

Reviews

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***Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam: Qur'an, Exegesis, Messianism, and the Literary Origins of the Babi Religion.* Todd Lawson.¹ (2011)**

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Reviewed by **Christopher Buck**, Pennsylvania State University
Email: BuckPhD@gmail.com

Structure and Overview

The spirit is willing, but the text is deep. To plumb its depths, an extended review of *Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam* is needed to explore Todd Lawson's analysis of the early work of Sayyid 'Alī-Muḥammad Shīrāzī (1819–50), known as the Bab ('the Gate'), prophet-founder of the Babi religion (which later evolved into the Baha'i Faith). According to Lawson, the Bab's 'first public heretical act was to compose/reveal a new Qur'an – "the true Qur'an"' (21), which is the Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf ('Commentary on the Sura of Joseph') – also known as the Qayyūm al-Asmā' (10) and the Aḥsan al-Qiṣaṣ ('Best of Stories'), the name that the Qur'an itself gives to the Sura of Joseph (Q. 12:3). This 'public heretical act' – and others – was as brazen as it was brilliant, and ultimately cost the Bab his life, with his public execution on 9 July 1850 in Tabriz, Persia (Iran). The Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf, composed/revealed in 40 consecutive days (29) in mid-1844, when the Bab was 25 years old (28), is thus the subject matter of Lawson's monograph.

The full title, *Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam: Qur'an, Exegesis, Messianism, and the Literary Origins of the Babi Religion*, packs – that is, compacts – a great deal of conceptual and theological agenda in a few words. Transforming the title into a thesis statement, the following claim – using all of the words (in italics) of the title itself – may be made in representing the 'message' of Lawson's work:

The literary origins of the Babi Religion begin with a Gnostic Apocalypse, the Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf, an exegesis of the Qur'an that proclaims the messianic fulfillment of Islam.

In essence, *Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam* could be equivalently entitled, *The Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf and the Qur'an*. The Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf is composed 'entirely in Arabic' (17) and comprises around 400 pages, with around 4,662 verses (= 111 x 42). The Qur'an itself has 114 suras and 6,200 verses. Whether one of the reasons the Bab chose Sura 12 was that its verses closely number the suras of the Qur'an is uncertain, although undoubtedly the effect of this coincidence was not lost upon the audience of readers (41).

Structurally, *Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam* is laid out as follows: 'Acknowledgments' (vi–vii); 'Introduction: Qur'an, apocalypse, and gnosis' (1–20); '1. Commentary and imitation: Charismatic text, messianic exegesis' (21–45); '2. Voices of the text: Remembrance and gate' (46–74); '3. Renewal of covenant: *Coincidentia oppositorum* and the primal point' (75–92); '4. The metaleptic Joseph: The shirt, the Bees, and Gnostic Apocalypse' (93–139); 'Conclusion: Hermeneutic Spiral' (140–1); 'Appendix 1: Manuscript of *Sūrat al Nahī*' (142–4); 'Appendix 2: *Sūrat al Nahī* transcription' (145–9); 'Notes' (150–84); and 'Bibliography' (185–205); 'General Index' (206–28); and 'Index of Qur'anic verses' (229–30).

Both concept and title – is borrowed, an acknowledged debt. As a 'production' note, Lawson's *Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam* has a strikingly similar colour scheme (blue, black and white) as the cover of Cyril O'Regan's *Gnostic Apocalypse: Jacob Boehme's Haunted Narrative*.² While this is fortuitous, yet it is happily coincidental, as Lawson, in defining the term 'Gnostic Apocalypse' intentionally invokes O'Regan's monograph (3).

By 'Gnostic Apocalypse', Lawson argues that the *Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf* is 'itself the result of a reordering of the basic elements of the scripture of Islam [the Qur'an] that have been internalized and transformed by the apparently opposite processes of imitation and inspiration to become finally an original "act" of literature of a genre that we would like to call gnostic apocalypse' (141). By means of its 'special charismatic energy' (141) and the torquing of central aspects of Shi'i Islam, the Bab endeavoured 'to appropriate and participate in the spiritual power (or charisma) of the Qur'an in order to invoke his own spiritual authority – namely by recasting the existing revelation in a new form' (48).

How does the Bab achieve this? It is through 'metalepsis and paraphrase' (140). Metalepsis is the key to the Bab's literary calculus, by which the Bab interprets the Qur'an in transumptive style, by paraphrase and intertextual echoes, thereby creating a 'the "True Qur'an", and a new Qur'an' (22). The 'True Qur'an', according to Shi'i Islamic tradition, 'has been in the safe-keeping of the Twelfth Imam, due to be restored to its proper place at the time of the return (*raj'a*) on or before the Day of Judgment, when justice is to be reestablished in the world' (4). Thus the *Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf* is the new and true Qur'an revealed by the Twelfth Imam in the apocalyptic moment of realized eschatology, known only by gnosis.

What is metalepsis? The *Oxford English Dictionary*³ defines 'metalepsis' as: 'The rhetorical figure consisting in the metonymical substitution of one word for another which is itself a metonym; (more generally) any metaphorical usage resulting from a series or succession of figurative substitutions. Also: an instance of this.' Technically, metalepsis (or *transumptio*, in its Latin form) is 'double metonymy'. A metonymy (Greek, 'change of name' [noun]), is 'a figure [of speech] by which one name or noun is used instead of another,' and is 'not founded on resemblance, but on *relation*.'⁴ In the very next section, Bullinger defines 'metalepsis', or 'double metonymy', as consisting of 'two stages, only one of which is expressed'.⁵ The Romans called this figure of speech a *transumptio* ('taking across'), i.e. 'transumption'.⁶ The most well-known biblical instance of metalepsis is the expression, 'the blood of Christ', as Ethelbert Bullinger explains:

In the New Testament, the expression ‘the blood of Christ’ is the figure *Metalepsis*; because first the ‘blood’ is put (by *Synecdoche*) from blood-shedding: i.e., the death of Christ, as distinct from His life; and then His death is put for the perfect satisfaction made by it, for all the merits of the atonement effected by it: i.e., it means not merely the actual blood corpuscles, neither does it mean His death as an act, but the merits of the atonement effected by it and associated with it.⁷

Lawson does not explicitly define *metalepsis*, but refers the reader to O’Regan.⁸ In a 2001 monograph, O’Regan characterizes *metalepsis* ‘as essentially consisting of disfiguration-refiguration of biblical narrative’.⁹ Thus *metalepsis* operates as a ‘revisionary ratio, the way in which a later discourse both neutralizes an earlier discourse and siphons off its authority’ – in other words, a form of ‘usurpation’.¹⁰

What does *metalepsis* look like? How did the Bab make use of this device, this literary technique? It is through a process that may be called ‘inverse exegesis’, resulting in ‘interpretation as instantiation’. Here, the Bab ‘usurps’ (or ‘appropriates’ or ‘fulfils’) the charismatic power and authority of the Qur’an as his own messianic prerogative. In the Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf, the Bab ‘disfigures’ the Qur’anic narrative of the Sura of Joseph and ‘refigures’ the figure of Joseph as an archetypal, prophetic figure who typologically prefigures the messianic advent of the Bab himself (as the Shi’i messiah, known as the Mahdi, Qa’im, or return of the Twelfth Imam). Thus the Bab, Lawson concludes, is the new, ‘*metaleptic Joseph*’ (93–139), that is, Joseph *redivivus*.

Interpretation as Instantiation: Inverse Exegesis?

Exegesis is interpretation – typically of scripture. After reading Todd Lawson’s closely-argued *Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam*, the present writer was left with the distinct impression that the Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf, the Bab’s first major revelatory work, was a ‘*tafsīr*’ (Qur’an commentary) in name only, as no ‘formal’ interpretation is found in the chapter translated by Lawson, the Sura of the Bees (chapter 4), which is Sura 93 (*Sūrat al-Nahl*) of the Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf. This is in stark contrast to an earlier work of the Bab’s, the Tafsīr Sūrat al-Baqara (‘Commentary on the Sura of the Cow’), an exegesis of the first and second chapters of the Qur’an (2), completed in January to February 1844. Thus the Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf is the first work composed subsequent to the inception of the Bab’s prophetic career.

The Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf purports to be a commentary on the ‘Sura of Joseph’, which is Sura 12 of the Qur’an. Yet this commentary does not formally ‘explain’ the verses in question, but uses the Qur’anic text as a foil, or template, for presenting something quite different. To be fair, the Bab, as Lawson puts it, ‘had been commanded to write his *tafsīr* by none other than the Hidden Imam’ (23). This fact had earlier been noted by Edward Granville Browne: ‘In it [the Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf] a distinct claim to a divine mission is put forward.’¹¹ This is exemplified in Browne’s translation of the following passage from the Sūrat al-Mulk:

God hath decreed that this book, in explanation of the ‘best of stories’ (i.e. the *Sūra-i-Yūsuf*, which is so called) should come forth from Muhammad, son

of Hasan, son of ‘Alī, son of Mūsa, son of Ja‘far, son of Muḥammad, son of ‘Alī, son of Huseyn, son of ‘Alī, son of Abū Tālib, unto his servant that it may be the proof of God on the part of the Remembrance [the Bab] reaching the two worlds.¹²

Here, ‘God hath decreed’ – through the agency of the Hidden Imam – that the Bab reveal the Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf. This revelation therefore constitutes ‘proof’ of the Bab’s prophetic credentials.

So it is not the ‘fact’ of interpretation that is in question, but the ‘how’. How does this interpretation-as-proclamation work? First, the the Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf is a Qur’anic commentary in neo-Qur’anic form. The Bab typically quotes the Qur’anic text (but without using quotes or indicating the he is quoting) and then inserts his own comments – both of which combine to read as though the entire passage was the (imitative) voice of the Qur’an itself. To discern Qur’anic passages from the Bab’s neo-Qur’anic glosses, in fact, one must be able to recognize the Qur’anic text within the Bab’s discourse itself, because where each quotation begins and ends is not immediately obvious. This is where Lawson’s technique of representing the Qur’anic text in small capital letters enables the reader to immediately distinguish the Bab’s ‘commentary’ from the text being commented on. The first eight verses of the ‘Sura of the Bees’ (Sūrat al-Naḥl, Sura 93 of Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf) offer a prime example of the Bab’s embellished Qur’anic paraphrasing:

1. IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE MERCIFUL, THE COMPASSIONATE.
2. GO, TAKE THIS SHIRT OF MINE AND DO THOU CAST IT ON MY FATHER’S FACE, AND HE SHALL RECOVER HIS SIGHT; THEN BRING ME YOUR FAMILY ALTOGETHER. (Qur’an 12:93).
3. *kāfhā’ ‘ayn.*
4. Indeed we REVEALED UNTO THE BEES, SAYING: TAKE FROM THE MOUNTAINS (Qur’an 16:68) which are citadels – the abode for affirming the sanctity of God – the sign of this Luminous One, AND OF TREES (Qur’an 16:68), places for affirming that there is no God but God (*al-tawḥīd*), the sign of this Easterner AND OF WHAT THEY ARE BUILDING (Qur’an 16:68) in the path of affirming the unity of God (*al-tawḥīd*), the threadbare garment of this Westerner belonging to God, the Sublime. And He is God, Witness over all things.
5. THEN EAT OF ALL MANNER OF (Qur’an 16:69) divine allusions (*al-ishārāt*) MADE SMOOTH (Qur’an 16:69) in the path of the Remembrance, this Gate. THERE COMES FORTH FROM THEIR BELLIES (Qur’an 16:69) the water of the elixir that is one in terms of its blessings, although it is OF DIVERSE HUES WHEREIN IS HEALING FOR (Qur’an 16:69) believers. Verily God is Powerful over all things.
6. God is the creator of everything through His power. And God, in very truth, is apprised of everything which men do.
7. O believers! FEAR GOD CONCERNING THIS most great word protected in the divine fire. Indeed he is, in very truth, accounted by God, the Sublime, as a witness.
8. O people of the veils! Harken to the call of God from the tongue of the most great Remembrance: VERILY VERILY I AM GOD (Qur’an 28:30) THERE IS NO GOD BUT HIM (Qur’an *passim*). Indeed, the likeness of the Remembrance is as gold softened in fire that flows in rivulets through all the hidden places by the will of God, the High. And he is God – Mighty, Ancient. (100–10)

Here, with the exception of verse 2 and its reference to all Joseph's 'shirt', the 'commentary' is squarely on the 'Sura of the Bees' (Sura 16), rather than the 'Sura of Joseph' (Sura 12) – unless one is prepared to argue that the Bab is somehow explicating verse 93 of Sura 12 by the verses of Sura 16. This would largely explain why the Bab titled his own sura, the 'Sura of the Bees'.

Here, the Bab represents himself as Joseph in verse 4 ('the threadbare garment of this Westerner'). In verse 5, the honey is explicated as 'divine allusions' to 'the Remembrance, this Gate' (i.e. the Bab). Then, in verse 8, the 'gold softened' (*al-dhahab al-mā'ila*) appears to be a double metaphor within the formal 'similitude' (i.e. simile). Here, the Bab's revelation is, at once, compared to both (golden) honey (implicit) and (molten) gold (explicit), conveying the sense that the new revelation is both mellifluous and precious, sweet and rich. Lawson notes that, in verse 8, 'VERILY VERILY I AM GOD' is an implicit claim to divine prerogative and authority: 'It affirms that the Bāb is claiming revelation by comparing his rank to that of Moses' (112). In other words, this 'tafsīr' is no less than 'the call of God from the tongue of the most great Remembrance' – that is, the Bab's new Qur'an, cast in the form of a Qur'an commentary.

As represented by this example, the reader can see that there is neither formal interpretation being performed here with respect to the Qur'an itself, nor of its 'authorial intent', apart from pointing to the Bab as the new Joseph, the new Moses, the revealer of a new Qur'an, and the new voice of God. Where, then, is the formal *tafsīr*? This is a *tafsīr* in form only, not in substance. In other words, the reader will not have a greater understanding of the 'Sura of Joseph' as such – except insofar as the Bab is the new, 'meta-lectic Joseph' (93–139). Even the Bab's paraphrases are not strictly exegetical, insofar as they do not explicate the meaning of the Qur'anic passages being invoked. Granted, this may be a radical reading, and a departure from what Lawson has to say regarding it: 'The chapter chosen for this examination is written in the form of a commentary on the 93rd verse of the sura of Joseph (Qur'an 12)' (92). Yet Lawson elsewhere concedes: 'The work is patently not *tafsīr* in the classical sense. ... Though it is not *tafsīr* in the generic, technical sense, it does say what the meaning of the Qur'an is' (4). This assertion is little more than concession. In any case, Lawson points to the sudden, inexplicable intrusions of apparently unrelated subject matter and/or Qur'anic text, which add to the difficulty of fathoming just what the Bab is doing:

The symbol of the shirt of Joseph is immediately associated with the BEES mentioned in the Qur'an 16 (*Sūrat al-Nahl*/The Sura of the Bees). Such an apparently incongruous and abrupt association of the BEES with the *shirt* of Joseph is quite typical of the Bāb's method throughout this commentary. The Bāb seems to take the BEES out of thin air. As will be seen, this air is actually the exceedingly rich atmosphere of Shi'i exegetical tradition.

(98)

It does appear that the bee and honey imagery is not explained in terms of the 'authorial intent' of the Qur'an itself, but of the intent of the author himself (the Bab). In other words, the Bab is not so much explaining the

Qur'an as using the Qur'an to explain himself. This is what is meant by 'inverse exegesis' and 'interpretation by instantiation', whereby the Qur'an is interpreted as typologically prefiguring 'the reappearance of ... the true Qur'an' (10) which, 'according to tradition, has been in the safekeeping of the Twelfth Imam' (4), whose return was proclaimed in the advent of the Bab.

Suggesting that the Bab is not so much interpreting the Qur'an as invoking the Qur'an to authorize his own advent is perhaps overstating the case and admittedly contradicts, in part, this statement by Lawson: 'There is no doubt that the work is unusual; but to say that it is not interpretive, or that it does not "make clear" what the Qur'an meant is either not to have read it, or to have imposed upon it too rigid a notion about what constitutes *tafsīr*, which is after all "explanation"' (140). But the real 'explanation' at work here is the presentism of the Bab's prophetic advent. Thus *Gnostic Apocalypse's* thesis may be reduced to three words: 'Eisegesis usurps exegesis.'

The 'True Qur'an'

As previously stated, the Bab is not, *strictu sensu*, explicating the Qur'an. Rather, he is expatiating – and thereby announcing – his advent in the guise of interpretation. Indeed, it is utterly remarkable that a Qur'an commentary would be cast in the form of a complete Qur'an. Lawson underscores this very fact: 'Certainly the most striking aspect of the work is that it purports to be at once a commentary on the Qur'an, the 'True Qur'an', and a new Qur'an' (22).

In revealing the Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf, the Bab 'is introducing a new scripture or revelation by means of the Trojan horse of exegesis' (22). In other words, the Bab's tafsīr is modelled on the Qur'an – indeed, 'a blatant imitation of the Qur'an itself' (17) – and divided into 111 suras (chapters) each with 42 verses (*āyat*) each, with its language 'cast in rhyming prose (*saj'*)' (17). True, the Qur'anic Sura of Joseph contains 111 verses. That is why there are 111 suras in the Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf. The Qur'an has 114 suras. Lawson notes that the Bab assigns titles to each the 111 suras, as in the Qur'an, such that there is 'no question that the use of these titles is meant to suggest the appearance of the new Qur'an' (41). Each sura, moreover, begins with the *bismillāh* ('In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate'), and most of the 111 suras open with mysterious 'disconnected letters', just like the Qur'an.

If this 'interpretation by instantiation' is fundamentally correct, then the end result is that the Bab reveals himself, in his performance as exegete, as the subject and object of that exegesis, where the exegesis is about the exegete rather than the exegeted text. Lawson seems to suggest this: 'But this text is within the soul of the Bāb, who in the act of reading inscribes himself with the read text and becomes a text himself, which he also reads aloud to us: reading reading itself' (135).

In appreciating what Lawson is saying here, three levels of sacred text emerge: (1) the literal text, in and of itself, which is obviously the Qur'an; (2) the 'read text' as the imamological interpretation, wherein the Bab reads 'Joseph' as the Qa'im (the occulted, Twelfth Imam); and (3) the 'text himself', i.e. the 'realized' interpretation in the Bab's prophetological advent as the new, metaleptic Joseph. The substitution of the Qa'im (for the figure

of Joseph in the Qur'an) operates as the first-order metonym, while the Bab's advent functions as the second-order metonym (for the figure of the Bab, who is the advent of the Hidden Imam).

This completes the metalepsis. 'This method, by which the Bāb weaves his own words into the fabric of the Qur'an, is a kind of metalepsis,' Lawson writes (60), which is nothing less than 'the utter and unapologetic manipulation of sacred Scripture—metalepsis' (137). 'Rather,' Lawson concludes, 'the message of the commentary is proclaimed by an invocation of images and symbols, which when combined points to a kind of annunciation' (41).

What appears as a merely literary trope or device, i.e. metalepsis, is actually a spiritual, existential process of presenting the text (the Qur'an), of re-presenting the text (of interpreting Joseph as the Qa'im), of representing – indeed, of instantiating, even incarnating – the text (of interpreting the Qa'im as the Bab himself), as Shi'i tradition predicts: 'When the Qā'im comes forth the shirt of Joseph will be on him, and he will have the staff of Moses and the ring of Solomon' (qtd. on 175, n. 13). Here, through metalepsis, the Bab engages in a profound and sustained meditation ('reading') of the Qur'an and then explicates the text by embodying the text, wherein the Qa'im rises up through the soul/mind of the Bab such that the Bab performs the Qa'im, becomes the Qa'im. In other words, the Bab steps out of the pages of his commentary and emerges as a messiah.

In order to develop Lawson's primary thesis of *Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam*, this review has had to pass over features of this dense, information-rich, and utterly fascinating text. To recapitulate the major point that Lawson makes, it is this: In 'utter and unapologetic manipulation of sacred Scripture – metalepsis,' Lawson writes, the '*Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf* may be read, then, as the rising of the Imam through the consciousness of ecstasy, or better "instasy" (*wijdān*), of the Bāb' (137). And further: 'Throughout this "heresy of paraphrase", his [the Bab's] apocalyptic and messianic consciousness "flames forth" and is deliberately, elaborately, and responsibly reflected' (137). Not only that, but the Hidden Imam, as Lawson asserts, actually addresses the Bab in this dramatic passage from verses 38–42 of the 'Sura of the Bees':

38. O Solace of the Eye [the Bab]! Say: 'VERILY, VERILY I [the Bab] AM THE HOUR. HOW IS IT THEN THAT YOU DO NOT KNOW THAT THE HOUR, IN VERY TRUTH, IS NEAR ACCORDING TO THE MOTHER BOOK?' (132) ...
41. AND VERILY, VERILY I [the Bab] AM the fire in the LIGHT UPON LIGHT [Q. 24:35] OF SINAI in the land of Felicity and him had been in the precincts of the Fire [Q. 20:10–11]. (133)
42. O Solace of the Eye [the Bab]! Say to the believers from among all the people of the Earth and the heavens: 'COME TO ME WITH YOUR PEOPLE who are effaced COMPLETELY by the permission of God, the Sublime.' Verily God desires your reward in this Gate [the Bab], upon the most great truth. And He is God, Knower of all things. (134)

According to Lawson, we know that the Hidden Imam apostrophizes the Bab because this is a 'Say! (*qul*)' passage. That is, in each occurrence of the 'Say!' command in the *Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf*, the Hidden Imam is directly calling out to the Bab. It may be objected, however, that neither the Qur'an

nor the Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf itself states that it is the Qa'im who is summoning the Bab, but rather God, i.e. as the 'voice' of revelation. The occurrence of 'Say!' only confirms this impression. For it is by this expression that God is addressing Muhammad in the Qur'an. Whenever the command 'Say!' occurs in the Qur'an, it is God commanding the Prophet Muhammad to address the people. Why should it be any different in the Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf, especially if its resemblance to, and even being a deliberate imitation of the Qur'an in form, is accepted?¹³ Of course, for Shi'i Muslims, the voice of God is conveyed through the Imam as interlocutor. Shi'ism, after all, is imamocentric.

The voice of divine authority is of major importance, for this fact alone establishes the Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf as an apocalypse (both cosmologically and eschatologically). Because the apocalypse has not literally occurred on the earthly plane, this eschatological event (the advent of the Bab) is performed as a 'Gnostic Apocalypse'. Only those imbued with the perspicuity of faith (i.e. 'gnosis') can 'realize' (i.e. recognize) the occurrence of this apocalypse, what just transpired in the invisible realm of spiritual consciousness. Given its historical context, this fact makes the Qayyūm al-Asmā' truly revolutionary. In a sense, everything else is secondary.

It seems reasonable to assume that the Bab did not really think this was the long-hidden 'true Qur'an' – the actual book in hiding with the Hidden Imam – but rather a metaleptic evocation of it which, in the final analysis, is just as real (if not more real) than any historical artefact might be. It is a 'poetic' truth or 'spiritual' fact – a typological figuration. The 'recognition' scene, cited above, in which the Hidden Imam reveals the 'Gate' (i.e. the Bab) is extremely powerful, apocalyptic, explosive. The Bab is no mere 'Gate' (*al-bāb*) or deputy/interlocutor of the Hidden Imam. The Bab is revealed as the Mosaic flash of fire in the Burning Bush on Mount Sinai, as the light of God, in the language of the 'Verse of Light' (Q. 24: 35), one of the 'jewels of the Qur'an'. But no towering skyscrapers collapse or other catastrophes befall. Rather, the apocalypse is gnostic – unknown except to those who know (with the certitude of presentism that characterizes 'realized eschatology').

The body of the book is relatively error-free. Since errata are useful for subsequent printings, instances of rare typos in the back matter may be noted. The most significant of these oversights is where Lawson refers to prior studies of the Sura of Joseph that he fails to cite beyond the authors' last name: 1: p. 154 (Notes), n. 17: 'See bibliography for the shorter studies by Waldman, Johns, Mir, Morris, Neuwirth, Firestone and monographs by Bajouda, Bernstein, and Prémare among others.'¹⁴

The present work is a refinement of Lawson's doctoral dissertation (1987) at McGill University, Canada.¹⁵ It has aged, matured and sophisticated like fine wine in the barrel of Lawson's subsequent work, and is interspersed with insights arising in subsequent studies. Thus, it is a work of original research on an original figure prised by an original mind. *Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam* is an instant classic in Babi/Baha' studies. It is foundational to the academic study of Babi/Baha'i history and doctrine. Not only did it take a scholar with a command of Arabic and of the history, doctrine and arcane philosophy of Shi'i Islam to write *Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam*. It took a gnostic.

Endnotes

1. The author, Todd Lawson, is Emeritus Professor, formerly of the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations of the University of Toronto, and was cross-appointed at the Centre for the Study of Religion and the Centre for Jewish Studies. Lawson is one of the leading scholars in the academic study of the Babi religion.
2. Cyril O'Regan, *Gnostic Apocalypse: Jacob Boehme's Haunted Narrative*, New York: State University of New York Press, 2002. In fairness, however, other recent Routledge books appear with a similar cover design, as Routledge tends to reuse cover designs.
3. *Oxford English Dictionary* (3rd edn., Dec. 2001).
4. Ethelbert William Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible: Explained and Illustrated*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1968 [1898], 538.
5. Ibid. 609.
6. Ibid. 609.
7. Ibid. 610.
8. In an endnote (160, n. 13), Lawson refers the reader to O'Regan's *Gnostic Apocalypse*, pp. 115–27 (section 4.2, 'Narrative Swerve: Metalepsis'). The problem is that O'Regan does not define 'metalepsis' in this section.
9. Cyril O'Regan, *Gnostic Return in Modernity*, New York: SUNY Press, 2001, 230.
10. Ibid. 57.
11. Edward Granville Browne, 'The Bábis of Persia. II. Their Literature and Doctrines', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 2 (1889): 906.
12. Trans. Browne, *ibid.*
13. This observation is thanks to Youli A. Ioannesyan, an orientalist at St Petersburg State University and the St Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies under the Russian Academy of Sciences.
14. The interested reader can find the missing references in Todd Lawson, 'Typological Figuration and the Meaning of 'Spiritual': The Qur'anic Story of Joseph', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 2012, 13(2) 240–244.
15. B. Todd Lawson, 'The Qur'an Commentary of Sayyid 'Alī-Muḥammad, the Bāb (1819–1850)', PhD thesis, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, 1987.