

## Memorandum

To: Universal House of Justice

Date: 22 February 1998

From: Research Department

### Whether the Apostle Paul was a “False Teacher”

The Research Department has studied the query contained in the email of 8 December 1997 to the Baha’i World Centre from Mr. .... Mr. ... states that “some years ago” he read a letter in *The American Bahá’í*, which quoted from a statement of the Research Department concerning the Apostle Paul. He recalls that this statement “covered references in the Baha’i Writings to Paul and noted that there was no support for the view that Paul was a ‘false teacher’”. Mr. ... is requesting a copy of this statement by the Research Department.

It seems likely to us that the letter which Mr. ... recalls reading is the one published in the “Letters” section of *The American Bahá’í*, 4 November 1992, volume 23, number 16, page 11. We have attached a photocopy of this page for his convenience and note that in the letter to the editor in question, the writer introduces the term “false teacher” in his introductory remarks; it does not appear in any of the material he quotes. It is also important to clarify that the writer is quoting (with some inaccuracy) a reference to the Research Department in a letter dated 25 November 1980 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice.

Regarding Mr. ...’s request, therefore, it seems appropriate to provide him with an extract from the House of Justice’s letter cited above which contains the reference to the Research Department and the full text of the discussion of Peter and Paul. For clarity, we have

preceded this extract by the incoming query to which this discussion is a response. Thus:

**Incoming Query from an individual:**

Also I would like to know if there is any statement in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá or the letters of the Guardian that state that Saint Paul "usurped the station of Peter, and that Saint Paul completely "changed the basic message of Jesus Christ." This is the substance of a section of a book recently published by George Ronald Pub. Co....

**Response of the Universal House of Justice**

Concerning the relationship of St. Peter and St. Paul, the Research Department has found nothing in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá or the Guardian which states that St. Paul "usurped the station of Peter" or that he "completely changed the basic message of Christ."

Of St. Peter, the beloved Guardian has written:

...let it be stated without any hesitation or equivocation that... the primacy of Peter, the Prince of the apostles, is upheld and defended. (*The Promised Day is Come*,<sup>1</sup> p. 109)

...Peter is recognized as one whom God has caused "the mysteries of wisdom and of utterance to flow out of his mouth." (*The Promised Day is Come*,<sup>2</sup> p. 110)

Now with regard to your questions. First concerning the statement of Jesus Christ "Thou art Peter and upon this rock...": this saying of Jesus establishes beyond any doubt the primacy of Peter and also the principle of succession, but is not explicit enough regarding the nature and functioning of the Church itself. The Catholics have read too much into that statement, and derived from it certain conclusions which are

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quite unjustifiable. (From a letter dated 7 September 1938 written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer)

Bahá'u'lláh Himself has testified that the original Message of Jesus has not been lost. You are undoubtedly familiar with the passage on page 89 of the Kitáb-i-Íqán,<sup>3</sup> where He states:

We have also heard a number of the foolish of the earth assert that the genuine text of the heavenly Gospel doth not exist amongst the Christians, that it hath ascended unto heaven. How grievously they have erred! How oblivious of the fact that such a statement imputeth the gravest injustice and tyranny to a gracious and living Providence! How could God, when once the daystar of the beauty of Jesus had disappeared from the sight of His people, and ascended unto the fourth heaven, cause His holy Book, His most great testimony amongst His creatures, to disappear also? What would be left to that people to cling to from the setting of the daystar of Jesus until the rise of the sun of the Muhammadan Dispensation?

It is indisputable, however, that many erroneous teachings have entered into Christianity, obscured the pure Gospel and caused disunity and schism. This is explained by the Guardian on pages 20 and 21 of the compilation entitled *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, where he points out that

...the fundamental reason why the unity of the Church of Christ was irretrievably shattered, and its influence was in the course of time undermined, was that the Edifice which the Fathers of the Church reared after the passing of His First Apostle was an Edifice that rested in no wise upon the explicit directions of Christ Himself.

It is also undeniable that St. Peter had to face many problems in his own lifetime. On page 145 of *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, the Guardian writes:

Could Peter, the admitted chief of the Apostles, or the Imám Alí, the cousin and legitimate successor of the Prophet, produce in support of the primacy with which both had been invested written and explicit affirmations from Christ and Muhammad that could have silenced those who either among their contemporaries or in a later age have repudiated their authority and, by their action, precipitated the schisms that persist until the present day?

That St. Paul on occasion disputed with St. Peter is seen from St. Paul's own words in the Epistle to the Galatians, 2:11–14. It is also St. Paul who mentions early divisions among the Christians, which he endeavours to heal, in I Corinthians 1:11–13. St. Peter's attitude to St. Paul appears in II Peter 3:15–18.

In considering the relationship between St. Peter and St. Paul, one needs to bear in mind all of these various factors. High praise is accorded to them both in the Bahá'í Writings. A particularly pertinent statement by 'Abdu'l-Bahá appears on page 223 of the new publication *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*:<sup>4</sup>

One's conduct must be like the conduct of Paul, and one's faith similar to that of Peter (25 February 1980 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual)

Mr. ... may also find of interest the following extract from a letter written by the Universal House of Justice regarding whether Paul was a "Covenant-breaker":

## Whether the Apostle Paul was a “False Teacher”

Your letter... concerning the question of Saint Paul as an alleged Covenant-breaker doubtless arises from the comments of those who seek to compare the evolution of early Christianity with the origins of the Bahá'í Faith.

You are correct in noting such questions from the Writings as the one cited from the *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbás*, which confirm the high rank of the Apostle Paul in the Christian Dispensation.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, while there is no doubt that the Bahá'í teachings uphold the primacy of Peter (see *The Promised Day is Come*, page 113)<sup>6</sup> we know of no text stating that Paul was a Covenant-breaker. We have heard of a pilgrim's note to this effect, but it cannot be given credence in the absence of any validation. (13 August 1972 to an individual believer)

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### NOTES

- 1 Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980.
- 4 sec. 189) Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978.
- 5 “Physical nearness or remoteness is of no importance; the essential fact is the spiritual affinity and ideal nearness. Judas Iscariot was for a long time favored in the holy court of His Holiness Christ, yet he was entirely far and remote; while Paul, the apostle, was in close embrace with His Holiness.” (*Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbás*, vol. 3 (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, pp. 719–20.
- 6 Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1941.