsai of Bahrein (1753-1826), a Shi'ite Arab who began his teaching career in the pilgrimage cities of Karbala and Najaf. He travelled widely, came to Persia on the invitation of the Shah and lived there for many years, teaching in Teheran and Yazd. He was, however, publicly excommunicated in Persia in his old age because of his heretical doctrines, especially his conception of the Imams as causes of creation, their pre-existence and return in an Isma'ili sense, and his denial of bodily resurrection and of the bodily voyage of the Prophet to heaven, as well as other points. It is interesting that both Shaikh Ahmad and his successors maintained their orthodoxy before the religious authorities, thus following in the Shi'ite tradition, adopted by all the Shi'ite heretical sects as well as by Shi'ite orthodoxy, that the true faith may be denied and hidden with a good conscience before unbelievers.

Shaikh Ahmad died on a pilgrimage near Medina, shortly after his excommunication. He was succeeded by Siyyid Kazim Reshti, a Persian, who followed him closely in his doctrine and was also excommunicated by the Shi'ite religious authorities. He established his school at Kerbela, where one of his students was Mirza 'Ali Muhammad, later known as the Bab.

Before we take up the thread of events at this point let us briefly review the historical heritage that fell to Babism. It sprang up from within Shi'ite Islam, from whose doctrine of the Imamate its conception of religious revelation and authority took its color. From Shi'ite Islam Babism also received the underlying motifs of expectation and secret, the awesome wonder of what is to come and the mystery of what is present but hidden. In its chiliastic motif Babism could find its point of contact in popular Mahdism, both orthodox and heretical. In its gnostic motif Babism would base itself on the rich theosophical lore handed on through centuries by the secret heretical groups. It seems to us that the merging of these two motifs in the peculiar religious configuration offered by the Shi'ite environment was bound to have powerful historical results, as was the case with the Isma'ili sect and again with the movement that is here our special concern.

2. The Appearance of the Bab

The first period of the Bahá'í movement, which we have called here the period of proclamation, is clearly divided into two halves, the one from 1844 to 1850, from the declaration of the Bab to his execution, and the other from 1850 to 1892, from the beginning of the succession struggle after the death of the Bab to the death of Baha-u'llah, in whose favor this struggle was resolved. The whole period, however, is characterised by the passionate intensity of the proclamation that they expected on has indeed arrived and is

now living in the midst of men. With the death of Baha-u'llah the content of the Bahá'í message found its point of orientation in the past and ceased to be

that breathless proclamation of the divine wonder to be found here and now with which the movement began. In spite of many important contradictions in the sources,[20] the main outline of events during the period of the Bab is clear. It will now be our task to follow these events up to the year 1852, two years after the execution of the Bab, when, as a result of bloody suppression, the movement seemed all but destroyed.

Siyyid 'Ali Muhammad, later to be known as the Bab, was born in Shiraz on March 20, 1821.[21] His father, Siyyid Ibrahim, was a merchant of that city, died when 'Ali Muhammad was still a child. The maternal uncle of the child, one Siyyid 'Ali, also a merchant, took care of his education after the death of his father. As indicated by the title siyyid, both the paternal and maternal lines of 'Ali Muhammad's family claimed descent from the Prophet Muhammad.

Babi traditions have claimed a number of miraculous events connected with 'Ali Muhammad's childhood, supposedly going back to accounts given by his uncle. Characteristic of these is the story that upon his birth 'Ali Muhammad exclaimed in Arabic, "The Kingdom is God's", and that he was found reading the Koran on the day he was to learn the alphabet.[22] It seems clear, however, that the child was serious and intelligent, showed an early interest in religious matters, and charmed many of the adults around him with his pleasant personality. As an adolescent 'Ali Muhammad was sent to work in Bushire for his uncle's business and lived there about 5 years before returning to his native Shiraz.

Shortly after his stay in Bushire the young 'Ali Muhammad set out on a pilgrimage to Kerbala.[23] This in itself would have been a very ordinary thing to do for a young Shi'ite Persian, but while on this pilgrimage, 'Ali Muhammad attended the Shaikhi school in Kerbela. According to Babi sources, 'Ali Muhammad personally met Siyyid Kazim, then head of the Shaikhi sect, who was greatly impressed by him and, according to one source, secretly but explicitly designated him as the bearer of the new divine manifestation which the Shaikhis were expecting.[24] In view of the later events, however, this is highly improbable. It is certain that 'Ali Muhammad spent several months in Kerbela, became a member of the Shaikhi sect, then returned to Shiraz. Also, it seems very likely that shortly before his death Siyyid Kazim prophesied that the "Lord of the Age" would soon appear and would be a young man, a descendent of Muhammad and un-instructed in formal learning.[25] After Siyyid Kazim's death in 1843 a number of Shaikhi leaders, among them one Mulla Husain, a Persian, set out to search for this "Lord of the Age" in different parts of the Muslim world.[26]

While 'Ali Muhammad's personality and learning had impressed many people both in Kerbela and in Shiraz, there had as yet been no indication on his part that

he claimed any supernatural station for himself. We can only guess about the inner process which led him to such conviction. The outward proclamation of his claim was sudden and dramatic. On June 11, 1844 (5 Djemadi el-Akher 1260 A.H.) 'Ali Muhammad publicly declared himself to be the Bab ("Gate") and began to preach a number of highly exciting sermons in the mosques of his native city.[27]

There has been considerable disagreement on the precise meaning intended by 'Ali Muhammad when he adopted the title of the Bab. The term itself has a long history.[28] The term has no Koranic significance. On the Shi'ite hadith it is put into the mouth of Muhammad to refer to 'Ali, the first Imam: "I am the city of knowledge and 'Ali is its gate (bab)". Also, as we have pointed out above, the term in its plural form (abwab) is used by the Shi'ites to refer to the four agents of the Hidden Imam. In Sufi tradition the term was used to denote the means through which it is possible to enter the world of mystic illumination. The Isma'ilis gave the title of bab to the spiritual leader (shaikh) who instructs the initiates in the secrets of the sect. It seems that the Shaikhs thought of the term mainly in terms of the idea of return (raj'a), that is, the return not only of the Hidden Imam as the Mahdi, but also of the abwab and perhaps other historical figures preceding the next manifestation of the divine world intellect. There is little doubt that the masses who first heard the Bab's preaching in Shiraz, and those among them that became his first followers, understood his claim in an orthodox Shi'ite sense, that is, in connection with the coming of the Imam-Mahdi. When, soon later, the Bab acknowledged the ascription to him of the honors of the Imam-Mahdi himself, and bestowed the title of Bab to one of his followers, this was still understandable in a Shi'ite sense. Indeed, at his final trial in Tabriz the Bab reiterated his claim to be the Mahdi before the religious tribunal and explained his title in terms of the hadith concerning 'Ali. It is obvious, however, that in the Bab's own mind the meaning of the title far transcended any Shi'ite or even Islamic context. The only question is whether this was so from the beginning or its adoption or only a result of further developments. There is a progression of claims on the part of the Bab to be Zikr ("Reminder" - a term associated with the Mahdi), Qa'im (Mahdi) and finally Nuqta (Point). The last of these terms probably reflects the Bab's own thinking most accurately. It is a gnostic concept, derived from the Isma'ili and Shaikhi traditions, and means that center of a divine manifestation. The matter is further confused by the fact that the title Nuqta was claimed by several people in succession, if not simultaneously, in the course of the following years, with the Bab agreeing to the claim in at least one case, that of Kuddus (we shall have occasion to come back to this peculiarity later). Muslim sources claim that the Bab made this claims [sic] in succession, carried along, as it were, by the dynamic of the movement he had started. Babi sources, on the other hand, claim that the full meaning of Nuqta was intended by the Bab from the beginning, and was only hidden from the masses and the religious authorities in harmony with the

traditional Shi'ite usage of ketman - the hiding and disguising of the true faith from hostile unbelievers. The Babi interpretation of this matter is much more probable, in view of the Bab's Shaikhi connections, his acceptance by important Shaikhi leaders as the coming divine manifestation prophesied by Siyyid Kazim, and the fact that, as we shall see, an inner circle of his followers actually proclaimed his full claim, in the sense of Nuqta, at the so-called Council of Bedesht. It may be added here, incidentally, that the later Bahá'í claim that the Bab adopted his title because he understood himself as merely the forerunner of Baha-u'llah, that is, as the "Gate" to Baha-u'llah, lacks any foundation in the facts.

Even in the Shi'ite sense, however, the claim was a stupendous one. The religious implication of the statement that a bab had re-appeared meant that the gate of revelation, closed since the disappearance of the 12th Imam and the death of his last agent, was re-opened. The Mahdi was near, and was already communicating with the world. The actual claim to be the Mahdi himself was, of course, even more stupendous. Its political implication was nothing less than the establishment of theocracy, as, according to Shi'ite doctrine, all Islamic secular rulers, including the Kajar dynasty then ruling Persia, were only ruling as trustees of the Hidden Imam, the true "Lord of the Age". It is no wonder, then, that the declaration of 'Ali Muhammad to be the Bab immediately aroused widespread attention.

The Bab's early sermons in Shiraz must have been extremely impressive events. It seems that the impact of his preaching and his personality was stunning.[29] The religious teachers of the city were deeply disturbed by the appearance of this 23-year old preacher, but completely unable to do anything against him. He easily countered all arguments, silenced all who would oppose him. Shortly after the Bab's declaration Mulla Husain arrived in Shiraz, pursuing his mission of searching for the new "Lord of the Age" expected by the Shaikhis. After an interrogation of the Bab, Mulla Husain became fully convinced of his identity and thus became the Bab's "First Believer". The Bab bestowed upon him the title of Bab-ul-Bab ("Gate of the Gate")[30] and sent him to preach in Iraq and Khorasan. At Isfahan Mulla Husain openly proclaimed the Bab as the Imam-Mahdi: "Il faut dire ici, pour prevenir toute erreur, qu'en assimilant le Bab au douzieme Imam, le missionnaire cherchait a se faire comprendre de la foule et a gagner ses sympathies, absolument comme Saint Parul lorsqu'il revelait aux Atheniens que le Dieu qu'il leur annoncait etait ce Dieu inconnu auquel ils avaient deja eleve un autel. C'etait des deux parts une facon de parler, et on verra plus tard qu'il n'y a aucun rapport entre l'idee que les Babys se font du Point, et ce que les musulmans pensent au sujet de l'Imam Mehdy." [31]

The Bab himself, shortly after Mulla Husain's departure, set out on a pilgrimage to Mecca.[32] Muslim sources claim that there he drew a sword and proclaimed himself Mahdi in front of the Ka'aba,

but this is to be doubted. It seems that the pilgrimage took place without outward excitement and that at its conclusion the Bab returned to Shiraz, where he resumed his preaching and began to write verses and commentaries.

The first serious clash between Babis and Muslims occurred during the Bab's absence from Shiraz.[33] His followers, led by Mulla Muhammad 'Ali of Barfurush, whom the Bab had given the title Kuddus, changed the kibra (the direction in which Muslims turn for prayer) from Mecca to the Bab's house in Shiraz, changed the azzen (the Muslim call to prayer), and recited verses written by the Bab instead of the Koran in the mosque. From the Muslim point of view, this was equivalent to blasphemy and apostasy. Kuddus and another Babi missionary by the name of Moqaddes were brought before Husain Khan, the governor of Shiraz, who ordered them to be whipped and tortured. The two missionaries thereupon left Shiraz and went on a preaching tour including Yezd and Kirman, meeting with mounting violence on the part of the religious authorities and fanatical Muslim mobs. An angry meeting took place during this trip between Moqaddes and Kerim Khan, who had become head of the Shaikhis after the death of Siyyid Kazim. Kerim Khan refused to recognise the claims of the Bab and, following this meeting, the majority of the Shaikhi sect held aloof from the Babi movement, in some instances even became active against it.

The Bab himself was brought before the religious authorities in Shiraz.[34] When he declared his mission there, the leader of the religious teachers ('ulamas), Shaikh Abu Tarab, beat him with a stick. The Bab was sent to his uncle's house with orders to cease public activity. As, however, attention was growing and people from different parts of the country came to Shiraz to see the Bab, he was taken to the great mosque and ordered to recant. According to Babi sources, he preached a powerful sermon instead, even further confusing his enemies and drawing upon himself the attention of the country.[35]

Finally, the attention of the court was drawn to the situation in Shiraz and one Siyyid Yahya Darabi was sent by the Shah to deal with the Bab personally. Siyyid Yahya arrived in Shiraz and went to see the Bab. When the latter again asserted his divine mission, Siyyid Yahya, probably in mockery, asked him to write on the spot a commentary on an obscure sura of the Koran. The Bab did so at once. Moreover, the contents of the commentary struck Siyyid Yahya greatly, as they referred to certain thoughts he had himself had concerning this passage. Greatly disturbed, Siyyid Yahya requested another interview with the Bab, openly recognised his claim and was ordered by him to go out and preach his message.[36] This incident is typical of the effect the personality of the Bab had upon many people who met him.

The opposition to the Bab was mounting in Shiraz and several plots were made to assassinate him. In 1846 he left Shiraz for Isfahan.[37] The governor of that city, a tolerant and curious man, assigned him a house there. However, he was unable to prevent the Bab from further violent disputes with the 'ulamas, leading to mounting feeling

against the Bab in Isfahan too. As a result, the Bab left the city under guard and with much ostentation, was brought back secretly and went into hiding.

From Isfahan the Bab addressed a letter to the Shah, asking that the latter reach a decision about his position and claims, and, if possible, permit him to come to Tehran to present his case.[38] The

Shah replied that the Bab should go to Maku, a royal fortress, and stay there quietly for a while. Under virtual arrest, the Bab was brought there by military escort. On the way to Maku he had yet another dispute with an assembly of 'ulamas, who made fun of him by asking him questions in Arabic grammar and astronomy, to make him admit his ignorance.[39] The Bab arrived in Maku and stayed there for nine months in relative freedom. According to Babi tradition he converted 'Ali Khan, the commander of the fortress.

While the Bab was staying in Maku, his missionaries carried his message throughout practically all of Persia. Especially Mulla Husain was responsible for large numbers of converts in different parts of the country.[40] In Kashan he converted Mirza Jani, who later was to write the most important history of the movement,[41] and in Teheran he converted the two half-brothers Mirza Yahya Nuri (Sobh-al-Azal - "Dawn of Eternity") and Mirza Husain 'Ali Nuri (Baha-u'llah - "Glory of God"), later to be the two protagonists in the struggle for succession following the death of the Bab.

One of the most interesting converts to the Bab was a woman, Qurat'ul-Ain of Kazvin, whom the Bab called Tahirih ("The Pure One").[42] Tahirih must have been a woman of unusual beauty and learning. After an early marriage, she went on a pilgrimage to Karbela and attended the Shaikhi school there, an enterprise sufficiently unusual for a Muslim woman so as to require great will power and determination. In 1848 she wrote to the Bab, whom she apparently was never to meet in person,[43] and declared herself this disciple. Muslim sources claim that she showed herself in public without a veil, which is denied by Babi sources for this period. Muslim sources also credit her with extravagant claims concerning her own person, assert that that she claimed to be the Nuqta of the new revelation at one time and told her followers that she was the kibra towards whom they must turn in prayer.[44] Be this as it may, her behaviour created a great scandal in her city, especially as she went out to preach in several provinces, on orders of the Bab. Her uncle, a fervent Muslim by the name of Muhammad Taghi, was brutally assassinated while praying in the mosque by one of Tahirih's followers.[45] Tahirih was accused of having ordered this murder and was forced to flee Kasvin. Many Babis were arrested in that city.

There followed a large meeting of the several Babi missionaries and their followers which has come to be known as the Council of Bedesht.[46] It marks a turning point in the history of the movement.

The three main characters of the meeting were Mulla Husain, Kuddus and Tahirih. Bahá'u'lláh was also present. The meeting was one of tremendous excitement, heightened by the extravagant claims put forward by Kuddus and Tahirih. The position of Kuddus is especially interesting. It seems that Mulla Husain was accepted for a while as the leader of the group of Babis with whom Kuddus travelled, and that Kuddus replaced him in one night, which he spent reciting new verses, an event regarded by both Shi'ites and Babis as a clear sign of divine revelation.[47] It is quite clear from

the sources that Kuddus at one time claimed to be the Nuqta of the new divine manifestation, apparently without incurring opposition from the Bab: "It is abundantly clear from Haji Mirza Jani's history that Hazrat-I-Kuddus advanced the most extravagant claims, and that many of the Babis were disposed to regard him as superior to the Bab. He not only developed himself to be Christ come back to earth, but even went so far as to say, 'Whosoever hath known me is become a polytheist, and whosoever hath not known me is become an infidel, and whosoever asketh 'why' or 'wherefore' or 'how' concerning me is become a reprobate.'"[48]

The original aim of the meeting was to arrange a great pilgrimage to Maku, where the Bab was then staying, probably with the intention of liberating him by force. The meeting soon, however, arrived at a discussion of the new doctrine. Tahirih made the suggestion to the other leaders that the time had come to tell all the Babis that the time of a new divine manifestation transcending Islam had come and that it was not just a question of recognising the Bab as Mahdi. The other leaders, however, argued against such an open break with Islam. Tahirih then suggested a stratagem, which was agreed to by the others. Shi'ite law prescribes death for the apostate, even if he later repents, but not if the apostate is a woman. Tahirih, therefore, suggested that she announce the real nature of the Babi manifestation to a mass meeting in the absence of Kuddus; if the people accepted her message, Kuddus was to join her; if they rejected it, Kuddus was to reproach her for her apostacy and "re-convert" her to Islam, and the leaders would continue to practice ketman in regard to their real convictions, not only against the Shi'ites but against the mass of their own followers. The event must have been one of great dramatic power. As usual, Tahirih sat behind a curtain and began to address the assembled people: "Elle commence aussitôt sa conférence: l'aventure qu'elle tentait, l'emotion bien naturelle qu'elle en ressentait, l'espoir de la réussite, la crainte d'un échec l'excitèrent à tel point que jamais elle n'avait été aussi éloquente ni aussi persuasive. Les auditeurs, charmés par sa voix et par son talent, l'écoutaient avec une attention profonde, pas un ne remuait. Au moment ou elle prononça ces paroles, 'Vous devez aujourd'hui tous savoir que Dieu s'est manifesté et que le Qoran est abrégé: un livre nouveau nous est descendu du ciel, une loi nouvelle nous est donnée', elle fit le signe convenu: les servantes obéirent, le rideau tomba et splendide elle apparut aux yeux des auditeurs. Elle se tourna une seconde vers ses servantes comme pour leur demander compte de ce qui venait de se passer, mais faisant

immédiatement face à la foule: 'Qu'importe cet accident dit-elle, cela n'a aucune importance: ne suis-je pas votre soeur et n'êtes-vous point mes frères. Or quelle soeur a jamais cache son visage à son frère.'"[49]

There must have been a tremendous turmoil on the meeting place after this event. It is not hard to imagine the emotions of these men, as they heard this open rejection of Islam and saw the curtain fall before the proclaimer of the new manifestation appearing in the figure of this beautiful, passionate woman. The men ran about, shouting, many of them hiding their faces so as not to see Tahirih. Distressed by the confusion, Tahirih stepped down and walked among the men, trying to convince them, until Baha-u'llah threw his coat over her and led her away to one of the tents. The mob broke into two factions, one seeking out Kuddus and telling him of the event, the other following Tahirih. Kuddus would not openly accept or reject Tahirih's announcement, appeared pensive, said that she had put herself outside the pale of Islam by her statement concerning the Koran, but that perhaps there was some hidden meaning to her actions. Tahirih meanwhile instructed those who had followed her in the new faith, then sent two men, who had expressed readiness to die, to invite Kuddus to a "discussion" at the point of a sword. Kuddus accepted the invitation, was "convinced" by her argumentation and openly submitted to her. The meeting then ended with several days of festivities. Apparently no more thought was given to the original purpose of the meeting, the pilgrimage to Maku. After the festivities, Mulla Husain left for the interior of Khorasan, Kuddus left for Mazindaran, accompanied for a while by Tahirih, who then returned to Kazvin.[50]

The Council of Bedesht was followed by the bloodiest episode in early Babi history, the Mazindaran insurrection.[51] As we have seen, the Babi leaders separated after the Council of Bedesht, with Kuddus and his group going on into Mazindaran, his native province. After travelling through the province and encountering much opposition from the Muslims, Kuddus issued a call to Mulla Husain to join him with his men in Mazindaran. It is difficult to establish the exact meaning of this call. Babi historians have claimed that the Babis took up arms in self-defense and knew that they were going to their martyrdom. Muslim historians, on the other hand, assert that the Mazindaran insurrection was the first step in what was to be the establishment by the sword of a Babi theocracy in all Persia, with the overthrow of both Shi'ite Islam and the Kajar dynasty. The Muslim interpretation appears more adequate to the facts as we know them, especially since the earliest Babi history, that of Mirza Jani of Kashan, tends to agree with the Muslim interpretation that the Mazindaran events constituted an open insurrection planned and led by Kuddus.[52] It is interesting to note that the Mazindaran episode happened in the period immediately following the death of Muhammad Shah and before the accession of the new Shah, in that period of interregnum during which successful rebellions have often broken out in oriental countries. Also, this was the period during which Kuddus wrote verses, thereby laying claim to immediate revelation from God and, possibly, a station in the new divine manifestation even superior to

that of the Bab. The coming together of the several Babi groups, the establishment of a powerful fortress and the fanaticism with which the Muslims were attacked hardly seem explainable in terms of self-defense.

Mulla Husain heeded the call and set out for Mazindaran with about 200 men and their dependents. According to the Babi historians, Mulla Husain made a speech to his men, telling them that they were going to their martyrdom and that any wishing to leave the group should do so, after which only 30 men are supposed to have left for their homes. Mulla Husain's journey was not unopposed and there were repeated armed clashes with Muslims. In the Babi sources Mulla Husain is extolled as a great hero and fighter. His sword stroke was to have been so powerful that he usually split his opponent in two down to the waist, once did this not only to a Muslim but also split in two the big tree behind which that Muslim was hiding. One incident, which we have no reason to disbelieve, is to have taken place in a caravanserai in which Mulla Husain's band was besieged. Mulla Husain told a man to go on a terrace and chant the assan, the Muslim call to prayer. Before he could finish the azzan, the man was shot by the Muslim outside the caravanserai. Mulla Husain, to show the Muslims how the Babis respected God's commandments, sent a second and a third man to the terrace, both of whom were also killed by Muslim shots, but the third man was able to finish the azzan.

Kuddus and Mulla Husain met at the tomb of Shaikh Tabarsi, a local Shi'ite shrine. They immediately set out to build a fortress around the shrine. Apparently, this fortress was well constructed and greatly impressed the Muslims who came to take it. Shaikh Tabarsi was occupied by about 2,000 Babi men, in addition to the families which many had brought along. Over this community Kuddus was the undisputed ruler, received visitors from behind a curtain. Mulla Husain acted as his lieutenant and as military commander.

In trying to understand the emotions which animated these men as they built their fortress and awaited the coming of their enemies, we may look at two descriptions of the situation at Shaikh Tabarsi, one based on a Muslim source, and other from a Babi source: "Du haut de leur château, ils parlèrent presque exclusivement de politique, de politique bâby sans doute, mais enfin de politique. Ils annoncèrent que tous ceux qui voulaient vivre heureux dans ce monde, en attendant l'autre avaient désormais peu de temps pour se décider. Une année encore, une année sans plus, et son Altesse le Bâb, envoyé de Dieu, allait s'emparer de tous les climats de l'univers. La fuite était impossible, la résistance puérile. Tout ce qui serait bâby posséderait le monde, tout ce qui serait infidèle servirait. Il fallait se hâter d'ouvrir les yeux, de faire soumission à Moulla Houssein, sans quoi, tout à l'heure il allait être trop tard." [53]

"They knew for a surety that in a little while that devoted band would to a man fall before the guns of the foe, and stain the earth with their life-blood. In spite of this knowledge, however, they eagerly set out from the most distant

provinces to share the martyrdom of those already assembled in that fatal spot. I know not what these people had seen or apprehended that they thus readily cast aside all that men do most prize, and thus eagerly hastened to imperil their lives. Surely their conduct was such as to leave no room for doubt of their sincerity and devotion in any unprejudiced mind; and in truth what they did and suffered was little short of miraculous, being beyond mere human capacity." [54]

It is characteristic of the exalted state of mind prevailing at Shaikh Tabarsi that the provisions to sustain the fortress and its large garrison in case of siege were completely inadequate. Mulla Husain distributed among his men the titles of prophets and Imams, and governorships of distant lands. Also, he promised that any of those killed in battle would rise again in 40 days, a statement that he might have understood in the Babi sense of "return", but which was certainly taken in the literal sense by his men. [55]

The battle around Shaikh Tabarsi lasted for over four months and ended in the complete destruction of the Babi fortress. At first, however, success was all on the side of the Babis. The first royal troops sent to Shaikh Tabarsi with the express order from the Shah to destroy the Babi uprising were routed by the fanatic Babis. Their battle cry "Oh, Lord of the Age" ("Ya sahibu'l-zaman") struck terror into the hearts of the Muslim soldiers. [56] The Babis completely destroyed and massacred a village that had given assistance to the royal troops and terror of their ferocity spread through the whole province. Other Babi groups, among them one led by Baha-u'llah, tried to get through to Shaikh Tabarsi, but were unable to get through the cordon thrown around the fortress.

The tide turned late in 1848, after Mulla Husain was killed in open battle. The Babis were deeply struck by the death of their beloved military leader. Hunger began to undermine the fortress from within. Soon the situation was such that Mulla Husain's half-putrified dead horse was disinterred and eaten. New royal troops were brought against the fortress and a holy war (jihad) was proclaimed in all the mosques of Mazindaran. The Muslim sources report that some Babis were beginning to desert and even join the other camp.

The royal commander offered a truce and free passage to Kuddus. A Muslim source claims that the condition for the truce was return to Islam, but the Babi sources deny this, claim that Kuddus knew that the Muslims were going to kill him, but, when the royal commander sent him the guarantee of free passage written on a page of the Koran, he accepted, knowing the other's intent but wishing to show him respect for God's book. [57] However this may have been, the 214 Babis who surrendered with Kuddus were brutally massacred, their women raped and carried away by soldiers. A Muslim source recounts how the soldiers cut open the bellies of their Babi prisoners to find undigested grass, the diet of Shaikh Tabarsi in the last days of the siege. Kuddus himself was taken to Barfurush, his native city, and there tortured to death. The fortress of Shaikh Tabarsi was levelled to the ground.

The Mazindaran uprising was not the only occasion in which the Babis took up arms against the Shah. Shortly after the conclusion of the Mazindaran uprising there was an insurrection in Zendjan, capital of the Turkish-speaking province of Khamsah.[58] The Babis there were led by one Mulla Muhammad 'Ali, who proved himself highly adept in street fighting. And for many months mountain warfare went on in Niriz between Babi bands and royal troops.[59] Both the Zendjan and the Niriz episodes, like that of Mazindaran, ended in bloody defeat for the Babis. In terms of worldly success, the fall of Shaikh Tabarsi marked the defeat of the Babi movement in Persia. There followed a period of cruel persecution and extermination.

The suppression of the Mazindaran uprising also ushered in the final chapter in the life of the Bab himself.[60] In 1848 a royal envoy was sent to transfer the Bab from Maku, where he had lived in relative freedom and received many pilgrims from all parts of the country, to the fortress of Chihriq. There too, however, he exercised as much influence around himself as at Maku: "Nor was it an uncommon occurrence even for unbelievers involuntarily to bow down in lowly obeisance on beholding His Holiness; while the inmates of the castle, though for the most part Christians or Sunnis[61] reverently prostrated themselves whenever they saw the visage of His Holiness appear resplendent over the walls of the building. In short, at no previous time had the serene and awful beauty of that noble countenance exercised so irresistible an attraction over all who came within the sphere of its influence. No sooner, then, did the 'Indian believer', as he approached the building, catch sight of the face of His Holiness, than he involuntarily exclaimed, 'This is my Lord!'[62] and fell swooning to the ground. On coming to his senses he wept much, and, the glory of that divine apparition irradiating a heart, clear and receptive as a mirror, began to chant the words, 'I am the Ka'im become manifest', and, like Mansur,[63] to cry out, 'I am the Truth!'"[64]

From Chihriq the Bab was brought to Tabriz, where he was imprisoned rigidly for several months, awaiting his trial for heresy before the religious authorities of the city.

The interrogation of the Bab was conducted by the 'ulemas with the same contempt and mockery that had marked the previous disputes of the young preacher with the religious authorities of Shi'ite Islam:

"'We have heard,' continued they, 'that you claim to be the Bab.'

'Yes,' replied he.

'What,' demanded Mulla Muhammad with a scornful smile, 'does 'Bab' mean?'

'The same,' answered His Holiness, 'as in the holy saying of the Prophet, 'I am the City of Knowledge, and 'Ali is its Gate.'

'On what night,' continued the other, 'wert thou thus favoured, and who

assigned this name to thee?'

His Holiness answered, 'I am He whose advent you have been expecting for one thousand two hundred and sixty years,[65] and whom ye now deny.'

They said, 'We are expecting Him who is to arise of the kindred of Muhammad, to wit, Muhammad ibnu'l-Hasan, whose mother is Narjis Khatun, and who is of the Arabs; thy birthplace is Fars, thou art of the Persians, and thy father and mother, too, are known.'

'By just such nominal considerations was it,' he replied, 'that all former peoples were veiled from knowledge of the prophet of their time; you too are veiled, else I am indeed He.'

'Whence,' asked they, 'shall we recognize you?'

He answered, 'By the evidence of the verses revealed through me.'"[66]

This constituted an open claim to the title of Mahdi, but more than that, the open assertion that, as the Koran, the Bab's Bayan was an immediate revelation of God. This alone would be enough, under Shi'ite law, to merit death. It appears that after the interrogation the Bab was cruelly beaten and tortured. Muslim sources claim that after receiving a bastinado the Bab recanted and renounced all his supernatural claims.[67]

This fact is doubtful, but, in view of the evidence, it cannot be dismissed entirely. In any case, such recantation could not have saved the Bab's life, as under Shi'ite law an apostate must die even if he recants. A doctrinal opinion (fatwa) was issued against the Bab, pronouncing him worthy of death and asserting that he would already have been executed, if there had not been some doubt concerning his sanity.[68]

The Bab and two of his closest disciples, Mulla Muhammad 'Ali of Tabriz and Siyyid Husain of Yazd were paraded through streets, after their condemnation, and cruelly tortured in front of a growing mob. The two disciples were urged to deny their master and save their lives thereby. Siyyid Husain finally succumbed to the torture and cursed the Bab. The officer in charge of the procedure told him that he would be immediately released if he also spat in the Bab's face. He did what was asked of him and was released.[69] Mulla Muhammad 'Ali remained faithful to death, even when he was confronted with his weeping wife and children, who lived in the city.

The execution of the Bab took place on the same day as his condemnation and torture, apparently in the late afternoon, on July 8, 1850.[70] The authorities wished the execution to be as public as possible, so that no legends might arise of a "hidden" Bab. It was, therefore, carried out on a large square in Tabriz, strangely enough known as the Square of Sahibu'l Zaman. The two men were suspended by cords from a wooden structure erected on the square and a company of Armenian Christian soldiers was prepared to shoot them.[71] The men were hanging in such a way that Mulla Muhammad 'Ali's head rested on the Bab's shoulder and he

is reported to have said, just before the volley, "Are you satisfied with me now, master?" When the volley rang out and the smoke cleared, only one man was hanging dead by the cords, Mulla Muhammad 'Ali. The Bab's cords had merely been cut by the shots and he had fallen unhurt to the ground. There was great confusion on the square in face of this apparent miracle. It appears that the soldiers, stricken with terror, refused to fire again. The Bab, dazed and apparently not knowing what he was doing, ran from the square and tried to hide in a guardhouse. He was followed there by an officer, who struck him with his sword. When the soldiers saw that the Bab drew blood, was, therefore vulnerable, they suspended him again and this time killed him with their shots.[72] The dead body of the Bab was paraded through streets and thrown outside the gates to be eaten by dogs. According to the Babi sources, the body was recovered by faithful believers, hidden, and eventually brought to Palestine on the order of Baha-u'llah. It is now supposed to be buried in the Baha'I shrine known as the Persian Gardens on the slopes of Mount Carmel in Haifa.

It is interesting to reflect what might have happened if the Bab, after the failure of the first volley, had had the presence of mind to appeal to the mob as the Imam-Mahdi. Even the Muslim sources admit that no soldiers could then have been found to carry through the execution and that the whole history of the Babi movement might have been changed.[73]

The persecution continued after the execution of the Bab. The civil and religious authorities were determined to eradicate the heresy once and for all. Mirza Yahya, son of Mirza Buzurg Nuri, was chosen as the successor of the Bab.[74] Mirza Yahya was then 16 years old. He secretly travelled around the country, forbidding the Babis to engage in useless rebellions. He took refuge in Bagdad, then part of the Turkish Empire.

In 1852 two Babis attempted the murder the Shah, Nasr-al-Din.[75] The Babi sources present considerable evidence that the assassination was part of a plot, possibly to prepare a Babi insurrection in the capital itself.[76] According to Muslim sources, the assassins could easily have killed the Shah with the pistols they used on his entourage, but that the attempt failed because instead they tried to drag him from his horse, literally obeying the orders given them by the Babi leaders to cut his throat.

The attempt on the life of the Shah was followed not only by the cruel execution of the assassins but by a massacre of 40 of the leading Babis of Teheran. The different departments of the government were assigned one victim each and the executions took place amid terrible tortures before large mobs. All the reports agree on the great heroism shown by the Babis as they went to their death.[77] As they were led through the streets, they chanted, "Truly, we come from God and to God we return." It is certain that many secret converts were gained by this heroism. It is reported that one man who came to watch the execution of a Babi was so moved with the

victim's heroism that he rushed out, shouting, "Kill me! I am a Babi too!" Another story reports that a Babi was to be beheaded, but the executioner failed to cut off his head with the first stroke but only knocked off his turban, whereupon the Babi lifted his head and recited the verse of Hafiz: "Happy the man who knows not whether it is head or turban that falls at the feet of the Beloved!"

Among those who died were Mirza Jani of Kashan, the author of the earliest Babi history, and Siyyid Husain of Yezd, who had betrayed the Bab at Tabriz and whose conscience had led him to seek martyrdom at Teheran. The most famous of the victims of this massacre was Tahirih, who had been arrested at Kazvin and brought to the capital for trial. There are different reports of her death, but all stress her complete fearlessness and dignity to the last moment.[78] Baha-u'llah was thrown in jail, but his life was spared.

In this way the Babi movement was drowned in blood. In 1852 it might have seemed as if the movement was permanently destroyed. The Babis were in hiding. European travellers, writing more than a decade after the Teheran massacre, were unable to come across any who would dare admit that they were Babis.

3. Babi Doctrine

We have characterised Babism as a meeting point of gnostic and chiliastic motifs in Shi'ite Islam. If we may anticipate for a moment, it will be our task to show how the former motif was gradually eliminated almost completely in the development of the Baha'I movement, while the latter underwent a profound transformation, with important effects on the social structure of the movement. Also, it must be realised that the gnostic doctrine taught by the Bab and his followers remained the property of a small circle of initiates within the large Babi movement, whose driving forces were chiliastic, not gnostic. The gnostic motif was significant within the large movement not so much through its content, but because it gave the authority of superior wisdom to the Babi leaders who possessed it, that is, it satisfied an essential requirement of the Imam in popular Shi'ite consciousness. As this study is concerned with the development of the social-religious structure of the movement, rather than with its doctrinal history, we shall devote considerably less space to matters of doctrine than to the course of historical events. In the next few pages we shall look briefly at the gnostic and chiliastic motifs as they expressed themselves in Babi doctrine as it has come down to us,[79] and then look briefly at the kind of life which was envisaged by this doctrine for its followers.

Babism took over the gnostic corpus of doctrine of the Shaiki sect, which in turn had received it as the result of a long historical tradition the outline of which we have traced above. At the heart of this corpus lies a gnostic doctrine of God and revelation.[80]

Any gnostic conception of God has always been grounded in the originally

Neoplatonist distinction between His pure being (proten hen) and His attributes (protologen hen). The latter constitute the realm of the logos, that intermediary being between God and world which constitutes especially God's creative activity. In the Islamic tradition this logos became the 'akl, which, under the influence of Jewish gnosticism (Philo: the logos as doxa; Ibn-Gabirol: kavod), is seen particularly under the aspect of light. In Babi doctrine too there is much imagery associated with light, the fraction and mirroring of light.

Following the Shaikis, the Bab calls the logos God's primal will. This primal will is the source of all revelation and religion. It appears in the world through the cycles of revelation, but is never dissolved in the world (Sufi ittihad, henosis, against which Babi doctrine repeatedly protests as leading to pantheism).

In the Bayan we are told that nothing exists but God, and His names and attributes.[81] His pure being, or essence, never changes; all of His works are performed by the primal will, which emanates from His pure being.[82] Again in protest against Sufi mysticism, the Bayan stresses that God's essence is unknowable and is only manifested in the world in His primal will: "L'Essence éternelle ne se peut comprendre en essence, ne se peut décrire, ne se peut qualifier, ne se peut louer, ne se peut voir, quoique tout se comprenne par Elle, se qualifie par Elle, se loue par Elle, se voit par Elle.

Dans les livres célestes chaque fois qu'il est question qu'on Le verra, cela veut dire qu'on verra Celui qui est manifesté dans Sa manifestation, c'est-à-dire qu'on verra le Point de Verite qui est etait la Volonte Primitive." [83]

That is, God's primal will, His activity in the world, is known through the prophet who becomes the "point" (nuqta) at which the primal will reveals itself in a particular age.

The Babi doctrine of revelation is a complicated gnostic system of cycles of prophetic manifestations. Each prophet is a "mirror" of the light emanated by the primal will.[84] The Bab is at pains to point out that the prophet is not to be understood as an "incarnation" (hullul) of the primal will, but this distinction appears technical in view of his own claims and was probably motivated by considerations of ketman, as Muslim orthodoxy, in its polemic against Christianity, has always abhorred any conception of hullul. In any case, the prophet, as Nuqta, speaks of himself as one with the primal will and, through it, with God himself. The Bab frequently refers to himself as God, in this way, despite his doctrinal differentiations from them, reminding of the extreme Sufi saints.[85]

The term Nuqta, the crucial term in the Bab's own understanding of the prophet's station, is found in Shi'ite hadith, where it is connected

with the belief that the Prophet Muhammad gave to 'Ali a secret revelation of the hidden meaning of the Koran: "Alles was in Koran ist, ist in der Fatiha (I.Sure) und alles was in der Fatiha ist, ist in Bismillah (ihrem ersten ort) und alles was in Bismillah ist, ist im ba (seinem Anfangsbuchstaben) und alles was im ba ist, ist im Punkt unter dem ba (seinem kleinsten Teil) und ich ('Ali) bin der Punkt unter dem ba".[86]

The prophet, as the "mirror" of the world of the primal will, becomes the demiurg who creates, by the emanation of his prophecy, a new world on earth: "Der Prophet erweist als der Demiurg... seine Schoepferkraft in der Hervorbringung eines Buches, dessen Buchstaben ein Widerspiel der transzendenten Wirklichkeit darstellen, die somit mit Hilfe der geheimen, von logos selbst geoffenbarten Buchstabenwissenschaft erfasst werden kann. Entweder wird dann aus der ueberlieferten H. Schrift (A.T. bzw. Koran) diese Wissenschaft ohne weiteres erhoben oder es verbindet sich damit ein neuer prophetischer Anspruch mit Darbietung eines neuen Kanons. Das letztere ist in Babismus der Fall."[87]

We might add that the choosing of the second alternative marks the decisive division between Shaikhism and Babism, as it was dramatically demonstrated at the Council of Bedesht.

The new world, as it were, which the prophet establishes on earth must correspond in inner structure to the world of the primal will, that is, the two stand in a relationship of microcosm and macrocosm. This inner structure is understood primarily in terms of kabbalistic numerology.[88] The Sufi philosopher Ibnu'l-'Arabi had asserted that the opening sura of the Koran, Bismillah al-rahman al-rahim ("In the name of God the Most Merciful") corresponds numerologically to the number 19. This number has ever since played an important role in Islamic numerology, but probably never to the extent it did in the Bayan.[89] According to the Bayan, the universe is patterned in structures 19. Consequently, the microcosm of the "people of the Bayan" on earth must also be built around this structure. As there are 19 attributes of God, so there are 19 "Letters of the Living" in each prophetic manifestation. These 19 "Letters", which in the Babi manifestation were believed to be the Bab and 18 of his closest followers, were created before all time by the primal will and "return" with each manifestation. It is easily seen how this conception could lead to something closely resembling polytheism: "Personne ne saurait se laisser aveugler par le dogma unitaire au point de croire que le polythéisme n'est pas là en germe, et en germe patent."[90]

This helps us to understand not only the hate which the Babis aroused in the Muslims, but also the ease with which different leaders of the movement claimed the title of Nuqta at different times of the history. Moreover, despite the vigorous denials of the Babis, this "return" of the "Letters of the Living" borders so closely on a doctrine of transmigration that the distinctions, again, appear very technical and are perhaps to be understood in terms of

ketman.⁹¹ The Bayan, in its final form, is to contain 19 units.^[92] The Bayan also establishes a new calendar based on 19 months, still used by the Bahá'ís. Social life is also to follow the structure of 19, down to the number of days a school teacher must withdraw from his wife as a punishment for beating a child. As often happens when numerological doctrine is popularised, the Babís used many talismans consisting of different numerological combinations of words, to which great magical powers were ascribed. Some of these talismans seem to go back to the Bab himself, and there is no reason to believe that he did not share the belief in their magic.

A prophet is recognised by two signs: his ability to write verses and the sheer force of his personality: "De pa part de Dieu pour tous les hommes, il y a deux témoins: l'un, les versets, l'autre, la personne sur qui descendent les versets."^[93]

The first of these, of course, would be particularly close to the thinking of Muslims, for whom "the miracle of the Koran", from the point of view of the Arabic language, is the most important sign of the prophetic dignity of Muhammad. There are five elements of this sign:^[94] fluent diction; rapid composition; direct as opposed to acquired knowledge; claim to divine inspiration; absolute power over men. We have seen what role these played in the actual life of the Bab.

Following in the Ismaili tradition, the Bab understands revelation as being progressive.^[95] In each prophet the primal will manifests itself more fully to the world. Thus the Bab sees himself in the line of the prophets recognised in the Koran, including Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. Progressive revelation is still held as a cardinal doctrine by the Bahá'ís to this day, though the catalog of prophets has been changed or left vague in the course of the history. Each divine manifestation follows a certain cycle. Each manifestation has a rising and a setting, the "day" when it is at full blaze, surrounded by the "minor manifestation" or "dawn", the period of the "forerunners" (according to the Bab, that of the Shaikhi saints), and the "minor occultation" or "evening", when the followers of the prophet are still living, and then the "occultation" or "night", occupying the period of time between the manifestations. The high point of the "theophanic day",^[96] or *zuhur-I-zubra*, is, of course, the period of the Bab, in this case: "This day is separated from the night of the *Gheybat-i-Kubra* or 'Major Occultation' by the twilight of the *Ghaybat-i-Sughra* or 'Minor Occultation', during which the last Saint or Imam of the cycle, though invisible to his followers, still leaves amongst them in concealment, and communicates with them by means of the 'Gates' or 'Babs' (*abwab*) whom he appoints to act as intermediaries between himself and his church. When the faithful have become accustomed to receiving the commands of the Imam thus indirectly, and to being debarred from seeing him, the series of 'Gates' is terminated, and the full night of the 'Major

Occultation' supervenes. As, however, the time for a new 'Manifestation' approaches, one or more of the 'Gates' reappears or 'returns' to prepare mankind for the fuller light which is soon to burst upon them. The period of these precursors or harbingers of the Theophany is called Zuhur-i-Sughra, 'The Minor Manifestation', corresponding to the 'True Dawn' (Subh-i-Sadik), when, though the sun has not yet risen, its light is apparent in the sky. The 'Minor Manifestation' of the Christian cycle was John the Baptist, of the Muhammadan, Waraka ibn Nawfal and the other Kanifs, of the Babi or Beyanic, Sheykh Ahmad of Ahssa and Seyyid Kazim of Resht."[97] At the end of time, all emanations return to God, who will then again fill all with His pure being as it was before the emanation of the primal will.

It is easily seen how such a conception of revelation leads to the dissolution of any historical religion within which it arises. Following Isma'ili practice, the Bab uses an allegorical method to explain the Koran and, by implications, all other historical religions: "Dans chaque manifestation, le refuge en Dieu est le refuge dans cette manifestation. Pendant que (le soleil de vérité) est caché, le refuge est le refuge dans ses ordres, jusqu'à la manifestation suivante. A ce moment la manifestation précédente et ses ordres ne donnent plus de refuge, si n'est par la manifestation suivante et ses ordres."[98]

That is, the Koran, and all other historical revelations, must be understood from the point of view of the Bayan: "A l'époque de la descente du Quoran, la gloire de tous résidait dans l'éloquence de la parole; c'est pourquoi Dieu a fait descendre le Qoran empreint de la plus sublime éloquence, et il en a fait (ainsi) le miracle de Muhammad. Dans cette période-ci le Dieu du monde a donné au Point du Beyan ses versets et ses témoignages; il en a fait son témoin inaccessible sur toutes choses. Si tous ceux qui sont sur la terre s'unissaient ils ne pourraient approuver un seul verset semblable aux versets que Dieu a fait couler de sa langue Du moment de la descente du Qoran jusqu'au moment de celle du Bayan, 1270 ans ont passés; comment quelqu'un n'a-t-il pas produit, de versets? Et cependant, de toutes leurs forces, tous ont voulu étouffer la parole de Dieu, mais tous ont été impuissants et aucun n'a pu le faire."[99]

If we now turn to the chiliastic motif as expressed in Babi doctrine, we can see more clearly, after the above discussion, how the Bab understood himself as a fulfilment of the prophecies concerning the Mahdi, but also as much more than that, and, ultimately, as something different from that.[100] But specifically we must devote a few words to a very curious doctrine of the Bayan which was later to lead to the great schism between the Bahá'ís and Azalis, namely, the doctrine of "Him whom God shall manifest" (M.Y.H. - Man yuz-hiruhu'llah).

The Bayan is full of references of M.Y.H., indeed, at one place it is stated that all the Bayan's glory (baha) lies in M.Y.H..[101] M.Y.H. is the bearer of the coming divine manifestation,

who will bring to an end and surpass the Bayanic cycle:

"Justqu'au jour de Celui que Dieu doit manifester, tous demanderont refuge à Dieu et au point du Beyan, mais ce jour-là ceci ne leur servira de rien, car alors se se refugier en Lui et se réfugier dans le piont du Beyan, c'est se refuier en Lui." 102

It is difficult to say whether the doctrine of M.Y.H. was an important matter in the Bab's mind from the beginning, as re-emphasizing his gnostic conception of revelation, or whether it was a result of his disappointment in the outward failures of his faith. Be this as it may, there can be no question of the importance of the doctrine in the Bayan as we now have it.[103] We are told that M.Y.H. will appear before 2001 years

have passed, but no lower limit is given; the exact date of his coming is only known to God. He will appear suddenly and it is impossible that any one should falsely claim to be him (!). Like all manifestations of the primal will, he is identical with the Nuqta-i-Bayan, but he is to be known by his own authority, not that of the Bayan. He will not be the last manifestation of the primal Will, but others will follow him. The "people of the Bayan" are urged not to repeat the mistake of the "people of the Koran" by rejecting him as the Muslims rejected the Bab. Many rules are given to emphasize the Babi community's expectation of M.Y.H. - he is to complete the remaining "unities" of the Bayan; the first month of the Babi year is called "Baha" and set aside for him (!); a vacant place is to be left for him in each Babi assembly; no child may be beaten or man insulted, for it may be him.

What interests us particularly in view of the later history is whether the Bab considered it possible that M.Y.H. would appear within the lifetime of his followers, or whether he regarded his coming as an event in the more distant future. The issue cannot be decided on the available evidence. Events after the death of the Bab, involving rival claims to this and other titles, indicate the general nature of Babi "polytheism" rather than the Bab's specific ideas about M.Y.H. In view of the Bab's entire gnostic system, however, and the elaborate Bayanic "microcosm" instituted by him, it seems unlikely that he regarded the coming of M.Y.H. as occurring immediately after his death. He utterances about himself are hardly those of one who understood himself as merely a kind of John the Baptist: "Et ce serait pour ce pitcyable résultat que cet homme aurait subi le martyre? C'est pour cela qu'il aurait devant les balles du peleton d'execution la verite de sa doctrine, et qu'il aurait répandu son sang, comme aussi celui de ses compagnons les plus chers? Il n'est inutile d'affirmer que cette thèse est essentiellement fausse." [104]

This argument is not too convincing, just because of the very example of John the Baptist! However, it remains true that the Bayan makes the later Bahá'í "forerunner" interpretation very doubtful, to say the least. What the doctrine of M.Y.H. did in practice was to re-shift the chiliastic motif again into the future, making possible further expression of the powerful forces at the heart of the Babi movement.

Finally, we must ask ourselves briefly what kind of life the Bab envisaged for his followers. In the matter of piety, the Babis may be characterised by the

term logos-mysticism. Their story incorporated certain Sufi features, such the "Mansur ecstasy", but it was always an adoration of the manifestation of the primal will in the prophet, not that which has been called "infinity mysticism" and which finally leads to pantheism.[105] The final fate of the soul, however, is some kind of return to God, as all emanations will finally return to God. This was movingly expressed in the words of the Babi martyrs of Teheran, "from God we come and to God we return".[106] The prayer of the Babi is private. There is no public prayer except the prayer for the dead, the latter being easily understood in a severely persecuted community. This, of course, gives the Babi piety a very pietist, quietist character.

The political ideal of the Bayan is the establishment of a Babi theocracy.[107] The possibility of holy war (jihad) is implicitly recognised in the Bab's prohibition of arms except in such war.[108] Indeed, there is no evidence that the Bab had any objection against the armed uprisings of his followers, in spite of his personal withdrawal from practical affairs, which is in keeping with the Sufi ideal of sainthood. We have already indicated that sometimes minutes regulations for everyday life which the Bab made for his followers. (He was particularly concerned with the education of children, but is hard to find in the Bayan much that could be called "social reform".[109] While the killing of unbelievers in the Babi state is forbidden,[110] they are to be driven from the central provinces of Persia, their property is to be confiscated, marriage with them is unlawful, and they are to be the virtual slaves of the Babis.[111]) It is ambiguous whether the Bab envisaged this theocracy as covering all the earth, or only Persia and the surrounding countries.

The political and social conceptions of the Bayan were never realized, and underwent fundamental changes in the later Bahá'í developments. In conclusion, we must emphasize again that the driving forces of the Babi eruption were not its complicated doctrines, but the violent expectations and passions which the appearance of the Bab aroused. It must also be stated clearly that this implies no general statement of the relative importance of doctrine and "life" in religious history, but is a description of this particular phenomenon.

4. The Appearance of Bahá'u'lláh

The period which it is our task to discuss now is the most obscure in the entire history of the Bahá'í movement. The information available about it is sparse and contradictory,[112] as a result of the schism between Bahá'ís and Azalis, and the distortions, suppressions and falsifications of the historical sources which resulted from it.

We must first look at the Babi background of the schism, which, after all, was a struggle for succession to the position of the Bab.[113] It is certain that the Bab appointed Sohb-i-Azal to be his successor and, as we have seen in our discussion of the period immediately after the Bab's death, that Azal was generally recognised as such by the Babi community after 1850. What is not clear, however, is the exact meaning to be described to this appointment, in the understanding of the Bab, Azal himself, and the Babi community, and its relationship to the Babi doctrine of M.Y.H.

The document presented by Azal to substantiate his claim is hardly convincing. It is a letter from the Bab to Azal, which reads as follows:

"God is Most Great with the Uttermost Greatness. This is a letter on the part of God, the Protector, the Self-Existent, to God, the Protector, the Self-Existent.[114] Say, 'All originate from God'. Say, 'All return unto God'. This is a letter from 'Ali before Nabil,[115] God's Reminder unto the Worlds, unto him whose name is equivalent to the Name of the One,[116] God's Reminder unto the Worlds. Say, 'Verily all originate from the Point of Revelation.' O Name of the One, keep what hath been revealed in the Beyan, and what hath been commanded, for verily Thou art a Mighty Way of Truth." [117]

Whatever may have been the Bab's intent, Azal himself regarded this appointment as a legal-political one, that is, in the sense of Caliphate rather than Imamate. It was to be his task to lead the Babi community in the difficult period of the "Minor Occultation". Certainly Azal did not regard himself as M.Y.H. When after the death of the Bab several claims to the station of Nuqta were made, Azal appears to have welcomed these as ecstatic identifications with the Bab (that is, as manifestations of the "Mansur ecstasy"), not as claims to the station of M.Y.H. From the Azali point of view, therefore, Baha-u'llah's claim to that station, not in the sense of the "Mansur ecstasy" but as abrogating the Bayanic cycle, was outrageous heresy.

The Bahá'ís have not been consistent in their interpretation of the Bab's intentions concerning Azal. At first, their intention seems to have been to claim all of Azal's titles for their own candidate, simply ignoring Azal and stating that the Bab appointed Baha-u'llah to be his successor; this is still generally done in western Bahá'í publications. To this purpose, the Bahá'ís tried to destroy or falsify the early history of the Babi movement, as recorded by Mirza Jani of Kashan, and to write new histories which would assert Baha-u'llah's claim, as was done in the 1880's from the Bahá'í center in Palestine: "As the Biography of the Prophet Muhammad composed by Ibn Is-hak was superseded by the recension of Ibn Hisham, so should Mirza Jani's old history of the Bab and his apostles be superseded by a revised, expurgated, and amended "New History" (Tarikh-i-Jadid), which, while carefully omitting every fact, doctrine and expression calculated to injure the policy of Beha, or to give offence to his followers, should preserve, and even supplement with new material derived from fresh sources, the substance of the

earlier chronicle." [118]

However, in the history which was written by Abdul Baha and became the official Bahá'í version until after the latter's death, the appointment of Azal was admitted, but explained in the following manner: "By the assistance and instruction of Bahá'u'lláh, therefore, they made him notorious and famous on the tongues of friends and foes, and wrote letters, ostensibly at his dictation to the Bab. And since secret correspondence were in process the Bab highly approved of this scheme [sic]. So Mirza Yahya was concealed and hidden while mention of him was on the tongues and in the mouths of men. And this might plan was of wondrous efficacy, for Bahá'u'lláh, though he was known

and seen, remained safe and secure, and this veil was the cause that no one outside (the sect) fathomed the matter or fell into the idea of molestation, until Bahá'u'lláh quitted Teheran at the permission of the King and was permitted to withdraw to the Supreme Shrines". [119]

There is, of course, no substantiating evidence for this explanation.

Mirza Jani himself, the only Babi historian who wrote before the schism and whose book we have, regarded the appointment of Azal as a recognition of this station as M.Y.H., because, he claims, the Bab ordered Azal to write the unfinished part of the Bayan, a task to be performed by M.Y.H.:

"He (B.) also wrote a testamentary deposition, explicitly nominating him (Ezal) as his successor (Wali), and added, 'Write the eight (unwritten) Vahids of the Beyan, and, if 'He whom God shall manifest' should appear in His power in thy time, abrogate the Bayan, and put into practice that which he shall inspire into thine heart." [120]

This proves, if nothing else, that there were Babis immediately after the death of the Bab who considered the possibility that M.Y.H. might appear and abrogate the Bayanic cycle within their own lifetime. If Mirza Jani is to be trusted in his interpretation of the appointment, the Bab himself did not completely dismiss this possibility either.

Very little appears certain in this confusion of claims and counterclaims. We cannot know clearly what the Bab's own understanding was in the succession matter. Azal himself, and his followers, adopted the more moderate, conservative interpretation of the appointment. Baha-u'llah, and his followers, taking up the chiliastic motif where the Bab had projected it into the future in his doctrine of M.Y.H. appeared with a new radical claim, which in the course of the struggle won completely over the conservative claim within the Babi community. It was Baha-u'llah, therefore, and not his half-brother, who was carrying on the dominant motif of the Babi movement. We may say that Azal may have been right from a "legal" point of view, but that Baha-u'llah was "religiously" right in his claim.

As we have already pointed out, Azal was generally recognised as the leader of the Babi movement after the Bab's death in 1850. Both Babi and non-Babi sources agree on this. [121] There were, however, a number of other claims in this period, such as that of Jenab-i-Zabih and

Jenab-i-Basir (the "Indian believers"), all appearing as divine manifestations and asserting themselves as Nuqta. Azal did not feel perturbed by these claims, accepting them as expressions of the "Mansur ecstasy", only mildly reproved the most violent ones. Mirza Jani himself comments on them in a tolerant manner: "We love such as advance claims, provided that they be sincere in their claims ... The more branches and leaves a tree bears, the greater is its perfection, and the more abundant its fruitfulness." [122]

A later Azali source comments more caustically: "The matter came to such a pass that everyone on wakening from his first sleep in the morning adorned his body with this pretension." [123]

In 1852, at the time of the Teheran massacre, Azal was in Nur, in the south of Persia. [124] He escaped arrest despite a price that had been set on this head. Disguised as a dervish, he escaped across the border into Iraq, then part of the Turkish Empire. Baha-u'llah was arrested in Teheran, apparently released because of his aristocratic background and some kind of intervention on the part of the Russian embassy, and was permitted also to proceed to Iraq with his family. The two brothers met in Bagdad, where they remained for 12 years. The Babi exiles appear to have received a friendly, or at least indifferent, reception from the Turkish authorities. The latter were not interested in the inner quarrels of the Shi'ite faith, as the Babi episode must have appeared to them, and may not have been too averse to welcoming people who had created political difficulties in neighboring Persia, with which the Turkish Empire was not always on the best of relations.

From this time onwards the important events of Bahá'í history take place outside Persia. In the period following the flight of the two brothers to Iraq the Persian community lived in hiding, under the constant threat of persecution. Outside Persia there were established two centers of Babi exiles. One was the community in Bagdad, the other was established in Ishqabad, in Russian Turkestan, where a number of Babis had taken refuge and had been well received by the Russian authorities, who had from the first shown a sympathetic attitude towards these victims of persecution. The community in Ishqabad was later to erect the first Bahá'í house of worship. It continued, however, in relative isolation and played no great part in the subsequent history of the movement. The community in Bagdad, however, found itself at the very heart of the Shi'ite world. It was able to engage in open missionary activity among the many Persian pilgrims who came to the Shi'ite shrines of Kerbela and Najaf. Despite the secret character of the movement in Persia, communications between Bagdad and Persia were frequent, and the Babi community in the homeland of the movement was able to follow in all the details the succession struggle which was to break out.

The most important problem of the Bagdad period is the growing claims and importance of Baha-u'llah. [125] The Bahá'í sources assert that Baha declared himself to be M.Y.H. the new prophet of the age, in the "Year 9" (after the declaration of the Bab), that is, 1853. This

date has to this been accepted by Bahá'ís as the beginning of the Bahá'í era,

following that of the Bab, but the date is very improbable. Other Bahá'í sources speak of the "Year 19", that is, 1863, when just before the departure of the community from Bagdad Baha made some kind of a declaration in the caravansarai of the "Garden of Rizwan", from where the group was to start out on its journey to Adrianople. The first, if not both, of these declarations were, if made at all, communicated more or less in secret to a small inner circle of Baha's followers.[126] We cannot know, of course, now the consciousness of his position developed in Baha's own mind. We know that Baha spent two years in retirement in the wilderness of Kurdistan.[127] The Bahá'í sources have described this period as one in which his prophetic consciousness was ripening and have compared it to the retreats of Jesus and Muhammad. The Azali source, however, claims that Baha left in anger because the community resisted his innovations in Babi laws and his pretensions to leadership, and that he returned at the invitation of Azal.[128]

This source also states that Baha did not begin to dispute Azal's supremacy until the second part of the Baghdad period, gradually making use of his administrative position to increase his power, but that he did not openly proclaim himself as M.H.Y., or, as the Azali source falsely claims, as incarnation of God, until the transfer of the community to Adrianople.[129]

What appears certain is that from the beginning Azal remained in the background, living in meditation like a Sufi saint, and like the Bab had done before him. Baha was the administrative leader of the community, taking care especially of the important communication line with Persia. He also wrote some important books in this period, which we shall discuss below. From our sources and from the internal evidence of these books, it seems that Baha did not openly proclaim himself in the Baghdad period, submitted outwardly to Azal's leadership, but gradually began to prepare his followers and wider Babi circles in Persia for the coming of a new proclamation.

The community stayed in Baghdad until 1863 or 1864.[130] At that time, the Persian embassy in Constantinople made a formal request to the Sultan for the extradition of the Babi exiles, who, it was asserted, constituted a political threat to Persia. The request for extradition was not granted. Instead the Babis were summoned to Constantinople, apparently for an audience with the Sultan. This audience never took place. The Babis arrived in Constantinople after an arduous journey through Anatolia, and immediately began a vigorous missionary activity in the Turkish capital. This aroused the anger of the Sunnite clergy, who influenced the Sultan to remove the Babis from the capital. The community was ordered to proceed to Adrianople, as far away from Persia as possible and reasonably far from Constantinople. They arrived there in 1864.

The community of Babi exiles remained in Adrianople from 1864 to 1868. In this period the schism between Azal and Baha reached its culmination. It is

completely impossible to determine the truth of what happened during these four years; all we can do is put the two versions of events side by side, and take the story up again at the end of this period. The only thing we know for certain, and on which both versions agree, is that Baha openly declared himself as M.Y.H. in 1866 and 1867, and at that time appealed to Babis everywhere to recognise him as the prophet of the new age predicted by the Bab.[131]

The Bahá'í version of the Adrianople period[132] asserts that Azal openly "rebelled" against Baha and claimed the title of M.Y.H. for himself, although he knew that his title rightfully belonged to Baha. In this he was to have been inspired largely by one Siyyid Muhammad of Isfahan, an Azali who was later assassinated by Bahá'ís in Palestine. The Bahá'í version further claims that Azal made two attempts to murder Baha, one by trying to poison his food and the other by bribing Baha's barber to cut his throat. Baha is supposed to have addressed a letter to all Babis, faithfully declaring both his own and Azal's claim, and to have retired for a brief period awaiting the result of this appeal. In accordance with the Bab's promise that M.Y.H. would be recognizable by the sheer power of this person, Baha was universally recognized by the Babi community. Thereupon Azal is to have denounced Baha to the government, stating that he was planning rebellion against the Turkish Empire. As a result of this denunciation both Bahá'ís and Azalis are to have been deported from Adrianople. Of this version we can only say that the assertion that Azal laid claim to the title of M.Y.H. is certainly untrue, as is clear from his subsequent behavior, and that the statement that the "rebelled" against Baha makes little sense in view of Azal's undisputed leadership prior to Baha's declaration (declarations).

The Azali version give us an almost precise reversal of this story.[133] It tells us that Baha, who had already begun to subvert Azal's leadership in Baghdad, openly proclaimed himself not only as M.Y.H. but as an incarnation of God at Adrianople. It was he who tried to murder Azal in the two ways mentioned above. Again, it was he who denounced Azal to the Turkish authorities as a rebel leader, going as far as planting false letters in government offices in Constantinople, purporting to be calls to rebellion from Baha. This denunciation is to have led to the deportation from Adrianople. Of this version it can only be said that Baha did not proclaim himself as an incarnation of God, as we have already pointed out. In regard to both claims of denunciation to the authorities we may doubt their veracity, as such a denunciation was likely to harm all Babis, of whatever faction. Our best impartial researcher into this period has this to say about it: "It is difficult amidst the conflicting statement of the two parties and the silence of disinterested historians to discover precisely what were the causes which led to the removal of the Babis from Adrianople. Further investigation inclines me to abandon the view ... that overt acts of hostility between the two factions made it necessary to separate them, for Mirza Yahya appears to have been almost without supporters at Adrianople, so that,

according to his own account, he and his little boy were compelled to go themselves to the market to buy their daily food." [134]

If we are unable to discover the precise causes, we know what the consequences were. Both Azal and Baha were arrested by the Turkish authorities and deported from Adrianople with their respective followers. The Bahá'í group was substantially larger than the Azali one. Azal was sent to Famagusta, on Cyprus, with four Bahá'ís to watch him, while Baha was sent to the prison fortress of Acre, in Palestine, with four Azalis to watch him. Of these four one was already assassinated in Adrianople, the three others in Acre. [135] The greater severity of Baha's fate seems to indicate that the Turkish authorities regarded him as the principal culprit.

From this time on we no longer have to concern ourselves with Azal. Baha's victory was complete and the history of this followers constitutes from then on the history of the movement. Azal continued to live in Famagusta until his death in 1912 in increasing isolation and obscurity. The Azali faction ceased to exist long before that. [[136] wrong footnote]

Baha lived in and then near Acre for 1868 to 1892, the date of his death. [137] This period is characterised by the full unfolding to his prophetic claim and an extensive literary activity, to be discussed below, in which the corpus of the new Bahá'í manifestation was laid down.

The first two years Baha lived under strict imprisonment in the filthy fortress notorious for holding the worst criminals of the Turkish Empire. Gradually his conditions were alleviated. He was first permitted to move into a private house within the city gates and after nine years, in 1877, into a quiet country house at Bahji, outside the city, where he lived until his death.

From the first, a stream of pilgrims passed through Acre, Persian Bahá'ís who came to see their prophet. While he was in prison, he could only show himself through the window, and the pilgrims would wait patiently for hours to catch this brief glimpse of him. Baha received now the same passionate worship that the Bab had received before him. When he was permitted to live at Bahji he lived in the same contemplative isolation that had characterized the life of the Bab. An audience with him was a privilege granted to only few. [138] The temporal affairs of the Bahá'í movement were increasingly administered by Baha's son Abdul-Baha, just as Baha had done at Baghdad, and the various "Letters of the Living" in the time of the Bab. Baha was constantly surrounded by secretaries, who took down all he said, as far as possible. His numerous letters were called "tablets" (alwah), to indicate their imperishability, and treated as containers of divine revelation.

The Bahá'í community in Acre established itself as a fairly respected minority. Some Bahá'ís became successful in business there. After the assassination of the Azali spies brought along from Adrianople, an act in which

Baha, at any rate, acquiesced, the community was united under Baha. His authority was unquestioned, however, not only in Acre, but in all Bahá'í communities in Persia as well.

In the homeland of the movement the Bahá'ís continued as a secret group. Baha gave strict orders against any form of rebellion or even resistance against persecution. As we have seen, the Bahá'í histories of the 1880s tried substantially to change the character of the Babi movement, one of these changes being the systematic suppression of the rebellious character of the movement and the exoneration of the Kajar dynasty from the cruelties inflicted on the Babis. In the course of a series of letters Baha sent to various rulers and kings, he also wrote a letter to the Shah. In this letter he assured the Shah of the Bahá'ís' loyalty to the Persian throne and urged him to practice religious toleration. The letter was delivered in Teheran by a young Bahá'í, Mirza Badi, who was immediately executed in cruel fashion. We have every reason to believe that Baha really meant this new policy and that he completely abandoned any idea of establishing the Bahá'í order by force of arms.

In spite of secrecy and persecution, the movement continued to grow in Persia. Ketman was generally observed against the Shi'ites, less so as the fierceness of the original opposition began to subside. There were, however, intermittent outbreaks of bloody persecution, as at Isfahan and Yezd in 1888-1891.[139] Bahá'ísm achieved some remarkable successes among Persian Jews and, to a lesser extent, was received favorably by Zoroastrians. To both these groups the movement was attractive as abandoning the rigid Muslim attitudes towards them. Also at this time the movement began to attract some freethinking individuals, who, under western influences, were becoming estranged from Islam.

Baha died in 1892, at the age of 75. He is buried in the garden of Bahji, a place of pilgrimage for Bahá'ís from all over the world and the Bahá'í kibla.

5. Doctrinal Developments

There are no fundamental differences between the doctrinal systems of the Bab and Baha-u'llah. The works of Baha, the most important of which are available in translation,[140] constitute an elaboration of the Bayanic system in terms of the new claim to divine manifestation. There are certain changes and shifts of emphasis, and the esoteric gnosticism of the Bayan is considerably pushed into the background. On the basis of Baha's works, we can say that the gnostic motif in Babism was receding and its chiliastic motif was being increasingly domesticated into an ethical-religious program for world peace and betterment. Also, we find in Baha's works the signs of the larger audiences the movement was trying to reach with its spread beyond the borders of Persia.

Chronologically, we can see, of course, a great difference between the works written in Baghdad, when Baha was still recognizing Azal's leadership, and

those written in Adrianople and Acre, where the new claim was openly proclaimed. However, this difference appears to consist in the doctrine of Baha's person and the practical consequences, in terms of the new manifestation, drawn from it, not in the underlying conceptions of God, revelation and the religious life. The most important works from Baghdad period are the Haft Vadi ("Seven Valleys") and the Kalimat-i-Maknune ("Hidden Words"), both edificational tracts, and the Kitab'ul-Ighan ("Book of Certitude"), an apologetic work to defend Babism against its critics. From the late Adrianople period dates the Suratu'l-Haikal ("Sura of the Temple"), setting forth Baha's claim, and perhaps some of the Alwahi Salatin ("Tablets to the Kings"), in which Baha addresses the rulers of both east and west. From the Acre period dates above all the Kitab Akdas ("Holy Book"), containing the new Bahá'í legislative corpus, as well as a large number of "tablets" (alwah) sent to different individuals or groups. Translation of the Kitab Akdas were forbidden by Baha until its legislative plans could be realized in practice, but summaries of its contents have been made.[141]

The Bahá'í doctrine of God and revelation is identical with that of the Bayan, with the difference that the person of Baha is included in the catalog of prophets and that there is less emphasis on the mysterious elements of the revelatory process, such as the concept of "return". As in the Bayan, the Bahá'í doctrine of God differentiates between His essence and attributes, only the latter being knowable to men through the manifestations of the logos ('akl). Sufi formulations of man's unity with God are emphatically rejected. The world is co-eternal with God, the arena of His emanations and manifestations.[142]

As in the Bayan, the Bahá'í doctrine speaks of a series of prophets, each bearing the message of God to a particular age. There does not appear to be a clear idea of the number and identity of these prophets; in one place Baha mentions prophets that came before Adam.[143] The signs of the prophet are still the "descent of verses" and the power of his personality. As had been done by the Bab, Islamic eschatology is interpreted in an allegorical fashion to refer to the coming of the next prophet. Baha, however, also showed considerable interest in Christian eschatology, interpreting it in the same allegorical fashion as referring to himself, as in Jesus' words concerning the Comforter to come and the sign of the Son of Man appearing in the sky, to be understood as referring respectively to Baha and the Bab.[144] The Bab, in this way, appears in the role of John the Baptist, the "Minor Manifestation", in relation to Baha.

Baha appears in the full authority of the prophet for the new age. The Bayesian manifestation is concluded and the Bahá'í era has begun. In one of this

polemics against the Azalis, who refuse to accept this claim, Baha says:
"Remarquez que certains vergets rèvèlès
postérieurement abrogent ceux qui one ètè
rèvèlès antérieurement. Peut- être que les
polyth êtesistes du Bayan n'ont jamais lu le Qoran non plus, sinon
comment peuvent-ile dire que, le commandement du verset antérieur il
n'est pas possible de l'abroger par un autre verset? Quant à ceux dent
nous avons parle en vérité, vous ne trouverez en eux que
l'infidélité, la rébellion, la négligence, la perdition.
Leur et tout ce qui se trouve dans les Ecritures divines, au sujet des
abrogations et des contradictions du Qoran, ils recommencent les mewes errurs,
et de nouveau ils se soulèvent contre le Roi de l'invisible et du
visible." [145]

All manifestations are essentially one, so that Baha can speak of himself as
Jesus returned from heaven: "En vérité, Il est
venu Ciel comme Il en vint la première fois; prenex gards de controdire
ce qu'Il dit, comme l'ont fait les peuples qui vous ont
précédés! Ainsi Dieu vous instruit, si vous êtes de
ceux qui savent." [146]

In this spirit of authority Baha addressed his letters not only to the Persian
Shah and the Turkish Sultan, but to the Pople and the Christian rulers of
Europe. He wrote to Queen Victoria, Napoleon III and Alexander II, demanding
that they recognize him as the returned Christ. To Pope Pius IX he wrote:
"O Pape! Déchire les voiles, car le Seigneur des
Seigneurs est venu à l'ombre des nuages, et l'ordre a été
decreté de la part de Cieu, l'independent, le Tout-Puissant! Ouvre les
rideux par la puissance de ton Seigneur, puis monte au Royaume des noms et des
Seigneur, le Fort, le Puissant." [147]

Just as the Bab had envisaged a Babi state in which the Bayan would be the
supreme law, so Baha envisaged a Bahá'í commonwealth. Baha, however, was
explicit in his expectation that his commonwealth would cover the whole earth.
Baha explicitly abrogates the "four great barriers" of the Bayan: killing men's
lives (jihhad); burning books; shunning other nations; and exterminating other
communities. [148] The purpose of the Bahá'í
manifestation is the "Promulgation of the Most Great Peace" throughout the
world: "O ye people of the world! The virtue of this Most
Great Manifestation is that we have effaced from the Book whatever was the
cause of difference, corruption and discord, and recorded therein that which
leads to Unity, Harmony and Accord." [149]

In the place of the "four great barriers" of the Bayan are recommended the
"five greatest foundations" for the government of the nations: the promotion of
the Most Great Peace by the House of Justice, which we shall discuss below; a
universal language; the practice by all of love and unity; the levying of taxes
for universal education; and promotion of agriculture. [150] Other specific
recommendations is that Bahá'ís must

obey all governments, that all clergy and monasticism must be abolished, that the sciences "which lead and conduce to the elevation of mankind" be studied, and that each man must have an occupation in which to serve God.[151] The last of these is especially interesting to us, as it gave the Bahá'ís in the Near East a vocational ethic often setting them off visibly from their Muslim neighbors.

To carry out the administrative work of the Bahá'í commonwealth, both on the local, national and eventually international level, Baha instituted the Beitul-Adl ("House of Justice"). The idea of the "House of Justice" represents a curious blending of theocratic and democratic concepts, the former going back to the Bayan, the latter to Baha's great admiration of British constitutional monarchy.[152] The Kitab Akdas orders the establishment in the future of local "Houses of Justice" by election of the local communities (assumed to consist of Bahá'ís), later to lead to national "Houses of Justice", and eventually to culminate in a "Universal House of Justice", which would constitute a world government. Baha ordered that after his death the succession pass to Abbas Effendi (Abdul-Baha), his oldest son, and from the latter to the "Universal House of Justice", which Baha expected would exist by then. The "Houses of Justice" are to exist side by side with existing monarchies, their relationship with the monarchies corresponding to that between the British Throne and Parliament. The "Houses of Justice" are administrative organs, both religious and political, but they have no right to change the fundamental laws as laid down by the prophet.[153]

Above all Bahá'ís must cultivate a spirit of tolerance and sympathy towards all men, of whatever nation or race: "Consort with (the people of) religions with joy and fragrance; to show forth (in deeds, etc) that which is declared by the Speaker of the Mount; and to render justice in affairs. The followers of Sincerity and Faithfulness must consort with all the people of the world with joy and fragrance; for association (intercourse) is always conducive to union and harmony, and union and harmony are the cause of the order of the world and the life of nations. Blessed are they who hold fast to the rope of compassion and kindness and are detached from animosity and hatred!"[154]

Baha's commandment of international amity is summed up in the following statement, frequently quoted by western Bahá'ís: "Glory is not his who loves his native land; but glory is his who loves his kind."[155] The religious life as laid down by Baha is one of simple worship, mostly private (as had been the case with the Babis), warm inner piety, the practice of love and active work for the betterment of the world.

In describing the experiences of the inner life Baha frequently uses Sufi symbolism, especially in his early Haft Vadi. It is a mistake, however, to regard even this work as Sufi in inspiration.[156] The terms implying unity and ecstasy never refer, in the Sufi sense, to God, but always to the logos as found in the

prophetic manifestations. Through the logos, however, all creation is seen to be filled with the emanations of God's glory: "Si tu cherches à l'interieur de chaque atome, au milieu tu trouves un soleil." [157]

Sufism is explicitly rejected: "Those souls (mystic Sufis) have affirmed concerning the stages of 'Divine Unity' that which is the greatest cause of addicting people to idleness and superstition. They have, indeed, removed the distinction and have imagined themselves to be God. The True One is sanctified above all; (but) His signs are manifest in all things. The signs are from Him - not He Himself - and all of them are recorded and visible in the volume of the world. The plan of the world is a great Book; everyone endowed with perception can grasp (therefrom) that which shall enable him to attain to the Right Path an the 'Great Message'". [158]

While clergy and monasticism are abolished, along with the Muslim laws concerning ritual uncleanness and purification, and while prayer is to be essentially private, Baha ordered the establishment of Bahá'í houses of worship, to be called Mashriqu'l-Azkar (literally, "Place of Ascent of Prayers"). The first of these was established in Ishqabad, but later closed by the Soviet authorities. The only one in existence today is that in Wilmette, Ill., whose foundations were laid by Abdul-Baha.

In conclusion, we may point out that Baha continued the Bab's concern for the humane education of children. In the Near East Bahá'ís are known for the charm of their children, as well as the high regard (at least by comparison with the Muslims) in which they hold their women.

Notes:

This is the end of the typed excerpt I possess. Please email me if you can help finish typing or scanning this dissertation. I don't have a copy of it, but it can be obtained in many university libraries.

The footnote reference numbers were included in the text above by the typist, but the footnotes themselves have not yet been typed.

— From *Sect to Church: A Sociological Interpretation of the Baha'i Movement* [excerpt] (Used by permission of the curator)