

The Knowledge of God: An Essay on Bahá'í Epistemology

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THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD, Bahá'u'lláh says, is the beginning of all things.¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá states: "knowledge is the most glorious gift of man, and the most noble of human perfections. . . . knowledge is light, life, felicity, perfection, beauty, and the means of approaching the Threshold of Unity."² Further, the Bahá'í writings state that the knowledge of God along with its sister phenomenon, the love of God, is the one great purpose underlying all of creation.³ Here I will attempt to elucidate the means by which man acquires the knowledge of God and to clarify ideas about the methods through which one secures knowledge about God and His revelation, methods that are specifically mentioned in the Writings of the Author and the Interpreter of the Bahá'í Faith.

The epistemological process, as I see it, is more than an impersonal mechanism seeking to discover the laws of thought. It also manifests a highly dynamic quality. The knowledge of God always occurs within a particular religious experience. Knowledge and experience work together. Certain forms of knowledge are at the same time forms of religious experience.

The modes of knowledge judged to be most relevant in a discussion of the knowledge of God are: reason, intuitive knowledge, the knowledge of the heart, mystical knowledge, and faith itself, which is also a form of knowledge. These categories constitute the conceptual framework of the paper. I have elucidated them all from the point of view of one particular Bahá'í, but I hope they might be universal when applied to the entire field of religious knowledge.

'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated that none of the roads to knowledge is by itself perfect.⁴ Therefore, I stress at the outset their complementary nature. I have made an effort, however, to place reason and its preoccupation with analysis, so prominent in western epistemology, into its proper perspective.

I. The Investigative Faculty—The Path of Reason

THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH explicitly recognizes the value of reason in man's search for God. As a tool of philosophic and scientific enquiry, reason has been the mainstay of western civilization for at least twenty-five hundred years. Modern

1. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, comp. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice and trans. Habib Taherzadeh and a Committee at Bahá'í World Centre (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), p. 156.

2. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, comp. and trans. Laura Clifford Barney, rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1964), pp. 156-57.

3. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2d rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 65.

4. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 343.

science owes much in its origins to the ancient Greeks, who, even granting the weaknesses in their scientific method and rudimentary mathematics, recognized that proper reasoning proceeds according to general principles. The notion of proof, of general demonstration, is a specifically Greek invention. Rather than relying on myth and legend as a means of explaining the world, as the Mesopotamians and Egyptians had done, the Greeks brought a logical and scientific element to their theories. The Egyptians knew, for example, how to construct a right-angled triangle; but it took a Greek, Pythagoras, to explain the theorem.⁵

From a theological point of view, the faculty of reason within man himself has long been viewed as one of those components of God's "image" in which the book of Genesis tells us man was made. For St. Augustine, reason was the eye of the soul given to man that he might comprehend God.⁶ Reason in this light, has been viewed as one of the attributes of a Creator, who is orderly rather than capricious, omniscient rather than sometimes wise.

'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated that the method of reason is the method of understanding.⁷ The Bahá'í Writings contain numerous references to this faculty, which is viewed as constituting one of man's distinctive characteristics in relation to the animal: "God's greatest gift to man is that of intellect, or understanding."⁸ Further: "This human rational soul is God's creation; it contains and excels other creatures. . . ."⁹ Not only is reason a supernatural gift as the quotations above illustrate; its outstanding quality is its power of "intellectual investigation," its ability to discover laws and relationships: "This scientific power investigates and apprehends created objects and the laws surrounding them. It is the discoverer of the hidden and mysterious secrets of the material universe and is peculiar to man alone."¹⁰ Through the rational faculty man is able to transform his environment: "But man through the exercise of his scientific, intellectual power can rise out of this condition, can modify, change and control nature according to his own wishes and uses. Science, so to speak,

5. For an excellent discussion of the contributions of Greek science, see J. D. Bernall, *Science in History* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1969), I, 159-23.

6. D. M. Johnson, "Reasoning and Logic," *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, XIII, 344.

7. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 341.

8. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Reality of Man: Excerpts from Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1962), p. 10.

9. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 252.

10. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith: Selected Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 242.

is the 'breaker' of the laws of nature."¹¹ Reason also exhibits a logical or orderly quality: "The human spirit consists of the rational, or logical, reasoning faculty, which apprehends general ideas and things intelligible and perceptible."¹²

The Bahá'í Faith is proclaimed to be scientific in its method.¹³ A body of literature already exists in the Faith exploring the relationship between religion and science.¹⁴ What I find noteworthy is that Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, did not in his writings anywhere give any strict definition of what is meant by the scientific method, in its methodological application to religion. At least one eminent authority in the field has stated that the term "scientific method" is in itself beyond definition. Crystallographer, Dr. John Desmond Bernal, Fellow of the Royal Society and author of the four-volume *Science in History*, writes:

There is a danger of considering it as a kind of ideal Platonic form, as if there were one proper way of finding the Truth about Nature or Man, and the scientist's only task was to find this way and abide in it. Such an absolute conception is belied by the whole history of science, with its continual development of a multiplicity of new methods. . . . Consequently, scientific method, like science itself defies definition. It is made up of a number of operations some mental, some manual.¹⁵

Working definitions of the scientific method can be useful, however, in helping one to understand the scientific process at work within religion. Any such definition must be sufficiently broad to be applicable to religion. In its barest outline it refers to the systematic use of man's faculties to gain knowledge.¹⁶ If one were to attempt to apply some highly technical or rigid definition of the scientific method to religion, he would quickly find such a definition completely unworkable. The positivist definition of the scientific method is a case in point.

The scientific method postulated by Auguste Comte (1798-1857) rejects all forms of a priori knowledge but especially transcendent or metaphysical ones, whereas the Bahá'í Faith, as well as other world religions, clearly recognizes man's innate capacity to acquire a knowledge and a love of God. Positivism accepts truths verified by the experimental method only, whereas religion recognizes the possibility of the immediate apprehension of spiritual truth. Positivism teaches that the ultimate statement of truth lies in man's

11. *Ibid.*, p. 243.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 370.

13. Shoghi Effendi, "The Bahá'í Faith: A Summary," *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1955), p. xi.

14. Dr. William S. Hatcher has written several articles on the subject: "Science and Religion," *World Order*, 3, No. 3 (Spring 1969), 7-19, and "The Unity of Science and Religion," *World Order*, 9, No. 3 (Spring 1975), 22-38. In a more recent article on the subject Dr. Hatcher relates the scientific method to positivism and existentialism ("Science and the Bahá'í Faith," *Etudes Bahá'í Studies: A Publication of the Canadian Association for Studies on the Bahá'í Faith*, 2 (Sept. 1977), 29-45).

15. Bernal, *Science in History*, I, 35.

16. William S. Hatcher, in "Science and the Bahá'í Faith," has defined scientific methods as "the systematic, organized, directed and conscious use of our various mental faculties in an effort to arrive at a coherent model of whatever phenomenon is being investigated." *Etudes Bahá'í Studies*, 1 (Nov. 1976), 58-59.

rational discovery of laws in the physical, social, or moral spheres only, whereas religion recognizes theological statements pertaining to a Being called God. In *Cours de Philosophie Positive*, Comte postulated the law of the three states, which corresponded to the different stages in the development of mankind—the theological, the metaphysical, and the positivistic. Religion, the theological state, was nothing more than a primitive stage in the evolution of mankind that sought to explain the phenomena of nature as interventions of the gods. Mankind, Comte thought, having nearly outgrown its religion, was on the threshold of the positivistic state, the last and highest stage in mankind's development, the stage of the real, certain, and useful.¹⁷ Comte's understanding of religion reveals that he did not have a grasp of religion beyond Greek polytheism. Arguing from such an extreme example, as Comte's *in peiorem partem*, does not give an accurate picture of all the proponents of the scientific method. But it does serve to show to what extremes a belief in science without religion can lead some individuals. (By the same token beliefs in religion devoid of science can lead to profitless, puerile, or unfounded notions.)

Three hundred years ago Blaise Pascal said that the supreme achievement of reason was to bring one to the place where he realized reason's limitations: "The final step in reason's progress is to recognize that there is an infinity of things that lie beyond it. It remains weak as long as it does not manage to realize that."¹⁸

Reasons for belief in God are doubtless more complex than obvious demonstrations of God's existence.¹⁹ William James, for example, argued that the sources of religious belief seem to lie more in the realm of man's will than in his speculative intelligence. James argued that one must always be prepared to admit the possibility of error when he speaks of rational proofs for God's existence; I think most people would admit that reason does not constitute an infallible epistemological tool. However, the problem becomes more acute when one takes the agnostic's position that in the face of inconclusive evidence he must suspend judgment, for in so doing he is in effect denying God since He thus ceases to have any further connection with his life. He becomes a dead issue. Agnostics are right when they state that the proofs for the existence of God are not infallible, but they are wrong when they restrict the method of proof to the field of reason alone. If one is not convinced by reason alone, and he wants to find out the truth about religion, he has to be willing to act as if it were true to see whether it proves itself in experience—he has to "will to believe."²⁰ If the religious experience is able

17. The foregoing on Comte has been gleaned from Jan de Vries, *The Study of Religion: A Historical Approach*, trans. Kees W. Bolle (New York: Harcourt, 1967), pp. 62–63.

18. "La dernière démarche de la raison est de reconnaître qu'il y a une infinité de choses qui la surpassent. Elle n'est que faible si elle ne va jusqu'à reconnaître cela." Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. Robert Barrault (Paris: Larousse, 1965), p. 104. (Pensée 188 La fuma, 267 Brunschvig).

19. The three traditional proofs for the existence of God are ontological, God as necessary being; cosmological, God as creator or first cause; and teleological, God as the divine mind or supernatural designer of the universe. 'Abdu'l-Bahá uses all three in *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 3–7.

20. William James, quoted in John MacQuarrie, *Twentieth Century Religious*

to transform individuals and indeed whole societies, it must be valid. James explored the whole field of religious experience in his classic *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.²¹ James saw that somehow to suspend one's instincts, heart, and courage in his search after God was "the queerest idol ever manufactured in the philosophic cave."²²

It should be remembered that revealed religion, the self-disclosure of God to mankind through a prophetic figure, has never contained proofs for the existence of God. Moses, Jesus, Muḥammad and, in our day, Bahá'u'lláh, never attempted to buttress their revelations by trying to lay down a metaphysical foundation for belief. In revealed, prophetic religion, God *is* the ground and source of the revelation Who enters into a relationship with mankind by means of the spoken word through the Manifestation Who is the Divine Word.²³ The "thus saith the Lord" of the Old Testament and the "recite" and "say" of the Islamic and Bahá'í dispensations clearly indicate this relationship. As for Christianity, Jesus says: "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me" (John 8:28). This saying among many others indicates the nature of the same relationship. (See also John 8:42-47, 54; 10:25; 13:16; 14:24-28.) Belief that the knowledge of God is not directly accessible is basic to any Bahá'í discussion of the concept of God that emphasizes that the Divinity cannot be known directly and that the knowledge of Him is, therefore, mediated to mankind through the Prophets. The Prophets do not incarnate the essence of Divinity, but They do reflect the names and attributes of God. "Names" here do not refer only to qualifying adjectives such as the All-Knowing, for example. "Names" also imply by extension the entire body of religious knowledge that the Omniscient One reveals to mankind. Anyone, therefore, who acquires knowledge of the teachings of the Prophets acquires knowledge of God:

The knowledge of the Reality of the Divinity is impossible and unattainable, but the knowledge of the Manifestations of God is the knowledge of God, for the bounties, splendors, and divine attributes are apparent in them. Therefore if man attains to the knowledge of the Manifestations of God, he will attain to the knowledge of God; and if he be neglectful of the knowledge of the Holy Manifestation, he will be bereft of the knowledge of God.²⁴

II. Preamble to Intuitive Knowledge— Knowledge of the Heart—Mystic Knowledge

THE COMPLEMENTARY NATURE of science and religion described in the Bahá'í writings would seem to require that the notion of the scientific method in religion be augmented with the notion of the "dynamic influence" of

Thought (London: SCM Press, 1963), pp. 177-78.

21. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Modern Library, 1902).

22. James, quoted in MacQuarrie, *Twentieth Century Religious Thought*, p. 178.

23. The biblical foundation for this belief may be found in Num. 12:6-8.

24. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 323.

religion. Shoghi Effendi has asserted that the revelation proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh, in addition to being scientific in its method, is "dynamic in the influence it exerts on the hearts and minds of men."²⁵ To anyone who has seriously studied their Writings it will appear obvious that Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá tell man that the knowledge of God will lead him ultimately to the experience of the manifestations of the divine. The forms of religious knowledge described in the following pages as well as the quality of the experience of which they form a part all have a subjective quality in the sense that they are experienced by the individual. But let that not detract from the experience. The individual Bahá'í does not wander off into a wilderness of self-generated spiritual experiences. He follows closely the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who have provided him with the models and patterns of spiritual experiences and the knowledge they contain and have described them in great detail. Where the seeker closely follows Their method of spiritual discovery and gains a first-hand knowledge of these patterns, he gains an experience that is both scientific and spiritual—in a word, real. However moving the spiritual discovery of the Bahá'í might be, he also realizes that such a discovery is not an end in itself. It should somehow contribute to increasing his knowledge and love of God. Therein lies its true value. Moreover, he realizes that any new-found knowledge he may acquire must be put to good use in the teaching, administrative, and social arenas of his Faith.

III. Intuitive Knowledge—the Absolute Gift

"... if the inner perception be open, a hundred thousand clear proofs become visible."²⁶

ONE of the more fascinating modes of knowledge is intuitive knowledge, which is explicitly mentioned in many passages in the Bahá'í writings. It may with equal validity be referred to as immediate apprehension, direct knowledge, intuitive reason, or insight. 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes it in *Some Answered Questions*:

Knowledge is of two kinds: one is subjective, and the other objective knowledge; that is to say, an intuitive knowledge and a knowledge derived from perception.

The knowledge of things which men universally have, is gained by reflection or by evidence: that is to say, either by the power of the mind the conception of an object is formed, or from beholding an object the form is produced in the mirror of the heart. The circle of this knowledge is very limited, because it depends upon effort and attainment.

But the second sort of knowledge, *which is the knowledge of being, is intuitive*, it is like the cognisance and consciousness that man has of himself. [emphasis added]²⁷

Objective knowledge, then, is the mode of knowledge "which men universally have," and which is based on proof, "evidence," conveyed through the

25. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. xi.

26. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 7.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

senses, "perception." Intuitive knowledge, on the contrary, is direct knowledge not dependent upon study, "like the cognisance and consciousness that man has of himself."

Ordinary men share intuitive knowledge with the Manifestations of God. The crucial difference is that the knowledge of the Manifestations of God is an absolute and not a relative knowledge; it apprehends the essence of all realities rather than their external qualities alone: "the universal Manifestations of God . . . surround the essence and qualities of the creatures, transcend and contain existing realities and understand all things. . . ." ²⁸ This is a categorical, qualitative difference. But it is certain that man also shares an intuitive knowledge of being, for 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, "This is the knowledge of being which man realises and perceives. . . ." ²⁹ Intuitive knowledge is also in the nature of a pure grace, for 'Abdu'l-Bahá further states, "it is an absolute gift." ³⁰

We may infer from these passages that intuitive knowledge bridges the subject-object dichotomy. It constitutes a border-line realm between affectivity or emotion and pure abstract reasoning. It bypasses the processes of dialectics or systematic reasoning with its sequences of hypothesis-proof-conclusion. Intuitive knowledge is existential knowledge in the sense that it is experienced directly in the immediate rather than being thought out conceptually within a framework of time. It is based on the assumption that the mind has the power to intuit truths directly through a form of nonanalytic reasoning. Meditation is simply the protracted use of intuitive reason directed toward questions hitherto unanswered. The use of intuitive knowledge is not confined to the study of religion alone. It is widely used in the humanities, in theology and philosophy, and especially in literature, which is also a world of immediate experience. Intuitive reason makes greater use of symbols and feelings than it does in working out abstract arguments. This is why all scriptures are so full of symbols. They are more apt to convey directly to the consciousness the truths of the revelation than abstract reasonings. Specifically, the use of intuitive knowledge in the humanities is called the phenomenological method, which is the investigation into the basic structures of consciousness and the conditions under which any kind of experience is possible. As such it is to be distinguished from psychology, which is more concerned with the behavioral manifestations of man's inner consciousness.

When one listens to the Divine Word, he is making active use of intuitive knowledge. The words sink deeply, so to speak, into the soul, and one immediately recognizes their truth and responds to them. In this way knowing becomes a form of experience. Bahá'ís meet this experience of intuitive knowing during the devotional part of the Nineteen Day Feast, which has been aptly described as "the very heart of their spiritual activity, their participation in the mystery of the Holy Utterance. . . ." ³¹ At that moment, one may say

28. Ibid., p. 181.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the British Isles, in Shoghi Effendi, *Principles of Bahá'í Administration: A Compilation*, 3d ed. (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1973), p. 51.

he is one with the Writings, one with the revelation. He has momentarily filled the gap between himself and the revelation. He has overcome the subject-object dichotomy.

It would be of interest at this point to draw some further implications of the affective nature of intuitive knowledge. There is a strong element of feeling in this form of knowledge. Feeling, however, should not be construed here to mean subjective emotion, but feeling is still perhaps the most accurate word to explain the relationship. One could best describe the concept of feeling as "a relationship of absolute dependence upon God."³² It is a moot point whether a relationship of absolute dependence lies more in the realm of feeling or reason. Nonetheless, what is being stressed in the definition is the feeling of dependency. Connected with this process of the intuitive recognition of spiritual truths is one's dependence upon them for his spiritual well-being. It is indeed doubtful whether religion could exist at all without the feeling of dependency upon God. The absence of such feeling would preclude faith, prayer, the knowledge of God, deeds, and almost everything that pertains to religion. Most academic definitions of religion usually include this notion of dependence.³³

There is one dramatic example from the history of the Bahá'í Faith that indicates clearly how dynamic this form of apprehension is and how it involves the feeling of absolute dependence. The example is the conversion of Hujjat to the Faith of the Báb.³⁴ About 1845 Hujjat deputized one of his disciples, Mullá Iskandar, to investigate the new revelation in Shíráz. Upon Iskandar's return to Zanján Hujjat reprimanded him in the presence of the 'ulamá (doctors of the law) of that city for stating that his acceptance or rejection of the new revelation would be conditional upon that of Hujjat:

Receiving from the hand of his messenger the copy of Qayyúm-Asmá', he, as soon as he had perused a page of that book, fell prostrate upon the ground and exclaimed: "I bear witness that these words which I have read proceed from the same Source as that of the Qur'án. Whoso has recognised the truth of that sacred Book must needs testify to the Divine origin of these words, and must needs submit to the precepts inculcated by their Author. I take you, members of this assembly, as my witnesses: I pledge such allegiance to the Author of this Revelation that should He ever pronounce the night to be the day, and declare the sun to be a shadow, I would unreservedly submit to His judgment, and would regard His verdict as the

32. This definition of feeling in religion is attributed to the nineteenth-century German theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher in his work *The Christian Faith*. Schleiermacher, whom many regard as the greatest Christian theologian of the nineteenth century, was the first to develop a general system of hermeneutics or interpretation of the religious experience.

33. Hans-Joachim Schoeps states the definition this way: "Religion may be defined . . . as the relationship between man and the superhuman power he believes in and feels himself to be dependent on." *The Religions of Mankind* (Garden City: Anchor-Doubleday, 1968), p. 6.

34. Hujjat (proof) had been so surnamed by the Báb. His fullname was Mullá Muḥammad-'Alí, native of Zanján. He was a fierce and outspoken critic of the Islamic hierarchy, which he viewed with unconcealed contempt. A man of wide learning, he was often able to silence his adversaries in religious controversies.

voice of Truth. Whoso denies Him, him will I regard as the repudiator of God Himself." With these words he terminated the proceedings of that gathering.³⁵

What other type of knowledge but a direct and immediate apprehension of the truth itself could have had such a striking effect upon Ḥujjat? Of course, one is dealing here with an experience of a highly inspirational quality stemming from the direct influence of the Manifestation Himself; the immediate apprehension of the truth is, however, the distinguishing feature of the experience. Moreover, one senses the compelling influence of this form of knowledge when he considers that Ḥujjat himself testified that he "involuntarily, yet with full option" confessed the truth of Báb's claims.³⁶ From this example it appears that intuitive knowledge has much in the nature of spiritual instinct, for it appears to have been acting independently upon Ḥujjat's will.³⁷

Falling prostrate upon the ground is one of the characteristic modes of behavior one finds in the face of the compelling power of revelation. It should not be regarded as a symbolic gesture indicating humility; rather it is the true instinctual act expressing one's recognition of the divine power and might when encountered directly. This particular aspect of Ḥujjat's conversion is typical of some of the experiences of the Prophets in which the Divine is experienced as an awe-inspiring and majestic force that by its very presence compels the worshiper to recognize it. It strongly resembles Daniel's vision of a glorious personage on the banks of the Tigris:

So I was left alone and saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me; my radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength. Then I heard the sound of his words; and when I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in a deep sleep with my face to the ground (Daniel 8-9).

The two incidents are dissimilar in that Daniels' experience was truly visionary, but they do resemble one another in that both experienced the Divine alone even though they were in the presence of others. To use the biblical expression, both Ḥujjat and Daniel fell on their faces. It is of equal interest to contrast this form of conversion, which is an independent recognition of the truth, with conversions in which the subjective emotions of guilt and sin are evoked to produce a breakdown in ego defense mechanisms. But apart from this type of immediate experience, the Bahá'í Faith also recognizes the gradual and difficult process involved in converting one's nature to reflect an ever-increasing spirituality.

It would be wrong, however, to infer that the Bahá'í revelation does not invite one to make use of systematic reasoning in understanding religion. The rational faculty does, of course, raise questions about the meaning of the revelation, and one should seek to answer such questions by all possible means

35. Nabil-i-A'zam [Muhammad-i-Zarandí], *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*, trans. and ed. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1932), p. 179.

36. Hájí Mírzá Jání, *Tárikh-i-Jadíd*, Appendix 2, pp. 349-50, quoted in Nabil, *Dawn-Breakers*, p. 180n.

37. 'Abdu'l-Bahá uses the term "spiritual instinct" in *Reality of Man*, p. 19. It is mentioned in connection with offering prayers for the departed.

whether it be private discussions, research, prayer, meditation, deepenings, schools, and so on. Questions and answers are central to the dialectic method that was used extensively by both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The path of reason and intuitive knowledge are complementary paths. In fact, it is often desirable to verify intuitive knowledge by the use of critical reason; otherwise, one may make gratuitous observations about things without any supportive proofs. Belief in the exclusivity of intuition can easily turn into a smug form of esoteric knowledge that dispenses with public verification, in the same way that belief in the superiority of reason, with its objectivity and definitiveness, can lead to intellectual pride.

IV. *The Knowledge of the Heart*

THERE EXISTS among students of religion the inaccurate impression that the heart must mean only emotion in a poetical sense, with all of the dangers this implies. There also exists the notion that the heart is a totally subjective reality, much too personal to make discussions of its experiences a fruitful exercise. While such views may contain elements of truth, they reflect superficial notions of the role of the heart in the discovery of the knowledge of God.

The knowledge of the heart is one of the fundamental pivots around which turns the knowledge of God.³⁸ It might prove useful at the outset to contrast the knowledge of the heart with other forms of knowledge—reason and intuitive knowledge. 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes intuitive knowledge as "the knowledge of being," a direct and immediate form of knowledge bypassing the stages of dialectics.³⁹ Reason consists of the logical exercise of the rational faculty in an effort to demonstrate objective truth. The knowledge of God gained through the heart is the knowledge of the Manifestation Himself that the seeker experiences in the realm of personal knowledge or personal encounter. The personal dimension is its outstanding feature.⁴⁰ It does possess some of the characteristics of mysticism, but the knowledge of the heart is more especially the knowledge of what is mine since it resides, so to speak, within me. It is the discovery of divine revelation, the Word of God, the Manifestation Himself within the human soul. *The Hidden Words* make several references to this type of personal knowledge of the Manifestation: "O SON OF LIGHT! Forget all save Me and commune with My spirit. This is of the essence of My command, therefore turn unto it." "O SON OF BEING! Thy heart is My home; sanctify it for My descent. Thy spirit is My place of revelation; cleanse it for My Manifestation."⁴¹

In *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* Bahá'u'lláh made one of His most cogent elucidations

38. "That the heart is the throne, in which the Revelation of God the All-Merciful is centered, is attested by the holy utterances which We have formerly revealed." Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 186.

39. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 180.

40. This personal category in religion has been made the object of a philosophical and theological study by the Jewish theologian Martin Buber in *I and Thou* (trans. R. G. Smith [New York: Scribners, 1958]).

41. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1939), pp. 8, 17.

of this divine reality, a statement from which, in conjunction with other passages on the same theme, one may conclude: (1) The heart is the seat of the inner mysteries of God, and its purification is the sine qua non of the acquisition of divine knowledge. (2) There is a direct relationship between spiritual passion and the acquisition of knowledge and certitude. By referring to the *Íqán*, one can make a more complete explanation of these statements. The first proposition is based on those pages of the *Íqán* that deal with the individual's search for the knowledge of God:

But, O my brother, when a true seeker determines to take the step of search in the path leading to the knowledge of the Ancient of Days, he must, before all else, cleanse and purify his heart, which is the seat of the revelation of the inner mysteries of God, from the obscuring dust of all acquired knowledge, and the allusions of the embodiments of satanic fancy.⁴²

This passage clearly reveals the heart as the locus of divine knowledge and declares that it must undergo a process of purification in order to discover the knowledge of God latent within it. I would like to attempt an explanation of this process of purification, which is unique since it constitutes a reversal of the traditional educational process.

The Purgation Process—The Via Negativa: Speaking of the purification process, Bahá'u'lláh states clearly that the seeker, in his search for the knowledge of God, must cease applying acquired forms of knowledge, "the obscuring dust of all acquired knowledge." By this is meant forms of knowledge that are not intrinsic to the revelation itself. The point here is that the knowledge of God does not refer to the practical application of the revelation to the needs of the body politic. This would, to be sure, necessitate specialized competencies as well as the need for an administrative machinery to accomplish the task. Rather, the passage, when taken in context, refers to the knowledge of the Manifestation Himself, the knowledge of the Manifestation being a quality of the Manifestation and not the essence of the Manifestation, to observe the distinction made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá.⁴³ Bahá'u'lláh seems to be suggesting that the method of gaining divine knowledge and the object of knowledge, the knowledge of the Manifestation, are all one. The method is divine, and the object is the Divinity. Thus the process involved in the search for the knowledge of God, like the Faith itself, is unitary. The unique aspect of the process is that it is autonomous and independent of any other methods. It is a process that could be termed *sui generis*, whole and unique, a unity unto itself. This method of acquiring divine knowledge is paradoxical to the acquisition of worldly knowledge since acquired knowledge consists of filling up the mind with information whereas Bahá'u'lláh is clearly saying that one must empty himself of worldly knowledge in order to discover the knowledge of God. Thus the process is a *via negativa* in which one must negate the one to find the other. In the light of this statement, the assertion "The most grievous of all veils is the veil of knowledge" becomes comprehensible.⁴⁴

42. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 3d ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 192.

43. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 255.

44. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 188.

Knowledge is also a grievous veil, for Bahá'u'lláh explains elsewhere in *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* that acquired knowledge is borrowed knowledge and that borrowed knowledge has the disadvantage of leading to pride.⁴⁵

To use acquired forms of knowledge in pursuit of the knowledge of God would result in a confusion of method and object, rather like using a road map to navigate upon an uncharted sea. Bahá'u'lláh, however, is not suggesting that one stop learning, reading, or working because it involves being caught up in acquired knowledge. Such antiworldliness would constitute obvious contradictions to other explicit teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.⁴⁶ It simply means that one does not apply these other forms of knowledge in the search after the knowledge of the Manifestation. Bahá'u'lláh's notion of purifying the consciousness from all previous presuppositions of knowledge in order to gain true knowledge has not been posited by him alone. Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) described this process as *epoché* (Greek for "stoppage") in which everything except the object under study is temporarily put into brackets and excluded from consciousness. Husserl claimed that such a method would lead to the true knowledge of the *eideia* or universal essences which, according to him, are the only objects worthy of true study.⁴⁷ But Bahá'u'lláh invites one to the search after the most genuine object of study—God—who reveals himself to the seeker, as we will see, in a dynamic and personal relationship.

The second proposition gleaned from *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*—"There is a direct relationship between spiritual passion and the acquisition of knowledge and certitude"—bears examination. In Western society man has been taught that he should keep emotion out of higher learning. The reasoning goes that it will somehow distort his perception of the pure objective truth. The truth is that there is no pure objective truth for the simple reason that man's understanding of it is relative to and contingent upon a great variety of factors: "Philosophy consists in comprehending the reality of things as they exist, according to the capacity and the power of man."⁴⁸ Man must bring himself, his whole self, to bear in his search after knowledge. Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá taught that where the knowledge of God is concerned (this also applies to other forms of knowledge) emotion is a valid and indeed indispensable aspect of the epistemological process. In fact, the following passage from *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* points out that it is only to the degree to which the individual allows his spiritual passions free play in the search after God that he will be successful in attaining knowledge and certitude:

Only when the lamp of search, of earnest striving, of longing desire, of passionate devotion, of fervid love, of rapture, and ecstasy, is kindled within the seeker's heart, and the breeze of His loving-kindness wafted upon his soul, will the darkness of error be dispelled, the mists of doubts and misgivings be dissipated, and the lights of knowledge and certitude envelop his being.⁴⁹

45. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

46. Universal compulsory education, higher learning, and the sacred character of work are all to be found in Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings.

47. Edmund Husserl, quoted in J. MacQuarrie, "The Method of Phenomenology" in *Twentieth Century Religious Thought*, p. 219.

48. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'i World Faith*, p. 322.

49. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 195–96.

Feeling viewed as a component of the process of knowing renders it vital, dynamic, alive. For a Bahá'í the method of securing knowledge is not a detached and objective exercise of reason alone. It involves his participation at the deepest levels of his being. The exercise of the passions must also involve the use of volition. If he finds difficulty in attaining these states, he must intently desire their realization. Passages such as the one cited demonstrate that the nonrational faculties of man's nature can lead him as surely to the knowledge of the divine as those of logic and reason. Bahá'u'lláh has done much to narrow the traditional Western gap between the heart and the head.

V. *The Mystic Knower*

*"For the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling
which unites man with God."*⁵⁰ Shoghi Effendi

THE WORD "mystical" often makes one ill at ease or at best evokes a neutral response. These reactions are understandable. First, it would appear that mysticism is largely a question of natural endowment and that relatively few people are predisposed to such experiences. Mysticism, then, is irrelevant to a large segment of the population. Second, pragmatic and scientifically minded individuals tend to dismiss the reports of mystics as vagaries that have no objective value and are incapable of scientific verification. Other criticisms point to the private and personal emphasis placed on the nature of mystical experience that tends to override the community aspects of religious life and that at worst degenerates into self-indulgent, antisocial behaviour. There are also examples of the degraded and immoral mystics who thought themselves above the law.

It is not my intention to debate the validity of these criticisms. I wish simply to point out that in the Bahá'í context such criticisms become largely inapplicable because the Founders of the Faith have provided safeguards that counteract excesses. As for the nature of the mystical experience itself, the Bahá'í Faith recognizes its intrinsic value.

The Bahá'í Faith also recognizes the value of diversity in shades of thought and personality among its adherents. Hence the person of so-called mystic bent is as welcome in the ranks of the Faith as individuals whose personal interests stress the social, scientific, historical, institutional, or psychological aspects of religion. In addition, any experiences of a private nature remain precisely that—individual and private. While nothing in the Faith prevents individuals from sharing such experiences with others, under no circumstances do they take on an authoritative character to be imposed upon the body of the believers. Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation and the authorized interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi remain the definitive statement for the believers. Any mystical experience the individual may have, moreover, ought to be set within a theological and metaphysical framework that is the means of verifying its validity. The statements constituting this framework are also found in the authorized writings of the Founders and their Interpreters. For example, any person who believes that he has become one with the Godhead

50. Shoghi Effendi, "Letters from the Guardian," *Bahá'í News*, No. 102 (August 1936), p. 3.

in mystical contemplation and has, therefore, taken on the nature of the Godhead as some mystics have claimed has made an unwarranted inference from the experience itself.⁵¹ The Bahá'í Faith clearly recognizes the validity of mystical experience, but Bahá'u'lláh's Writings provide a framework for interpreting it. It is necessary to distinguish between the experience and its interpretations. Also, Bahá'u'lláh has forbidden to his followers cloistering and monasticism, which have been the traditional breeding grounds of mysticism, and has invited all men to active participation in the life of society. Salvation for the Bahá'í cannot take place in a cloister or in shunning his fellowmen. Finally, the Bahá'í writings stress the wholesome nature of community relationships and the necessity of assemblies of consultation for the administration of the affairs of the Faith. All of these safeguards effectively prevent an overemphasis on private religious experience. Having safely limited the perimeters of mystical experience, we can more confidently venture into an understanding of it.

I should like to offer the following five statements on the qualities of mysticism based on the Bahá'í writings as well as on other literature: (1) Mysticism is a spiritual philosophy of life and as such holds an ultimate view of reality. (2) This ultimate view of reality holds that within man there is an untapped reservoir of spiritual knowledge that transcends his everyday consciousness; that this reality exhibits a quality of oneness that underlies the particularities of the sense world; and that man can attain union with the manifestations of the divine. (3) Mysticism seeks verification of its belief in ultimate reality through direct, nondiscursive, spiritual experience. (4) It affirms that the actual experience of encounter with the manifestation of the divine is ineffable. The experience is, of course, described but what is emphasized is the inability of language adequately to express it. (5) Mysticism should seek to express itself in acts motivated through spirituality rather than through passive contemplation alone. This is particularly stressed in the Bahá'í Faith.

Edward Granville Browne, the British orientalist who did much to acquaint the West with Persian civilization and who was one of the first Western scholars to write on the Bábí dispensation, has defined mysticism thus: "It is in essence an enunciation, more or less clear, more or less eloquent, of the aspiration of the soul to cease altogether from self, and to be at one with God."⁵²

Regardless of one's predisposition, it is difficult to ignore the fact that Bahá'u'lláh has written the finest mystical treatises, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, compositions written to different individuals.⁵³ It would be easy to view this work as a less important appendage to Bahá'u'lláh's other

51. One of the more outstanding examples of the unitive claim with the Divinity comes from Šúfí ecstatic Al-Ḥalláj, who claimed, "I am the Truth." Since the Truth is one of the divine names, Al-Ḥalláj was accused of blasphemy. When he refused to recant, he was publicly scourged and crucified.

52. E. G. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians*, 3d ed. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1950), p. 136.

53. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, trans. Ali-Kuli Khan and Marzieh Gail, 3d rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1978).

works destined for the initiates or for future generations. In fact, Shoghi Effendi ranked this mystical composition only third in importance to *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* and *The Hidden Words*, three works forming a triad of doctrinal, ethical, and mystical writings.⁵⁴ In *The Seven Valleys* Bahá'u'lláh "describes the seven stages which the soul of the seeker must needs traverse ere it can attain the object of its existence."⁵⁵ The essay may be viewed as both the epitome and the measure of all mystical experience. It is at the same time the description, the prescription, and the interpretation of mysticism. Bearing in mind that it is the mystic feeling that is "the core of religious faith," how does Bahá'u'lláh depict the transformation of the human consciousness from the mundane to the mystical? These transformations may be viewed as being seven in number, and they correspond in their general features to seven valleys: 1. Transformation from self-contentment to the burning search after God: "Labor is needed, if we are to seek Him; ardor is needed, if we are to drink of the honey of reunion with Him. . . ." (p. 7). 2. Transformation from the world of duality, contradictions, and paradoxes to the world of oneness: "In this station he pierceth the veils of plurality, fleeth from the worlds of the flesh, and ascendeth into the heavens of singleness" (p. 17). 3. Transformation from relative and incomplete understanding to the realm of absolute knowledge: "He stretcheth out the hand of truth from the sleeve of the Absolute. . . ." (p. 18). 4. Transformation from mundane consciousness to the realm of ecstasy: "From sorrow he turneth to bliss, from anguish to joy. His grief and mourning yield to delight and rapture" (p. 29). 5. Transformation from the three dimensional world of time and space to the realm of infinity: "In the ocean he findeth a drop, in a drop he beholdeth the secrets of the sea" (p. 12). 6. Transformation from sporadic spirituality to the complete expression of divine attributes: "This station is the dying from self and the living in God, the being poor in self and rich in the Desired One" (p. 36). 7. Transformation from ego-consciousness to annihilation in God: "They . . . reckon this city—which is the station of life in God—as the furthestmost state of mystic knowers, and the farthest homeland of the lovers" (p. 41).

VI. Faith

IN ANY DISCUSSION of faith, one must avoid the pitfall of reductionist simplicity. He can neither fix the meaning of faith nor restrict its implications. The Bahá'í writings allude to a wide range of concepts in the discussion of faith.⁵⁶

One of the more common distortions in the understanding of the notion

54. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 140.

55. *Ibid.*

56. In addition to the concept of faith discussed in this section Bahá'u'lláh has defined faith as the act of guiding the peoples of the world to recognize the Manifestation of God (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 338). Shoghi Effendi has elsewhere defined faith as "implicit obedience," "whole-hearted allegiance," and "uncompromising adherence" (*Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932*, 7th rev. ed. [Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974], p. 62).

of faith is that which reveals an intellectual bias. The intellectual bias against faith is characterized by a deep-seated skepticism as to the validity of the tenets of religion. Such criticisms usually center around teachings that are viewed as unscientific or irrelevant to the human condition and usually focus on the defects of organized religion. The intellectualist bias does not view faith as a valid form of cognition but rather as an inconsequential affair of the heart in which the emotions masquerade as some primitive form of belief. Such an intellectualist bias is usually manifest when it perceives that religion is not to be confined to the corner of mere subjective emotion, that it can and does demonstrate scientific processes, political organization, and moral imperatives. When this happens, the intellectualist bias usually wants to put faith back into the corner of subjective emotion. If some validity to the cognitive nature of faith is granted, it is usually viewed as a form of knowledge characterized by a low degree of evidence. Thus the intellectualist bias characterizes faith as knowledge having a low degree of evidence. The "blind faith" of popular parlance reflects such an attitude. The Bahá'í Faith, on the contrary, explicitly recognizes that faith is above all, but not exclusively, a form of knowing something about God. Far from being a blind voluntaristic thrust of the will into the dark when reason fails, faith is consciousness—conscious knowledge—and is so defined in Bahá'í teaching: "The lamp is lighted, but as it hath not a conscious knowledge of itself, no one hath become glad because of it. . . . By faith is meant, first, conscious knowledge, and second, the practice of good deeds."⁵⁷

Intellectualist distortion of faith is based more upon a misunderstanding of the function of epistemology than anything else. It would be futile here to try to draw distinctions between so-called scientific knowledge as having a higher degree of verifiability than knowledge through faith. The truth of faith is as verifiable as the truth of science, given a certain set of assumptions. Science, too, employs its set of assumptions when making its inquiries. The sphere of inquiry is different in religion as are the tools of verification. Religion does not use instrumentation to verify its hypotheses but can and indeed must, from the Bahá'í point of view, proceed according to systematic and orderly methods of inquiry. Thus faith can take on a genuinely scientific character, while still maintaining the integrity of its own sphere of knowledge. Scientific truths no matter how widely accepted today are temporary or preliminary statements to the scientific truths of tomorrow. In our age the principles of quantum physics and indeterminacy have undercut long-established scientific hypotheses and have clearly revealed the contingent nature of scientific truth. But let this not detract from the validity of science. The contingent nature of scientific statements does not diminish the truth value of a tested and verified scientific principle, though knowledge of it does have the effect of preventing scientific dogmatism. The same relative and contingent character applies equally to statements of a spiritual or religious nature: "Repudiating the claim of any religion to be the final revelation of God to man, disclaiming finality for His own Revelation, Bahá'u'lláh inculcates the basic principle of the relativity of religious truth, the continuity of Divine Revelation, the progressive-

57. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas* (New York: Bahai Publishing Society, 1916), III, 549.

ness of religious experience."⁵⁸

Even when maintaining the valid distinction between the social and spiritual nature of religion as dynamic and static forms respectively, it is necessary to bear in mind that the spiritual nature of religious truth is also relative in nature, even if this means nothing more than its being relative to our own understanding of it.⁵⁹ But in addition to the individual's relative understanding of them, the eternal principles of love and justice, just to name two of the more outstanding ones, reveal an expansionary and progressive nature as mankind's collective understanding of them increases. Bahá'u'lláh has considerably amplified the concepts of both love and justice in His Writings and especially that of unity, whose principles were also present in previous dispensations. Thus we see that both religion and science reveal unitary features in their epistemological process yet maintain the integrity of their own sphere of knowledge.

The intellectualist distortion of faith also misunderstands the total concept of reason and restricts its meaning to that of scientific method only, logical consistence, or power of analysis. This particular definition of technical reason is historically speaking a contemporary one and should be contrasted with that of the *logos* or universal reason of the Greek, the early Christian, and the Enlightenment eras. The latter definition of reason, rather than being a technical method of scientific inquiry, referred to the divine principle that infused order, meaning, and structure into the world. One historian of religion holds that the best translation of *logos* is "the creative manifestation of God," which in Bahá'í understanding is no one other than the Prophetic Figure.⁶⁰ The prologue to the Gospel of John reveals that some early Christians held that the Christ was the personification of this creative and all-knowing power in the universe. Even without accepting this Christian notion of the *logos*, its wider definition as "universal reason" has broader implications for man's participation in a wide variety of cultural activities—science, art, literature, philosophy, and religion. It is not confined to the realm of scientific methodology alone.

Paul Tillich provided religionists with a novel existentialist definition of faith when he defined it simply as the state of being "ultimately concerned."⁶¹ Tillich, however, has unwittingly echoed similar words of Bahá'u'lláh written some one hundred years earlier that a state of faith is reflected in "anxious concern": "Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements."⁶² Measured by the Bahá'í standard, Tillich's definition has a certain validity taken in its extended meaning. Tillich argues, convincingly I think, that no man is without

58. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, rev. ed. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1961), p. 112.

59. One should avoid interpreting the above passage of Shoghi Effendi in its widest possible extreme: that a Bahá'í, in view of the relativity of religious truth, may, therefore, believe anything. Individual interpretations of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh should always be made in the light of the revelation or its authorized interpretations.

60. Kurt Schubert, *Die Religion des nachbiblischen Judentums* (Vienna-Freiburg: Herder, 1955), p. 18.

61. Paul Tillich, *The Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper, 1957), p. 1.

62. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 213.

his ultimate concern, however high or low on the scale of values and that, therefore, no man is without faith of a type. The individual is not without his vital concerns. Political concerns can easily claim ultimacy for the nation. These claims of ultimacy that preoccupy man have in their nature the demand for the total surrender of him who pursues them. The definition has profound and far-reaching implications. If man's ultimate concern, his faith, centers in something other than its genuine object—namely God—faith becomes idolatrous and demonic in the retrogressive, even highly destructive form that it takes. Biblical faith very clearly defined the legitimate object of one's ultimate concern in the great commandment: "and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5). Bahá'u'lláh in *The Hidden Words* has defined the object of our ultimate concern in similar words: "O SON OF BEING! Love Me, that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee."⁶³ Genuine religious faith is directed toward the Deity as a Being having ultimate meaning and significance. Idolatrous faith is the substitution of the infinite, all-knowing, all-powerful God with lesser finite and material objects. The well-known traditional example of idolatrous faith, drawn from Jewish history, is the reversion of the Israelites during the Exodus to the worship of the Golden Calf, a practice common to most Semitic tribes of the ancient Near East. Shoghi Effendi clearly maintained that our century was not without its false gods or idols, subjects of man's ultimate concern, whose destructive impact upon civilization has had a far more devastating effect than Israel's worship of the idol:

The chief idols in the desecrated temple of mankind are none other than the triple gods of Nationalism, Racialism and Communism, at whose altars governments and peoples, whether democratic or totalitarian, at peace or at war, of the East or of the West, Christian or Islamic, are, in various forms and in different degrees now worshipping. Their high priests are the politicians and the worldly-wise, the so-called sages of the age; their sacrifice, the flesh and blood of the slaughtered multitudes. . . .⁶⁴

This is not poetic allegory. Mankind has come full circle in its spiritual evolution. And as in the days of Moses when the nature of faith was grounded in a covenantal relationship of threat and promise, so the faith of Bahá'u'lláh contains a threat and a promise: "for which any man or people who believes in them, or acts upon them, must, sooner or later, incur the wrath and chastisement of God."⁶⁵ In addition to the deification of the state, the petty god attendant on this trinity is the no less pernicious doctrine of the dominance of a privileged class.⁶⁶ In contrast with this stands Bahá'u'lláh's ultimate concern for the unity of the planet in one global faith: "'Bend your minds and wills to the education of the peoples and kindreds of the earth, that haply . . . all mankind may become the upholders of one order, and the inhabitants of one city . . . 'That one indeed is a man who today dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race.'"⁶⁷

63. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 4.

64. Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day Is Come*, pp. 117–18.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

66. *Ibid.*

67. Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day Is Come*, p. 118.