

Themes of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s *Tablets of The Divine Plan* Illustrated by Scriptural References to the Bible and the Qur’án

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Abstract

The Tablets of the Divine Plan of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (March 1916–March 1917), His Will and Testament, and the *Lawḥ-i-Karmil* (Tablet of Carmel) revealed by Bahá’u’lláh are described by Shoghi Effendi as the three “Charters” for promotion of the Cause of God [MBW 84-85]. Those revealed by the Center of the Covenant share several closely related subjects which will be examined here, specifically in the context of their references to the Bible and to the Qur’án. Problems facing humanity arising from a crisis of Faith – a spiritual affliction caused by humanity being denied Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation – a situation addressed in the Tablets of the Divine Plan.

Introduction

‘Abdu’l-Bahá revealed fourteen succinct and seminal letters over a period of one year during the latter part of World War I. Addressed to North America about five years prior to His

ascension, they constitute one of three “Charters” of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh.

All the teaching plans launched by the beloved Guardian, as well as those subsequently directed by the Universal House of Justice, are stages in the implementation of this master plan conceived by the Centre of the Covenant for the diffusion of the Message of Bahá’u’lláh.¹ [MBW 84-85]

The “Tablets of the Divine Plan” mandate members of the North American community to undergo a spiritual baptism and arise to proclaim the advent of the Kingdom of God, relying on the support of the Holy Spirit and confident that their efforts will bear fruit in a fertile field and that the Divine Word will transform souls and create unity and harmony. The letters are replete with direct and indirect references to the Bible and the Qur’án, demonstrating that the Source of inspiration of all Dispensations is One, and that Bahá’u’lláh is the Promise and fulfillment of the Glad-tidings of the Bible and of the Qur’án. The Tablets remind us that Christianity triumphed through the exemplary sacrificial efforts of the disciples to propagate far and wide the ‘Good News’ of the coming of the Kingdom. Five years later, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will and Testament, challenged us even more directly to follow their example:

It behooveth them not to rest for a moment, neither to seek repose. They must disperse themselves in every land, pass by every clime, and travel throughout all regions. Bestirred, without rest, and steadfast to the end, they must raise in every land the triumphal cry “Ya Bahá’u’l-Abhá!” (O Thou the Glory of Glories)... The disciples of Christ forgot themselves and all earthly things, forsook all their cares and belongings, purged themselves of self and passion, and with absolute detachment scattered far and wide and engaged in calling the peoples of the world to the divine guidance;

till at last they made the world another world, illumined the surface of the earth, and even to their last hour proved self-sacrificing in the pathway of that beloved One of God. Finally in various lands they suffered glorious martyrdom. Let them that are men of action follow in their footsteps! [WT 10-11]

The purpose of this presentation is to examine themes of the Tablets of the Divine Plan in the context of overt and oblique references to the Gospels and the Qur'án, and allusions to the early followers of Christ. These include (a) the importance of attaining 'the Straight Path' and investigating the truth; (b) a declaration of the Oneness of Divine Purpose and the Oneness of Faith; (c) the role of the North America community in establishing 'the oneness of humanity'; (d) the necessity to undergo a spiritual rebirth and the requisite spiritual qualities of those whose privilege is to promote the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh; (e) the duty of every Bahá'í in North America to travel teach, and as bidden by the "Divine Gardener" to plant the "seed"; (f) the creative power of the Holy Spirit and the ability of the Divine Word to transform darkness into light and to revive seemingly spiritually lifeless souls; (g) the influence or power of one (individual) or a few; (h) the exhortation to follow the sacrificial example of the disciples who through their death and suffering testified to their faith in their Lord and belief in the promise of the coming of the kingdom of God; (i) the importance of unity of the friends through faithfulness to the covenant as they resolutely and single-mindedly endeavor to rid humanity of its divisions and rancor and to replace the hatred with love and amity; and (j) the critical need for Bahá'ís to be able to explain the truths of the Bible and of the Qur'án if they are to understand adequately their own Faith, as an essential preliminary to teaching it, and, importantly, if they are to usher in the unity of mankind and reconciliation of the religions.

Humanity is beset by several seemingly intractable issues. These include irrational nationalism and territorial and

ideological conflicts, excessive expenditure of global resources on armaments, corruption, a widening gap between the rich and the poor, global warming, population growth coupled with finite resources, energy demand-supply uncertainties, instability of global economics and reservations concerning sustainable development, continuing health worries, lack of clean water supply, transnational organized crime, inharmonious relation of science and faith, racial, religious and sectarian prejudice, disintegration of the fabric of society due to ethical and moral decay, and lack of universal education. Additionally, the world has recently witnessed a series of appalling atrocities due to a resurgence of militant religious fanaticism.

As noted by Shoghi Effendi, humanity regrettably is often prompted to take definitive measures and redeem itself only after disastrous events:

Much suffering will still be required ere the contending nations, creeds, classes and races of mankind are fused in the crucible of universal affliction, and are forged by the fires of a fierce ordeal into one organic commonwealth, one vast, unified, and harmoniously functioning system. Adversities unimaginably appalling, undreamed of crises and upheavals, war, famine, and pestilence, might well combine to engrave in the soul of an unheeding generation those truths and principles which it has disdained to recognize and follow. A paralysis more painful than any it has yet experienced must creep over and further afflict the fabric of a broken society ere it can be rebuilt and regenerated.
[WOB 193-194]

The followers of Bahá'u'lláh, however, cannot let the happenings of the world and adversity sadden them. Their duty is to arise and rescue society from the evident evils under which it groans, and to carry out the wishes of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as expressed in His *Tablets of the Divine Plan*. Shoghi Effendi explains:

Who knows but that these few remaining, fast-fleeting years, may not be pregnant with events of unimaginable magnitude, with ordeals more severe than any that humanity has as yet experienced, with conflicts more devastating than any which have preceded them. Dangers, however sinister, must, at no time, dim the radiance of their new-born faith. Strife and confusion, however bewildering, must never befog their vision. Tribulations, however afflictive, must never shatter their resolve. Denunciations, however clamorous, must never sap their loyalty. Upheavals, however cataclysmic, must never deflect their course. The present Plan, embodying the budding hopes of a departed Master, must be pursued, relentlessly pursued, whatever may befall them in the future, however distracting the crises that may agitate their country or the world. [ADJ 72]

History records that true religion has at various times been a vital force for the betterment of mankind. Man has a spiritual yearning and needs to be put in touch once again with his spiritual nature. Bahá'u'lláh remarks “*every body calleth aloud for a soul*”, and adds, “*heavenly souls must needs quicken, with the breath of the Word of God, the dead bodies with a fresh spirit*” [ADJ 82-83]. At their core, many of the problems that humanity faces are due to deficient ethics and morality. Faced with a similar situation at the beginning of Islám, the Qur'án attributed the evil to a spiritual malaise requiring divinely ordained solutions:

In their hearts is a (spiritual) disease; and God has increased their disease: and grievous (painful) is the penalty they (incur, will face), because of their denial (of divine Message).²

The Bahá'í Faith provides the necessary spiritual remedies:

The vitality of men's belief in God is dying out in every land; nothing short of His wholesome medicine can ever

restore it. The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society; what else but the Elixir of His potent Revelation can cleanse and revive it?

The world is in travail and its agitation waxeth day by day. Its face is turned towards waywardness and unbelief. Such shall be its plight that to disclose it now would not be meet and seemly. [GWB 200]

And again:

Religious fanaticism and hatred are a world-devouring fire, whose violence none can quench. The Hand of Divine power can, alone, deliver mankind from this desolating affliction. [GWB 288]

The Tablets of Divine Plan may be regarded as the instrument that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá devised during the dark days of World War I for the purpose of proclaiming the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh to the remotest corners of the earth. The Divine Plan is laid out in fourteen letters, four addressed to the Bahá’í community of North America and ten addressed to communities in specific geographic areas. In the letters He summons the American and Canadian believers to arise and establish the Cause of God throughout the planet.

The Tablets of the Divine Plan contain several direct and indirect quotations from the Gospels and the Qur’án, the study of which increases significantly our understanding of our mission.

Theme one: “Guide us to the straight path”
(*Ihdiná aṣ-ṣiráṭu’l-mustaqím*)

This invocation appears in the sixth verse (*áyah*) of the first chapter (*súrah*) of the Qur’án, *Al-Fátihah*, or ‘The Opening’ which has a total of seven verses. The *súrah* was revealed by

Muḥammad initially in Mecca and subsequently re-revealed in Medina³.

The significance of this verse is underscored by the fact that it is quoted twice, in both the second and ninth Tablets of the Divine Plan, and several more times in the Writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. It encapsulates several related themes that are essential to our teaching efforts and to our ability to explain the relation of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh to Islám and to earlier dispensations.

Expectation

Attaining 'the Straight Path' or 'the Way' of God (the *Ṣirát*⁴), is part of a prayer that Muslims are required to repeat five times daily. Muslims are thereby reminded not only to pursue God's good pleasure in their lifetime, but also to anticipate the Path of God and His Guidance. They are to avoid "*the (path) of those who earn (God's) anger nor of those who go astray crooked ways.*"¹¹ If Muslims follow the admonition to follow the Straight Path *fástaqímú*, i.e. "be straightforward" they shall be rewarded with the glad-tiding of entering the paradise of Divine good pleasure:

*And for those who say, "Our Lord is God," and then follow the Straight Path without deviation, the angels descend upon them from time to time (with the Message): "Do not fear or grieve, but rejoice in Paradise which you have been promised."*⁵

Bahá'u'lláh states that the 'Good News' promised by earlier Dispensations is fulfilled today:

Glory be to God Who has revealed the Verses in Truth to the Prophets and Messengers ... In these verses are given Glad Tidings concerning the Straight Path of God, where all things are explained in detail, as a guide and a reminder for those who enter the Divine Paradise by the

*leave of God. Verily they will be guided to Salvation and will be led to the Holy Shores, nigh unto God, the Help in Peril, the Mighty, the Self-Subsisting.*⁶

Attaining the Straight Path requires receptivity and a desire for spiritual enlightenment:

*Those who deny our verses (signs) are deaf and dumb, in darkness. Whomsoever God will, He leads astray, and whomsoever He will, He places him upon a Straight Path.*⁷

The Qur'án therefore envisions that when God re-reveals His Straight Path Muslims will plead that God does not allow them to be shamed, e.g. by inability to recognize the event after all of the Divine exhortations.⁸

Expectation of the Straight Path (Way) in Judeo-Christianity

The Jews similarly pray for, and anticipate, as promised in the Tanakh by their Prophets, Isaiah and Micah, future Divine Paths and guidance:

Let us go to the Mount of the Lord... that He may instruct us in His ways,

And that we may walk in His paths... [Isaiah 2:3]

For the days to come,

The Mount of the Lord's House shall stand firm above the mountains;

And it shall tower above the hills.

The peoples shall gaze upon it with joy,

And the many nations shall go and shall say

"Come, let us go up to the Mount of the Lord...

*That He may instructs us in His ways,
And that we may walk in His paths.” [Micah 4:1-2]*

*Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her,
that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is
pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.*

*The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare
ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a
highway for our God.*

*Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and
hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made
straight, and the rough places plain:*

*And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed (The Presence
of the Lord shall appear), and all flesh shall see it
together. [Isaiah 40:2-5]*

Moses prayed that God grants the Children of Israel recognition of His ways:

*... pray let me know Your ways, that I may know You
and continue in Your favor. Consider, too, that this
nation is Your people. [Exodus 33:13]*

It is also part of a prayer of the Psalms (*Zabur* in the Qur'án):

*Let me know Your paths, O Lord; teach me Your Ways;
Guide me in Your true way and teach me, for You are
God, my deliverer;
it is You I look to at all times. [Psalms 25:4-5]*

In the sermon on the Mount Jesus warned that “*strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it*” [Matthew 7:14].

***“God guides whom He will to a Path that is straight”
– there is therefore no need to compel anyone to
accept Islám⁹***

Ultimately, God will define the nature of the Straight Path and will thus determine which Muslim enters it depending on his or her receptivity:

The life of this world is alluring to those who reject faith, and they scoff at those who believe. But the righteous will be above them on the Day of Resurrection; For God bestows His abundance without measure on whom He will.

... God by His Grace guided the believers to the Truth, concerning that wherein they differed. For God guides whom He will to a Path that is straight.¹⁰

In the beginning of the eleventh Tablet addressed to the Bahá'ís of the Central States 'Abdu'l-Bahá eulogizes the station of the follower of Bahá'u'lláh who has been selected by God to recognize His Day and privileged to promote His Cause. He quotes the following verse of the Qur'án:

God will choose for His special Mercy whom He will – for God is Lord of grace abounding.¹¹

An identical statement is also contained in another verse of the Qur'án:

It is never the wish of those without Faith among the People of the Book (religious leaders), nor the polytheists (pagans), that anything good should come down to you from your Lord. But God will choose for His special Mercy whom He will – for God is Lord of grace abounding.¹²

In this context, a prayer revealed in the ninth Tablet of Divine Plan expresses the profound gratitude of the followers

of Bahá'u'lláh for having been directed to God's promised straight path:

O Thou kind Lord! Praise be unto Thee that Thou hast shown us the highway of guidance...

“Guide us to the siráta almustaqeem” comprises several considerations including a reminder to Muslims of their important spiritual responsibility to investigate the Truth

Evidently, the expectations of the ‘straight Ways’ or ‘right Paths’ of God in the Bible and *aṣ-ṣirát mustaqím* in the Qur'án are incompatible with institutionally inspired beliefs of finality of any Dispensation, including that of Islám, for it is evident that the ways represent spiritual journeys and do not constitute *per se* a final destination.

In the Tanakh¹³ the Lord of Hosts declares to the followers of Moses that when they search for Him, they will find Him, “if only you seek me wholeheartedly [Jeremiah 29:13]. In the Gospels, the Heavenly Father will respond to the Christian but he is required to ask, seek and knock [Matthew 7:7-8]. Likewise, Alláh's or God's guidance to His way (*sabil*, pl. *sobul*) is, as stated in the Qur'án and commented on by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Kitáb-Íqán*, conditional on Muslims making a sincere effort to investigate the truth free of preconceived notions and imitation (*taqlíd*)¹⁴:

*And those who strive in Our (Cause) – We will certainly guide them to Our Paths: for verily God is with those who do right.*¹⁵

*Follow not that which thou hast no knowledge, verily, the hearing, and the sight and the heart, each of these shall be enquired of.*¹⁶

*O ye who believe! If a wicked person comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth, lest ye harm people unwittingly, and afterwards become full of repentance for what ye have done.*¹⁷

*O my Lord! advance me in knowledge.*¹⁸

*... Fear God and God will give you knowledge.*¹⁹

*Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know? It is those who are endued with understanding that receive admonition.*²⁰

The declaration of the Oneness of God is the Straight Path

Clearly, as God is Infinite, the declaration that He is One²¹ is not a description and an understanding of His unknowable reality but a declaration that the Source of Inspiration (*wahy*) of all faiths and all humanity is one.

I beg of Thee, O my God, by Thy power, and Thy might, and Thy sovereignty, which have embraced all who are in Thy heaven and on Thy earth, to make known unto Thy servants this luminous Way and this Straight Path, that they may acknowledge Thy unity and Thy oneness, with a certainty which the vain imaginations of the doubters will not impair, nor the idle fancies of the wayward obscure. [PM #176]

The Torah states that God is One:

*Hear O Israel, The Lord our God is one Lord*²²

Christ affirmed this teaching to be the greatest Law of God:

And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered

them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?

And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. [Mark 12:28-30]

The Qur'án also declares God is one.

*Say: He is God, the One and Only*²³

It proclaims that the assertion that Jews, Christians and Muslims worship the same Lord constitutes the Straight Path:

*Verily God is my Lord and your Lord: Him therefore serve ye: this is a Way that is straight (háthá siratun mustaqeemun).*²⁴

It is a declaration of the Oneness of the Way of God

Man is on the right Path and not on the crooked way when he realizes that every religious dispensation, *ummah* or *shariat*, share the same spiritual truths, and is an integral part of the same eternal Faith of God. Bahá'u'lláh attests to this unity of the Divine Purpose:

Thus doth the Lord make plain the ways of truth and guidance, ways that lead to one way, which is this Straight Path. Render thanks unto God for this most gracious favour; offer praise unto Him for this bounty that hath encompassed the heavens and the earth; extol Him for this mercy that hath pervaded all creation. [KA 24]

The religions differ only in the potency of the light of their revelation and in their social laws, which are not designed to be

permanent and require to be abrogated and discarded when they no longer serve the best interests of the individual or society.

Hence, bearing witness to the truth of one religion is a testimony of belief in all faiths. Conversely to deny one is to deny all of them. It is in this context that Christ declared to the Jewish leaders of His time who opposed Him that had they truly understood Moses and His Writings they would also have recognized Him.²⁵ Hence, the Qur'án declares that the religion (*dín* or *deen*) revealed to Muḥammad is the exact same as the one revealed to earlier prophets. The warning is added that Muslims must not divide the One Common Faith.

He has established for you the same religion as that which He enjoined on Noah – the same inspiration sent to thee, and the same We enjoined on Abraham, Moses, and Jesus: Namely, that ye should remain steadfast in Religion, and make no divisions therein: this is hard for the mushrikún²⁶. God chooses to Himself those whom He pleases, and guides to Himself those who turn (to Him).²⁷

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in the first sentence of the first Tablet of the Divine Plan addressed to the Bahá’ís of the Northeastern States, refers to the Bahá’u’lláh, the Source and Center of our Faith, as the “*threshold of oneness*.” In the eleventh Tablet of the Divine Plan addressed to the Bahá’ís of the Central States He emphasizes that the flag of unity is to be raised by establishing the Oneness of God and the Oneness of religion. Unfortunately, all paths have become crooked largely due to insistence on false theories of superiority, finality and exclusivity of religion. They require to be cleared of these divisive concepts and straightened. In this manner, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá anticipates, the joy of unity will overflow to the rest of humanity:

... the call to the world of unity, “There is no God but One God, and all the Messengers, from the beginning to

the Seal of the Prophets (Muhammad) ...” may be raised; the flag of the oneness of the world of humanity be unfurled, the melody of universal peace may reach the ears of the East and the West, all the paths may be cleared and straightened, all the hearts may be attracted to the Kingdom of God, the tabernacle of unity be pitched on the apex of America, the song of the love of God may exhilarate and rejoice all the nations and peoples, the surface of the earth may become the eternal paradise, the dark clouds may be dispelled and the Sun of Truth may shine forth with the utmost intensity. [TDP 79]

In keeping with the principle of oneness of faith the Guardian points out that describing the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh as “a new religion” fails to do justice to its admittedly wider role – the unification of all religions:

Ceasing to designate to itself a movement, a fellowship and the like – designations that did grave injustice to its ever-unfolding system... refusing to be labeled as a mere philosophy of life, or as an eclectic code of ethical conduct, or even as a new religion... Far from wishing to add to the number of the religious systems, whose conflicting loyalties have for so many generations disturbed the peace of mankind, this Faith is instilling into each of its adherents a new love for, and a genuine appreciation, of the unity underlying the various religions represented within its pale. [WOB 196-197]

Shoghi Effendi notes further the following remarkable and instructive observation by Bahá'u'lláh:

The well-being of mankind, its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established. [WOB 203]

In turn, the unity of mankind cannot be established unless and until there is unity of religion. This understanding is therefore a

central piece of the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith which aim to establish the oneness of humanity. Establishment of the oneness of the religions represented within its pale is hence also critical to promoting global tranquility. It achieves unity of religion by asserting that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is progressive, not final [WOB 58], and by reminding the followers of Moses, Christ and Muḥammad of the essential moral and ethical dimensions of their Faith.

“All the Prophets of God,” asserts Bahá'u'lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, *“abide in the same tabernacle, soar in the same heaven, are seated upon the same throne, utter the same speech, and proclaim the same Faith.”* From the *“beginning that hath no beginning,”* these Exponents of the Unity of God and Channels of His incessant utterance have shed the light of the invisible Beauty upon mankind, and will continue, to the *“end that hath no end,”* to vouchsafe fresh revelations of His might and additional experiences of His inconceivable glory. To contend that any particular religion is final, that *“all Revelation is ended, that the portals of Divine mercy are closed, that from the daysprings of eternal holiness no sun shall rise again, that the ocean of everlasting bounty is forever stilled, and that out of the Tabernacle of ancient glory the Messengers of God have ceased to be made manifest”* would indeed be nothing less than sheer blasphemy.

“They differ,” explains Bahá'u'lláh, *“only in the intensity of their revelation and the comparative potency of their light.”* And this, not by reason of any inherent incapacity of any one of them to reveal in a fuller measure the glory of the Message with which He has been entrusted, but rather because of the immaturity and unpreparedness of the age He lived in to apprehend and absorb the full potentialities latent in that Faith. [WOB 58]

Thus, every Divine Prophet is the Way of God, and His Revelation guides humanity along the same Straight Path of truth.

They Who are the Dawning-Places of Revelation and the Manifestations of the Cause of thy Lord, the Most Merciful, Who have sacrificed Their souls and all that They possessed in His Straight Path. [TB 205]

He hath sent forth His Messengers, and sent down His Books, that they may announce unto His creatures the Straight Path. [WOB 211]

The Prophets and Messengers of God have been sent down for the sole purpose of guiding mankind to the Straight Path of Truth. The purpose underlying their revelation hath been to educate all men, that they may, at the hour of death, ascend, in the utmost purity and sanctity and with absolute detachment, to the throne of the Most High.... [GWB 156-157]

Apparent exclusivist statements such as that of Jesus' "*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*" [John 14:6] are to be appreciated in the context that no prophet can be gainsaid in His Dispensation, during which time humanity needs to focus on His particular Message. This understanding that in their essentials the multiple Ways of God represent the One Path of God, and all Dispensations are expressions of the same Faith is a powerful illustration of the evolutionary nature of Divine Revelation. It becomes a potent means for ensuring the organic unity of humanity – a primary purpose of the Tablets of the Divine Plan and of the travel-teaching efforts that they exhort us to engage in.

The siráta almustaqeem is an affirmation of the Oneness of mankind in this Day

The Qur'án explains that humanity is one but that spiritual leaders in possession of the revealed Word have caused divisions largely due to differences in interpretation. It promises that God will, however, rectify the situation for the believers:

*Mankind was one single nation, and God sent Messengers with glad tidings and warnings; and with them He sent the Book (of Revelation) in truth, to judge between people in matters wherein they differed; but the people of the Book (spiritual leaders in possession of the Book and to interpret it), after the clear Signs came to them, did not differ among themselves, except through selfish contumacy. God by His Grace guided the believers to the Truth, concerning that wherein they differed. For God guides whom He will to a path that is straight.*²⁸

Bahá'u'lláh, 'the Shepherd' of all sections of humanity

In the Tablet to the Bahá'ís of the Southern States 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

... the divine policy is justice and kindness toward all mankind. For all the nations of the world are the sheep of God, and God is the kind shepherd. He has created these sheep. He has protected them, sustained and trained them. What greater kindness than this? And every moment we must render a hundred thousand thanksgivings that, praise be to God, we are freed from all the ignorant prejudices, are kind to all the sheep of God, and our utmost hope is to serve each and all, and like unto a benevolent father educate every one.

This is a reference to the statement of Christ anticipating the unification of religious systems and the establishment of 'one fold and one shepherd':

I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.

And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. [John 10:14-16]

The Apostle Peter teaches that the elders feed the flock of God in their care without recompense until the Chief Shepherd comes:

Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples (examples) to the flock.

And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

Today, Bahá'u'lláh, "the Chief Shepherd" guides humanity back to this Straight Path:

O ye children of men: the fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race... This is the Straight Path, the fixed and immovable foundation. [WOB 202-203]

The Bahá'ís of North America must guide humanity towards the Straight Path of the Oneness of humanity and the realization that "the earth is but one country and mankind its citizens"

Man has always been one in the sight of God. In support of this, 'Abdu'l-Bahá quotes from the "great Qur'án"²⁹ in the thirteenth Tablet addressed to the Bahá'ís of Canada and Greenland:

"Thou shalt see no difference (‘tafawut’ or real disparity in the attributes) in the creatures of God." In other words, He says: From the ideal standpoint, there is no variation between the creatures of God, because they are all created by Him. From the above premise, a conclusion is drawn, that there is no difference between countries.

Again He references the Quran¹⁴⁸ in the ninth Tablet addressed to the Bahá'ís of the Northeastern States to indicate that the Light of God, Bahá'u'lláh in this day, does not favor either the East or the West but belongs to all mankind. Now, it is part of the mission of the Bahá'í community of North America to proclaim and live by the principle of the "Oneness of mankind":

All countries, in the estimation of the one true God, are but one country, and all cities and villages are on an equal footing. Neither holds distinction over another. All of them are the fields of God and the habitation of the souls of men.

In every city and village they must occupy themselves with the diffusion of the divine exhortations and advices, guide the souls and promote the oneness of the world of humanity

Hence, love for the Divine Essence and recognition of His Manifestation is the siráta almustaqem – the Straight Path of God

“Guide Thou us on the Straight Path,” which is: “Show us the right way, that is, honor us with the love of Thine Essence, that we may be freed from turning toward ourselves and toward all else save Thee, and may become wholly Thine, and know only Thee, and see only Thee, and think of none save Thee.” [SV]

The divine Essence, sanctified from every comparison and likeness, is established in the Prophet, and God's inmost Reality, exalted above any peer or partner, is manifest in Him. [TB, Ishráqát]

Say: O children of dust! He Who is the Spirit of Purity saith: In this glorious Day whatsoever can purge you from defilement and ensure your peace and tranquillity, that indeed is the straight Path, the Path that leadeth unto Me. [TB 171; TU 7-8]

The Şirát is specifically the revealed Divine Word – in this Day, Bahá'u'lláh

He hath clearly set forth His Straight Path in words and utterances of highest eloquence. [TB, Ishráqát]

The episode of Sinai hath been re-enacted in this Revelation and He Who conversed upon the Mount is calling aloud: Verily, the Desired One is come, seated upon the throne of certitude, could ye but perceive it. He hath admonished all men to observe that which is conducive to the exaltation of the Cause of God and will guide mankind unto His Straight Path. [TB 248]

O servants! Verily I say, he is to be accounted as truthful who hath beheld the Straight Path. That Path is

one, and God hath chosen and prepared it. It shineth resplendent amongst all paths as the sun amongst the stars. Whosoever hath not attained it hath failed to apprehend the truth and hath gone astray. Such are the counsels of the incomparable, the peerless Lord. [TU 68]

We have revealed Ourselves unto men, have unveiled the Cause, guided all mankind towards God's Straight Path, promulgated the laws and have enjoined upon everyone that which shall truly profit them both in this world and in the next. [TB 251]

We have truly revealed the signs, demonstrated the irrefutable testimonies and have summoned all men unto the Straight Path. Among the people there are those who have turned away and repudiated the truth, others have pronounced judgement against Us without any proof or evidence. The first to turn away from Us have been the world's spiritual leaders in this age – they that call upon Us in the daytime and in the night season and mention My Name while resting on their lofty thrones. [TB 254]

Recognition of the station of a Manifestation of God is inseparable from following the ordinances of His Revelation [KA 19]. Hence, both represent the Straight Path of God. In this connection, Bahá'u'lláh refers to the earlier revelation contained in the Qur'án as the Straight Path and the Way of God.

Perused ye not the Qur'án? Read it, that haply ye may find the Truth, for this Book is verily the Straight Path. This is the Way of God unto all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth... [GWB XVIII]

The Báb declares that He is the Straight Path:

Some of the people of the city have declared: 'We are the helpers of God', but when this Remembrance came

suddenly upon them, they turned aside from helping Us. Verily God is My Lord and your true Lord, therefore worship Him, while this Path from 'Alí [the Báb] is none but the Straight Path in the estimation of your Lord.
[SWB 45]

O concourse of the faithful! Incline your ears to My Voice, proclaimed by this Remembrance of God. Verily God hath revealed unto Me that the Path of the Remembrance which is set forth by Me is, in very truth, the Straight Path of God, and that whoever professeth any religion other than this upright Faith, will, when called to account on the Day of Judgement, discover that as recorded in the Book no benefit hath he reaped out of God's Religion... [SWB 63]

Bahá'u'lláh similarly announces that He is the Guide to the Straight Path.

I am the guiding Light that illumineth the way. [TB]

O Living Temple! We, verily, have made Thee a mirror unto the kingdom of names, that Thou mayest be, amidst all mankind, a sign of My sovereignty, a herald unto My presence, a summoner unto My beauty, and a guide unto My Straight and perspicuous Path. [SLH 43]

And furthermore that His Revelation today represents the Straight Path of God:

This is a Book which hath become the Lamp of the Eternal unto the world, and His straight, undeviating Path amidst the peoples of the earth. Say: This is the Dayspring of Divine knowledge, if ye be of them that understand, and the Dawning-place of God's commandments, if ye be of those who comprehend. [KA 87]

He equates the Straight Path of God in this Day with the Great News or Great Announcement of the Qur'án:³⁰

My Forerunner (the Báb), Who laid down His life for this Great Announcement, this Straight Path. [ESW 141]

Say, O My loved ones in My lands! ... He hath made known unto you His Straight Path and hath acquainted you with His Great Announcement. [TB 121]

Acquaint the people with the holy verses of thy Lord and make known unto them His Straight Path, His mighty Announcement. [TB 52]

... all heavenly Scriptures bear evidence to its overpowering majesty. In this Day the Book solemnly testifieth to His glory and the Balance is moved to lift up its voice. This is the Day wherein the Şirát calleth aloud: 'I am the Straight Path', and Mount Sinai exclaimeth: 'Verily the Lord of Revelation is come.' [TB 237]

The Qur'án warns the individual that he has the choice of either rejecting the Revelation or taking the Straight Path to God

This is an admonition: Whosoever will, let him take a (straight) Path to his Lord.³¹

This exhortation is again enforced by Bahá'u'lláh:

Thus doth the Nightingale utter His call unto you from this prison. He hath but to deliver this clear message. Whosoever desireth, let him turn aside from this counsel and whosoever desireth let him choose the path to his Lord. [Tablet of Ahmad, in BP 210]

For the followers of Bahá'u'lláh the Şiráţu'l-Mustaqím is heeding His Call to arise and proclaim His Faith to all mankind

O Lord, my God! Praise and thanksgiving be unto Thee for Thou hast guided me to the highway of the kingdom, suffered me to walk in this Straight and far-stretching path, illumined my eye by beholding the splendors of Thy light, inclined my ear to the melodies of the birds of holiness from the kingdom of mysteries and attracted my heart with Thy love among the righteous.

O Lord! Confirm me with the Holy Spirit, so that I may call in Thy Name amongst the nations and give the glad tidings of the manifestation of Thy kingdom amongst mankind. [TDP]

The Herald of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, “commanded the sovereigns of the earth to arise and teach His Cause” [GPB 376], and Bahá'u'lláh admonished every one of His followers to teach the Cause of God, “for God hath prescribed unto every one the duty of proclaiming His Message” [GWB 278]. Any Bahá'í engaged in this activity is hence treading the Straight Path and is transformed by the experience.

Consistent with this explanation is that verse 6 of *súrah Al-Fátihah* referring to *aş-şiráţa al-mustaqím* in the second letter of the Tablets of Divine Plan is interposed between a statement about the importance of teaching at least one soul and an exhortation to travel teach:

One of the holy Manifestations, addressing a believing soul, has said that, if a person become the cause of the illumination of one soul, it is better than a boundless treasury. If God guide, through thee, one soul, it is better for thee than all the riches!” Again He says, “Direct us to the Straight Path!” that is, Show us the right road. It is also mentioned in the Gospel: Travel ye

to all parts of the world and give ye the glad tidings of the appearance of the Kingdom of God. [TDP 11]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá associated the Straight Path in several of His other Writings with teaching and guiding humanity to the Truths of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh:

I beseech Him to assist those brethren to promote His Word in those most distant places, cause them to be servants to His precious olive-garden, keepers of His inaccessible fortress and guides to his Straight Path! [TAB 599]

Verily I supplicate God in heart and spirit to make you signs of guidance, standards of sanctity and fountains of knowledge and understanding, that through you He may guide the seekers unto the Straight Path and lead them unto the Mighty Way in this Great Cycle. [TAB 408]

If this be the endeavor, strive with life and heart and guide the people to the Kingdom of God, lead them to the Straight Pathway, inform them of the greatness and magnitude of this Cause and give them the glad-tidings through the bounty of divine providence and the revelation of the Sun of Truth in this great age. [TAB 360]

Verily I supplicate God in heart and spirit to make you signs of guidance, standards of sanctity and fountains of knowledge and understanding, that through you He may guide the seekers unto the Straight Path and lead them unto the Mighty Way in this Great Cycle. [TAB 407]

O thou who art conscious!

At last thou didst learn of the path of salvation and didst find the straight way. [TAB 309]

Verily I read thy recent letter, and noted its beautiful contents and meanings which proved thy firmness in the Straight Path. [TAB 259]

The Şiráţu'l-Mustaqím is also a reference that our duty to teach should entail 'opening the eyes' and increasing perception. Those engaged in this holy endeavor must so kindle the love of God and the desire of Truth in the hearts and souls of the seekers that all will cry out to attain the Şiráţu'l-Mustaqím

'Abdu'l-Bahá thus summarizes our purpose as the followers of Bahá'u'lláh:

They must make the blind seeing, the deaf hearing, the extinguished one enkindled and set aglow, and the dead quickened. [TAB 721]

This understanding is also implicit in the daily prayer revealed in the Tablets of the Divine Plan for those who are engaged in teaching. It contains the second reference to verse 6 of *súrah al-Fátihah*:

O Thou kind Lord! Praise be unto Thee that Thou hast shown us the highway of guidance, opened the doors of the kingdom and manifested Thyself through the Sun of Reality. To the blind Thou hast given sight; to the deaf Thou hast granted hearing; Thou hast resuscitated the dead; Thou hast enriched the poor; Thou hast shown the way to those who have gone astray; Thou hast led those with parched lips to the fountain of guidance; Thou hast suffered the thirsty fish to reach the ocean of reality; and Thou hast invited the wandering birds to the rose garden of grace.

O Thou Almighty! We are Thy servants and Thy poor ones; we are remote and yearn for Thy presence, are athirst for the water of Thy fountain,³² are ill, longing

for Thy healing. We are walking in Thy path and have no aim or hope save the diffusion of Thy fragrance, so that all souls may raise the cry: O God, "Guide us to the Straight Path." May their eyes be opened to behold the light, and may they be freed from the darkness of ignorance. May they gather around the lamp of Thy guidance. May every portionless one receive a share. May the deprived become the confidants of Thy mysteries.

O Almighty! Look upon us with the glance of mercifulness. Grant us heavenly confirmation. Bestow upon us the breath of the Holy Spirit, so that we may be assisted in Thy service and, like unto brilliant stars, shine in these regions with the light of Thy guidance.

Verily, Thou art the Powerful, the Mighty, the Wise and the Seeing. [TDP 61-65]

Praise be to God! you have heard the call of the Kingdom. Your eyes are opened; you have turned to God. Your purpose is the good-pleasure of God, the understanding of the mysteries of the heart and investigation of the realities. Day and night you must strive that you may attain to the significances of the heavenly kingdom, perceive the signs of divinity, acquire certainty of knowledge and realize that this world has a creator, a vivifier, a provider, an architect, – knowing this through proofs and evidences and not through susceptibilities, – nay, rather, through decisive arguments and real vision [FWU 65].

The servants who dedicate themselves to the education of the world and to the edification of its peoples – They are, in truth, cup-bearers of the life-giving water of knowledge and guides unto the ideal way. They direct the peoples of the world to the Straight Path and acquaint them with that which is conducive to human

upliftment and exaltation. The Straight Path is the one which guideth man to the dayspring of perception and to the dawning-place of true understanding and leadeth him to that which will redound to glory, honour and greatness. [TB 35]

Have not His instructions paved before us the broad and Straight Path of Teaching? [BA 16]

Bahá'u'lláh admonishes the religious leaders that, through blind imitation and fanaticism, have misguided their followers and caused them to deviate from the Straight Path

Quoting the Qur'án He writes in the mighty Íqán [KI 16]:

Thus He (Prophet Muḥammad) saith:

“O people of the Book! Why disbelieve the signs of God to which ye yourselves have been witnesses?” [Qur'án, 3:70]

And also He saith: “O people of the Book! Why clothe ye the truth with falsehood? Why wittingly hide the truth?” [Qur'án, 3:71]

Again, He saith: “Say, O people of the Book! Why repel believers from the way of God?” [Qur'án, 3:99]

Again, He wrote:

The blind fanaticism of former times hath withheld the hapless creatures from the Straight Path. [ESW 162]

We can well perceive how the whole human race is encompassed with great, with incalculable afflictions. We see it languishing on its bed of sickness, sore-tried and disillusioned. They that are intoxicated by self-conceit have interposed themselves between it and the

Divine and infallible Physician. Witness how they have entangled all men, themselves included, in the mesh of their devices. They can neither discover the cause of the disease, nor have they any knowledge of the remedy. They have conceived the straight to be crooked, and have imagined their friend an enemy. [GWB 213]

The Lord of the world saith: O servants! Forsake your own desires and seek that which I have desired for you. Walk ye not without one to guide you on the way, and accept ye not the words of every guide. How numerous the guides who have gone astray and failed to discover the Straight Path! He alone is a guide who is free from the bondage of this world and whom nothing whatsoever can deter from speaking the truth. [TU 70]

Those eminent divines and men of learning who walk the Straight Pathway and are versed in the secrets of divine wisdom and informed of the inner realities of the sacred Books; who wear in their hearts the jewel of the fear of God, and whose luminous faces shine with the lights of salvation – these are alert to the present need and they understand the requirements of modern times, and certainly devote all their energies toward encouraging the advancement of learning and civilization. “Are they equal, those who know, and those who do not know?... Or is the darkness equal with the light?” [SDC 34; Qur’án 39:12; 13:17]

The Şiráţu’l-Mustaqím also refers to the spiritual qualities acquired through the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, which in turn is a testimony of the transforming power of His Revelation

Lay not aside the fear of God, O kings of the earth, and beware that ye transgress not the bounds which the Almighty hath fixed. Observe the injunctions laid upon

you in His Book, and take good heed not to overstep their limits. Be vigilant, that ye may not do injustice to anyone, be it to the extent of a grain of mustard seed. Tread ye the path of justice, for this, verily, is the Straight Path. [SLH 188; PDC 22]

O my friend! In all circumstances one should seize upon every means which will promote security and tranquillity among the peoples of the world. The Great Being saith: In this glorious Day whatever will purge you from corruption and will lead you towards peace and composure, is indeed the Straight Path. [TB 171]

A goodly character is a means whereby men are guided to the Straight Path and are led to the Great Announcement. Well is it with him who is adorned with the saintly attributes and character of the Concurrence on High. [TB 35]

Disencumber yourselves of all attachment to this world and the vanities thereof. Beware that ye approach them not, inasmuch as they prompt you to walk after your own lusts and covetous desires, and hinder you from entering the Straight and glorious Path. [GWB 276]

Theme two: Individual Bahá'ís must undergo a spiritual baptism if their teaching efforts are to prove effective

In the Tablet to the Bahá'ís of Canada and Greenland (#13), 'Abdu'l-Bahá expands on the essential qualities of an effective teacher.

As regards the teachers, they must completely divest themselves from the old garments and be invested with a new garment. According to the statement of Christ, they must attain to the station of rebirth – that is, whereas in the first instance they were born from the

womb of the mother, this time they must be born from the womb of the world of nature. Just as they are now totally unaware of the experiences of the fetal world, they must also forget entirely the defects of the world of nature. They must be baptized with the water of life, the fire of the love of God and the breaths of the Holy Spirit; be satisfied with little food, but take a large portion from the heavenly table. They must disengage themselves from temptation and covetousness, and be filled with the spirit.

“... they must completely divest themselves from the old garments and be invested with a new garment”, and “they must attain to the station of rebirth”

Those engaged in teaching must not be bound by effete tradition and customs and outdated ideas, but instead, they must resolutely present the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in its pure and pristine form. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers to a similar requirement in the time of Christ.

On being questioned as to why His disciples did not follow the laws and traditions of the Dispensation of Moses, Jesus explained that the truths of every new Dispensation require a new format for their adequate expression:

And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?

And Jesus said unto them, ...

No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse.

And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled,

and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles.

And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they (your disciples) on the sabbath day that which is not lawful?

And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath:

Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.

[Mark 2:18-19; 21-22; 24; 27-28]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in the thirteenth Tablet of the Divine Plan, refers to this passage and exhorts Bahá’í teachers to also undergo a spiritual baptism:

... they must completely divest themselves from the old garments and be invested with a new garment. According to the statement of Christ, they must attain to the station of rebirth – that is, whereas in the first instance they were born from the womb of the mother, this time they must be born from the womb of the world of nature. Just as they are now totally unaware of the experiences of the fetal world, they must also forget entirely the defects of the world of nature. They must be baptized with the water of life, the fire of the love of God and the breaths of the Holy Spirit; be satisfied with little food, but take a large portion from the heavenly table. They must disengage themselves from temptation and covetousness, and be filled with the spirit. Through the effect of their pure breath, they must change the stone into the brilliant ruby and the shell into pearl. Like unto the cloud of vernal shower, they must transform the black soil into the rose garden and orchard. They must make the blind seeing, the deaf hearing, the extinguished one enkindled and set aglow, and the dead quickened.

“According to the statement of Christ, they must attain to the station of rebirth ... They must be baptized with the water of life, the fire of the love of God and the breaths of the Holy Spirit” – Faith and man reborn through the trumpet-blast of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation and the diffusion of its Truths

In the last Tablet to Bahá’is of the United States and Canada ‘Abdu’l-Bahá returns to this topic – explaining by quoting the Gospels that materialism begets materialism whilst spirituality attracts spirituality:

Every one of the important souls must arise, blowing over all parts of America the breath of life, conferring upon the people a new spirit, baptizing them with the fire of the love of God, the water of life, and the breaths of the Holy Spirit so that the second birth may become realized. For it is written in the Gospel: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

The Apostle Paul explains that John, the Herald of Christ, “baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus” [Acts 19:4]. Symbolically, as they immersed themselves in the river and washed away the grime of this mundane world they at the same time, and as attested by John the Baptist Himself, prepared themselves for a spiritual rebirth through Christ:

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire. [Matthew 3:11]

(Notably, “Jesus himself baptized not (literally), but his disciples” did so [John 4:2].)

'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement is also a reference to the following explanation that Christ gives to Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin and keeper of traditions of the Dispensation of Moses – only a spiritual rebirth allows the individual to “see”:

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. [John 3:3-6]

“Blessed,” i.e. sanctified and consecrated

In the third Tablet to the Bahá'ís of the Central States 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that the Faith requires “blessed souls and detached teachers”. In the sixth Tablet He writes:

Now is the time for you to divest yourselves of the garment of attachment to this world that perisheth, to be wholly severed from the physical world, become heavenly angels, and travel to these countries. I swear by Him, besides Whom there is none other God, that each one of you will become an Israfil³³ of Life, and will blow the Breath of Life into the souls of others.

And again in the same communication:

... fluent speakers, who are detached from aught else save God, attracted with the fragrances of God, and sanctified and purified from all desires and temptations.

Their sustenance and food must consist of the teachings of God. First they must themselves live in accordance with those principles, then guide the people.

These essential qualities are emphasized by Bahá'u'lláh as quoted by Shoghi Effendi:

Say: O servants! The triumph of this Cause hath depended, and will continue to depend, upon the appearance of holy souls, upon the showing forth of goodly deeds, and the revelation of words of consummate wisdom. ... "Let your principal concern be to rescue the fallen from the slough of impending extinction, and to help him embrace the ancient Faith of God. Your behavior towards your neighbor should be such as to manifest clearly the signs of the one true God, for ye are the first among men to be re-created by His Spirit, the first to adore and bow the knee before Him, the first to circle round His throne of glory." [AD] 82-83]

"By the righteousness of God!" writes Bahá'u'lláh, "The world, its vanities and its glory, and whatever delights it can offer, are all, in the sight of God, as worthless as, nay even more contemptible than, dust and ashes. Would that the hearts of men could comprehend it. Wash yourselves thoroughly, O people of Bahá, from the defilement of the world, and of all that pertaineth unto it. God Himself beareth Me witness! The things of the earth ill beseem you. Cast them away unto such as may desire them, and fasten your eyes upon this most holy and effulgent Vision." "O ye My loved ones!" He thus exhorts His followers, "Suffer not the hem of My sacred vesture to be smirched and mired with the things of this world, and follow not the promptings of your evil and corrupt desires." And again, "O ye the beloved of the one true God! Pass beyond the narrow retreats of your evil and corrupt desires, and advance into the vast

immensity of the realm of God, and abide ye in the meads of sanctity and of detachment, that the fragrance of your deeds may lead the whole of mankind to the ocean of God's unfading glory." "Disencumber yourselves," He thus commands them, "of all attachment to this world and the vanities thereof." [ADJ 30-31]

'Abdu'l-Bahá describes the necessary qualities of Bahá'í teachers as "severed, holy, sanctified and filled with the love of God" (seventh Tablet of the Divine Plan), and as "souls who are in a condition of the utmost severance, purified from the defects of the world of nature, sanctified from attachment to this earth, vivified with the breaths of eternal life" (eleventh Tablet of the Divine Plan).

Shoghi Effendi describes the vision guiding the followers of Bahá'u'lláh as similar to that which motivated the early Christians:

Of such men and women it may be truly said that to them "every foreign land is a fatherland, and every fatherland a foreign land." For their citizenship, it must be remembered, is in the Kingdom of Bahá'u'lláh. Though willing to share to the utmost the temporal benefits and the fleeting joys which this earthly life can confer, though eager to participate in whatever activity that conduces to the richness, the happiness and peace of that life, they can, at no time, forget that it constitutes no more than a transient, a very brief stage of their existence, that they who live it are but pilgrims and wayfarers whose goal is the Celestial City, and whose home the Country of never-failing joy and brightness. [WOB 198]

They dwell in their own countries, but only as sojourners (wayfarers); they bear their share in all things as citizens, and they endure all hardships as strangers.

Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every fatherland is foreign...

Their existence is on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven.

They obey the established laws, and they surpass the laws in their own lives...

They love all men, and they are persecuted by all...

They are reviled, and they bless; they are insulted, and they respect...

Doing good they are punished as evil-doers; being punished they rejoice, as if they were thereby quickened by life.³⁴

Detachment – Shake off the very dust from your feet

In the Tablets of Western States (#12 of 14) He writes:

(The teachers of the Cause) must be embodied spirit, personified intellect, and arise in service with the utmost firmness, steadfastness and self-sacrifice. In their journeys they must not be attached to food and clothing. They must concentrate their thoughts on the outpourings of the Kingdom of God and beg for the confirmations of the Holy Spirit. With a divine power, with an attraction of consciousness, with heavenly glad tidings and celestial holiness they must perfume the nostrils with the fragrances of the Paradise of Abhá.

In the Tablet to the Bahá'is of the United States and Canada (#8 of 14) 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

Teachers must continually travel to all parts of the continent, nay, rather, to all parts of the world, but they must travel like 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who journeyed throughout the cities of America. He was sanctified and free

from every attachment and in the utmost severance. Just as His Holiness Christ says: Shake off the very dust from your feet.

The reference is to the admonishment of Christ to His disciples about detachment and how they should handle rejection whilst travel-teaching:

These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying ...

And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.

Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses,

Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat.

And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you.

And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. [Matthew 10:5, 7-10, 13-14]

Christ's instructions are repeated in the Gospel of Mark:

And he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two...

And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse:

But be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats.

And he said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place.

And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them... [Mark 6:7-11]

At the time of the Gospel, pious Jews on leaving Gentile cities often shook the dust from their feet to show their separation from Gentile practices. By shaking off the dust of a place from their feet the disciples symbolically showed that the people rejecting their message were making a wrong choice. They had done as bidden by Christ and were not required to linger on or argue with folks who refuse the message and contend with people who had shut their ears. If they were not receptive their instructions were not to bother with them – not even with their dust! They certainly should not leave the place expecting compensation for their efforts. Bahá'í teachers are to demonstrate the same attitudes:

As to those souls who are preaching the Word of God, it behooveth them to shake the dust of every land which they have passed by off their shoes and to be with God and without need of the rich – although their bed is the soil, their light is the stars of the sky and their food is the herbs of the desert – because theirs is the wealth of the Kingdom, the honor of the realm of might and the bounty of the divine world; and they are not in want of this world and its cares. Their throne is the mat of humility, their honor is in suffering every lowliness in the path of the Loving Lord and their wealth is being empty-handed from the pomps of the world and its vanities and their provision is trusting in God and being severed from all that is on the earth and its wealth. [TAB 60-61]

Contention is similarly forbidden in our Faith

Christ had declared “by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” [John 13:35]. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also states that the believers in the arena of teaching must demonstrate love and fellowship towards each other (#8 of 14):

The divine friends must be attracted to and enamored of each other and ever be ready and willing to sacrifice their own lives for each other. O ye friends! Fellowship, fellowship! Love, love! Unity, unity! – so that the power of the Bahá’í Cause may appear and become manifest in the world of existence.

If two souls quarrel and contend about a question of the divine questions, differing and disputing, both are wrong. The wisdom of this incontrovertible law of God is this: That between two souls from amongst the believers of God, no contention and dispute may arise; that they may speak with each other with infinite amity and love. Should there appear the least trace of controversy, they must remain silent, and both parties must continue their discussions no longer, but ask the reality of the question from the Interpreter.

Elsewhere, He states:

O ye beloved of the Lord! In this sacred Dispensation, conflict and contention are in no wise permitted. Every aggressor deprives himself of God’s grace. It is incumbent upon everyone to show the utmost love, rectitude of conduct, straightforwardness and sincere kindness unto all the peoples and kindreds of the world, be they friends or strangers. So intense must be the spirit of love and loving-kindness, that the stranger may find himself a friend, the enemy a true brother, no difference whatsoever existing between them. [WT 13]

O army of God! Beware lest ye harm any soul, or make any heart to sorrow; lest ye wound any man with your words, be he known to you or a stranger, be he friend or foe. Pray ye for all; ask ye that all be blessed, all be forgiven. Beware, beware, lest any of you seek vengeance, even against one who is thirsting for your blood. Beware, beware, lest ye offend the feelings of another, even though he be an evil-doer, and he wish you ill. Look ye not upon the creatures, turn ye to their Creator. [SWAB 73]

The Báb instructed that the teacher listen attentively to a seeker and present valid proofs of faith without contention.

Take heed to carefully consider the words of every soul, then hold fast to the proofs which attest the truth. If ye fail to discover truth in a person's words, make them not the object of contention, inasmuch as ye have been forbidden in the Bayán to enter into idle disputation and controversy, that perchance on the Day of Resurrection ye may not engage in argumentation, and dispute with Him Whom God shall make manifest. [SWB 134]

Bahá'u'lláh prohibited contentious arguments:

Revile ye not one another. We, verily, have come to unite and weld together all that dwell on earth... If anyone revile you, or trouble touch you, in the path of God, be patient, and put your trust in Him Who heareth, Who seeth... ye have been forbidden to engage in contention and conflict. [ESW 24]

“Living sacrifice”

In the Tablet to the Bahá'ís of Canada and Greenland (#5 of 14) 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that “*the believers of God must become self-sacrificing ...*” In His Will and Testament He writes:

The disciples of Christ forgot themselves and all earthly things, forsook all their cares and belongings, purged themselves of self and passion and with absolute detachment scattered far and wide and engaged in calling the peoples of the world to the Divine Guidance, till at last they made the world another world, illumined the surface of the earth and even to their last hour proved self-sacrificing in the pathway of that Beloved One of God. Finally in various lands they suffered glorious martyrdom. Let them that are men of action follow in their footsteps! [WT 10-11]

The term “living sacrifice” was coined by the Apostle Paul who admonished the Christians in Rome to sacrifice themselves to God, not as a sacrifice on the altar, as the Mosaic Law required the sacrifice of animals, but by consecrating their lives to God:

I beseech you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing to God, which is your reasonable service.

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. [Romans 12:12]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá in turn exhorts us to become a living sacrifice in the path of teaching:

Even as dust upon the Sacred Threshold, in utter humility and lowliness, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is engaged in the promulgation of His signs in the daytime and in the night season. Whensoever he findeth time he prayeth ardently, and beseecheth Him tearfully and fervently, saying:

O Thou divine Providence, pitiful are we, grant us Thy succour; homeless wanderers, give us Thy shelter; scattered, do Thou unite us; astray, gather us to Thy fold; bereft, do Thou bestow upon us a share and portion; athirst, lead us to the well-spring of Life; frail, strengthen us that we may arise to help Thy Cause and offer ourselves as a living sacrifice in the pathway of guidance. [SWAB 315]

As attested by Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was a living sacrifice to the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh. [BK 199]

Shoghi Effendi also writes on this topic:

The community of the organized promoters of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh in the American continent – the spiritual descendants of the dawn-breakers of an heroic Age, who by their death proclaimed the birth of that Faith – must, in turn, usher in, not by their death but through living sacrifice, that promised World Order, the shell ordained to enshrine that priceless jewel, the world civilization, of which the Faith itself is the sole begetter. While its sister communities are bending beneath the tempestuous winds that beat upon them from every side, this community, preserved by the immutable decrees of the omnipotent Ordainer and deriving continual sustenance from the mandate with which the Tablets of the Divine Plan have invested it, is now busily engaged in laying the foundations and in fostering the growth of those institutions which are to herald the approach of the Age destined to witness the birth and rise of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh. [ADJ 7]

Theme three: Creation of unity in the world and maintenance of unity in the faith

“Take ye hold of the Cord of God, all of you, and become ye not disunited”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains in the fourteenth Tablet that although there are many means for bringing people together none is as effective, comprehensive and permanent as Faith:

In the contingent world there are many collective centers which are conducive to association and unity between the children of men. For example, patriotism is a collective center; nationalism is a collective center; identity of interests is a collective center; political alliance is a collective center; the union of ideals is a collective center, and the prosperity of the world of humanity is dependent upon the organization and promotion of the collective centers. Nevertheless, all the above institutions are, in reality, the matter and not the substance, accidental and not eternal – temporary and not everlasting. With the appearance of great revolutions and upheavals, all these collective centers are swept away. But the Collective Center of the Kingdom, embodying the institutions and divine teachings, is the eternal Collective Center. It establishes relationship between the East and the West, organizes the oneness of the world of humanity, and destroys the foundation of differences. It overcomes and includes all the other collective centers. Like unto the ray of the sun, it dispels entirely the darkness encompassing all the regions, bestows ideal life, and causes the effulgence of divine illumination. Through the breaths of the Holy Spirit it performs miracles; the Orient and the Occident embrace each other, the North and South become intimates and associates, conflicting and contending opinions disappear, antagonistic aims are brushed aside,

the law of the struggle for existence is abrogated, and the canopy of the oneness of the world of humanity is raised on the apex of the globe, casting its shade over all the races of men. Consequently, the real Collective Center is the body of the divine teachings, which include all the degrees and embrace all the universal relations and necessary laws of humanity.

For the Faith to create the unity of mankind it cannot become disunited internally

In the fourth Tablet to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (#14/14) 'Abdu'l-Bahá' quotes the following from the Qur'án:

Take ye hold of the Cord of God, all of you, and become ye not disunited.

The entire verse is as follows and underlines the power of Faith to transform hatred and enmity to love and unity:

And hold ye fast by the cord of God, all of you and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude God's favour on you; for ye were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace, ye became brethren; and ye were on the brink of the Pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus doth God make His Signs clear to you: That ye may be guided.³⁵

Shoghi Effendi explains that "The word 'cord' so often mentioned in the Teachings means both the Faith itself and also the power of the Faith which sustains those who cling to it."³⁶ This power derives its strength from the Covenant.

In His Will and Testament 'Abdu'l-Bahá also warns us to remain firm in the Covenant if we are to remain on the Straight Path

O ye beloved of the Lord! Strive with all your heart to shield the Cause of God from the onslaught of the insincere, for souls such as these cause the Straight to become crooked and all benevolent efforts to produce contrary results.

O God, my God! I call Thee, Thy Prophets and Thy Messengers, Thy Saints and Thy Holy Ones, to witness that I have declared conclusively Thy Proofs unto Thy loved ones and set forth clearly all things unto them, that they may watch over Thy Faith, guard Thy Straight Path and protect Thy Resplendent Law. Thou art, verily, the All-Knowing, the All-wise! [WT 22]

In the third Tablet to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (#8 of 14) 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that to achieve unity, firmness in the Covenant must become the first duty of every soldier in the armies of God:

The first condition is firmness in the Covenant of God. For the power of the Covenant will protect the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh from the doubts of the people of error. It is the fortified fortress of the Cause of God and the firm pillar of the religion of God. Today no power can conserve the oneness of the Bahá'í world save the Covenant of God; otherwise differences like unto a most great tempest will encompass the Bahá'í world. It is evident that the axis of the oneness of the world of humanity is the power of the Covenant and nothing else. Had the Covenant not come to pass, had it not been revealed from the Supreme Pen and had not the Book of the Covenant, like unto the ray of the Sun of Reality, illuminated the world, the forces of the Cause of God would have been utterly scattered and certain souls who

were the prisoners of their own passions and lusts would have taken into their hands an axe, cutting the root of this Blessed Tree. Every person would have pushed forward his own desire and every individual aired his own opinion!... Therefore, in the beginning the believers must make their steps firm in the Covenant so that the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh may encircle them from all sides, the cohorts of the Supreme Concurrence may become their supporters and helpers, and the exhortations and advices of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, like unto the pictures engraved on stone, may remain permanent and ineffaceable in the tablets of all hearts.

Theme four: The holy spirit and transformative power of the word of god

The “Holy Spirit (Ghost)” (*ruach ha-kodesh* or the breath of God in Hebrew, and *Rúh al-Qudus* in Arabic). The Qur’án states that Christ was fortified by the *Rúh al-Qudus*.³⁷ Also, the Qur’án states that it was the source of Muḥammad’s Message³⁸.

In the last Tablet of the Divine Plan ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes the power of the Holy Spirit to once again revive humanity and, in particular, to create unity:

Consider how the religions of God served the world of humanity! How the religion of Torah became conducive to the glory and honor and progress of the nation of Israel! How the breaths of the Holy Spirit of His Holiness Christ created affinity and unity between divergent communities and quarreling families! How the sacred power of His Holiness Muḥammad became the means of uniting and harmonizing the contentious tribes and the different clans of Peninsular Arabia – to such an extent that one thousand tribes were welded into one tribe; strife and discord were done away with; all of them unitedly and with one accord strove in

advancing the cause of culture and civilization, and thus were freed from the lowest degree of degradation, soaring toward the height of everlasting glory! Is it possible to find a greater Collective Center in the phenomenal world than this? In comparison to this divine Collective Center, the national collective center, the patriotic collective center, the political collective center and the cultural and intellectual collective center are like child's play!

Now strive ye that the Collective Center of the sacred religions – for the inculcation of which all the Prophets were manifested and which is no other than the spirit of the divine teachings – be spread in all parts of America, so that each one of you may shine forth from the horizon of reality like unto the morning star, divine illumination may overcome the darkness of nature, and the world of humanity may become enlightened. This is the most great work! Should you become confirmed therein, this world will become another world, the surface of the earth will become the delectable paradise, and eternal Institutions be founded.

The friends must rely on Bahá'u'lláh and the creative power of His Word³⁹ – they must call on the Holy Spirit for assistance

'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Tablet to the Bahá'ís of the Southern States (#10 of 14) asks every teacher to read a prayer with the following invocation:

How can I succeed unless Thou assist me with the breath of the Holy Spirit, help me to triumph by the hosts of Thy glorious kingdom, and shower upon me Thy confirmations, which alone can change a gnat into an eagle, a drop of water into rivers and seas, and an atom into lights and suns?

In the Tablet addressed to the Bahá'ís of Northeastern states (#1 of 14) 'Abdu'l-Bahá quotes the Qur'án:

The soil was black and dried. Then we caused the rain to descend upon it and immediately it became green, verdant, and every kind of plant sprouted up luxuriantly.

This refers to the following verse of the Book:

O men! if ye doubt as to the resurrection ... And thou hast seen the earth dried up and barren: but when We send down the rain upon it, it stirreth and swelleth, and groweth every kind of luxuriant herb.

This, for that God is the Truth, and that it is He who quickeneth the dead, and that He hath power over everything:

And that "the Hour" will indeed come – there is no doubt of it – and that God will wake up to life those who are in the tombs.⁴⁰

'Abdu'l-Bahá expands:

In other words, He says the earth is black, but when the spring showers descend upon it that black soil is quickened, and variegated flowers are pushed forth. This means the souls of humanity belonging to the world of nature are black like unto the soil. But when the heavenly outpourings descend and the radiant effulgences appear, the hearts are resuscitated, are liberated from the darkness of nature and the flowers of divine mysteries grow and become luxuriant. Consequently man must become the cause of the illumination of the world of humanity and propagate the holy teachings revealed in the sacred books through the divine inspiration... Praise be to God, that the Northeastern States are in the utmost capacity.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's explanation provides three lessons. First, we have a duty to be the cause of illumination of mankind. Second, this success requires "propagation of the sacred book" which clearly include the Bible and the Qur'án. Third, the Divine Word, re-voiced to humanity, is capable of renewing the spiritual life of humanity. It is this transformation, the "supreme and distinguishing function of His (Bahá'u'lláh's) Revelation which is none other than the calling into being of a new race of men." [ADJ 16]

Bahá'u'lláh, referring to the transformation effected by every Revelation in the ways, thoughts and manners of the people, reveals these words: *"Is not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself, both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions? For if the character of mankind be not changed, the futility of God's universal Manifestations would be apparent."*
[WOB 25]

It constitutes the greatest proof of the Divine Word – the "good fruits" of the "good Tree" of true Faith.

The Gospel of John rings out with the statement that the Divine Word or *Kalimah* is capable of transforming darkness into light and reviving seemingly spiritually lifeless souls:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.

All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not (can never extinguish it)...

He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. [John 1:1-5, 11-13]

In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus asks that the validity of the future Revelation from God be tested and recognized by its fruits:

Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. [Matthew 7:16-20]

And, the Qur'án similarly speaks of the good fruits of a good tree:

Seest thou not how God sets forth a parable? – A good Word is as a good tree: whose root is firmly fixed, and its branches (reach) to the heavens,

It brings forth its fruit at all times, by the leave of its Lord. So God sets forth parables for men, in order that they may receive admonition.

And the parable of an evil Word is that of an evil tree: it is torn up by the root from the surface of the earth: it has no stability.

*God will establish in strength those who believe, with the Word that stands firm, in this world And in the Hereafter; but God will leave, to stray, those who do wrong: God doeth what He willeth.*⁴¹

Emulating the early followers of Christ, the apostles of Bahá'u'lláh must become spiritual farmers and toil in the field of service to humanity. Their concern must be to plant the seed (Word) – God will water the soil and the seed will reveal its inherent potentialities depending on the Divine Will and the receptivity of the souls.

... the ground is rich, the rain of the divine outpouring is descending. Now you must become heavenly farmers and scatter pure seeds in the prepared soil. The harvest of every other seed is limited, but the bounty and the blessing of the seed of the divine teachings is unlimited.
[TDP 6]

In the Tablet to the Bahá'ís of the Central States (#3 of 14), 'Abdu'l-Bahá also writes:

A person declaring the glad tidings of the appearance of the realities and significances of the Kingdom is like unto a farmer who scatters pure seeds in the rich soil. The spring cloud will pour upon them the rain of bounty, and unquestionably the station of the farmer will be raised in the estimation of the lord of the village, and many harvests will be gathered.

Therefore, ye friends of God! Appreciate ye the value of this time and be ye engaged in the sowing of the seeds, so that you may find the heavenly blessing and the lordly bestowal. Upon you be Bahá'u'l-Abhá!

The allusions are to a parable of Christ in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus explains that the farmer should not be too

concerned with the fate of the seed for that is largely outside his control:

And he (Jesus) spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;

And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up:

Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth:

And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:

But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold...

When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;

Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also

beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. [Matthew 13:1-23]

The heavenly armies of the Lord of Hosts

The Lord of Hosts is referred to in the Bible as 'Elohe Tzevaot' or 'Yahweh Sabaoth'. In the account of Elishá (successor to the Prophet Elijá) there is a realization by his young servant, when his eyes were opened, that the supporting hosts of heaven were more numerous than the armies of the king who had come to attack them:

Therefore sent he (King of Syria) thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about.

And when the servant of the man of God (Elishá) was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do?

And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.

And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. [2 Kings 6:14-17]

In the New Testament, the forces of darkness are defeated by the Heavenly Host led by the Archangel Michael during the anticipated spiritual war [Revelation 12:7-9]. The Qur'án also refers to the Hosts of thy Lord of Hosts as *junooda rabbika*:

... God lead astray whomsoever He will and guide whomsoever He will. And none knows the hosts of thy Lord but He...⁴²

‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains in the third general Tablet to the Bahá’ís of United States and Canada (#8 of 14):

The Blessed Person of the Promised One is interpreted in the Holy Book as the Lord of Hosts – the heavenly armies. By heavenly armies those souls are intended who are entirely freed from the human world, transformed into celestial spirits and have become divine angels. Such souls are the rays of the Sun of Reality who will illumine all the continents. Each one is holding in his hand a trumpet, blowing the breath of life over all the regions. They are delivered from human qualities and the defects of the world of nature, are characterized with the characteristics of God, and are attracted with the fragrances of the Merciful. Like unto the apostles of Christ, who were filled with Him, these souls also have become filled with His Holiness Bahá’u’lláh; that is, the love of Bahá’u’lláh has so mastered every organ, part and limb of their bodies, as to leave no effect from the promptings of the human world.

He exhorts the “Apostles of Bahá’u’lláh” to enroll as soldiers in the armies of God:

These souls are the armies of God and the conquerors of the East and the West. Should one of them turn his face toward some direction and summon the people to the Kingdom of God, all the ideal forces and lordly confirmations will rush to his support and reinforcement. He will behold all the doors open and all the strong fortifications and impregnable castles razed to the ground. Singly and alone he will attack the armies of the world, defeat the right and left wings of the hosts of all the countries, break through the lines of the legions of all the nations and carry his attack to the very center of the powers of the earth. This is the meaning of the Hosts of God.

Today, Bahá'u'lláh is the Manifestation of the Lord of Hosts as indicated in the second Tablet to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (#7 of 14):

Praise be to ... the Desired One that ye have become confirmed in the promotion of divine teachings in that vast Continent, raised the call of the Kingdom of God in that region and announced the glad tidings of the manifestation of the Lord of Hosts and His Highness the Promised One. Thanks be unto the Lord that ye have become assisted and confirmed in this aim. This is purely through the confirmations of the Lord of Hosts and the breaths of the Holy Spirit.

Again in the Tablet He writes:

... with eyes turned to the Kingdom of God, they must deliver the glad tidings of the manifestation of the Lord of Hosts to all the people.

And in the tenth Tablet:

... help me to triumph by the hosts of Thy glorious kingdom, and shower upon me Thy confirmations

The Guardian referred obliquely to the American believers who had arisen to pioneer as the Hosts of Heaven:

Because there have been so many applicants in America, the Guardian has written them that they may place their pioneers in any virgin area in the world. His objective now is to fill these lands yet unconquered by the Hosts of Heaven and he feels the initial impact must be made now... Furthermore, as the Chief Executors of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan, He expects the Americans to bear the brunt of the load everywhere. [UD, letter 1953 June 5]

Theme five: The light of unity will envelop the whole earth

God promises that “He will lead them from darkness into Light”

At the beginning of creation God will that there should be light:

And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

And God saw the light, that [it was] good: and God divided the light from the darkness. [Genesis 1:3-4]

The Prophet Isaiah promises that the Light will appear sevenfold stronger [Isaiah 30:26], and the Revelation of St. John states that the Glory of God (Bahá'u'lláh) will be the Light of the City:

And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it ...

And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it.

And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. [Revelation 21:23-27]

Bahá'u'lláh has fulfilled this promise:

At a time when darkness had encompassed the world, the ocean of divine favour surged and His Light was made manifest, that the doings of men might be laid bare. This, verily, is that Light which hath been foretold in the heavenly scriptures. Should the Almighty so please, the hearts of all men will be purged and purified through His goodly utterance, and the light of unity will shed its radiance upon every soul and revive the whole earth. [TU 8]

Today, the North American Bahá'í community has the responsibility to declare that Bahá'u'lláh has brought the Divine Light

As promised the Light came from the east but as illustrated by the Tablets of Divine Plan it now shines on the West:

For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. [Matthew 24:27]

In the ninth Tablet of the Divine Plan 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

The continent of America is in the eyes of the one true God the land wherein the splendors of His light shall be revealed, where the mysteries of His Faith shall be unveiled, where the righteous will abide and the free assemble.

He adds:

They must realize the value of this bounty; because they have obtained such a favor and in order to render thanksgiving for this most great bestowal, they must arise in the diffusion of divine fragrances so that the blessed verse of the Qur'an, "God is the light of heaven and earth: the similitude of His light is a niche in a wall, wherein a lamp is placed, and the lamp enclosed in a case of glass; the glass appears as if it were a shining star. It is lighted with the oil of a Blessed Tree, an olive neither of the East, nor of the West; it wanteth little but that the oil thereof would give light, although no fire touched it. This is the light added unto light. God will direct unto His light whom He pleaseth."⁴³

Unity is Light, and hatred, animosity and warfare is darkness. In this Day the Light of Divine Guidance is focused on creation of unity

Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements ... Turn your faces from the darkness of estrangement to the effulgent light of the daystar of unity ... Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. [TU]

... we must strive with heart and soul in order that this darkness of the contingent world may be dispelled, that the lights of the Kingdom shall shine upon all the horizons, the world of humanity become illumined, the image of God become apparent in human mirrors, the law of God be well established and that all regions of the world shall enjoy peace, comfort and composure beneath the equitable protection of God. My admonition and exhortation to you is this: Be kind to all people, love humanity, consider all mankind as your relations and servants of the most high God. Strive day and night that animosity and contention may pass away from the hearts of men, that all religions shall become reconciled and the nations love each other, so that no racial, religious or political prejudice may remain and the world of humanity behold God as the beginning and end of all existence. God has created all and all return to God. Therefore love humanity with all your heart and soul. [FWU]

Conferring 'life' and 'light' to the world

Christ declared that His disciples must bestow "life" and "light" to the world:

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven". [Matthew 5:13-16]

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." [John 8:12]

In the third Tablet to the Bahá'ís of United States and Canada (#8 of 14) 'Abdu'l-Bahá supplicates God:

Extinguish this fire, so that these dense clouds which obscure the horizon may be scattered, the Sun of Reality shine forth with the rays of conciliation, this intense gloom be dispelled and the resplendent light of peace shed its radiance upon all countries.

O Lord! Draw up the people from the abyss of the ocean of hatred and enmity, and deliver them from this impenetrable darkness. Unite their hearts, and brighten their eyes with the light of peace and reconciliation. Deliver them from the depths of war and bloodshed, and free them from the darkness of error. Remove the veil from their eyes, and enlighten their hearts with the light of guidance. Treat them with Thy tender mercy and compassion, and deal not with them according to Thy justice and wrath which cause the limbs of the mighty to quake.

He describes the "extraordinary capacity" that people will have to "hearken to the Divine Teachings" after having experienced World War I. This reminds us of the readiness today that the world has to listen Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on religious unity after experiencing recurrent acts of violence in the name of religion. 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes that the conflicts

had become “world-consuming” but that “the rays of peace are world-enlightening”:

One is death, the other is life; this is extinction, that is immortality; one is the most great calamity, the other is the most great bounty; this is darkness, that is light; this is eternal humiliation and that is everlasting glory; one is the destroyer of the foundation of man, the other is the founder of the prosperity of the human race.

... in a short space of time, (through travel-teaching) most wonderful results will be produced, the banner of universal peace will be waving on the apex of the world and the lights of the oneness of the world of humanity may illumine the universe

In the Tablet to the Western States (#4 of 14) He writes:

They must play the melody of international conciliation with such power that every deaf one may attain hearing, every extinct person may be set aglow, every dead one may obtain new life and every indifferent soul may find every extinct person may be set aglow, every dead one may obtain new life and every indifferent soul may find ecstasy.

Whilst in America seven years earlier ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was heard to remark:

May this American democracy... be the first nation to establish the foundation of international agreement. May it be the first nation to proclaim the unity of mankind. May it be the first to unfurl the standard of the ‘Most Great Peace’... The American people are indeed worthy of being the first to build the tabernacle of the great peace and proclaim the oneness of mankind... May America become the distributing center of spiritual enlightenment and all the world receive this

heavenly blessing. For America has developed powers and capacities greater and more wonderful than other nations... May the inhabitants of this country become like angels of heaven with faces turned continually toward God. May all of them become servants of the omnipotent One. May they rise from their present material attainments to such a height that heavenly illumination may stream from this center to all the peoples of the world... This American nation is equipped and empowered to accomplish that which will adorn the pages of history, to become the envy of the world and be blest in both the East and the West for the triumph of its people... The American continent gives signs and evidences of very great advancement. Its future is even more promising, for its influence and illumination are far-reaching. It will lead all nations spiritually. [WOB 75-76]

In the Tablet to the Bahá'ís of the Western States (#4 of 14) 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

God says in the great Qur'án: "Verily God is the helper of those who have believed. He will lead them from darkness into light." This means: God loves the believers, consequently He will deliver them from darkness and bring them into the world of light.

The verse of the Qur'án to which 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers is as follows and contains a warning for those who reject Faith:

God is the Protector (patron) of those who have faith: He brings them out of darkness into the light. Of those who reject faith the patrons are the Evil Ones: from light they will lead them forth into the depths of darkness: they shall be given over to the fire: they shall abide therein for ever.⁴⁴

In the Tablet to the Bahá'ís of Canada and Greenland (#5 of 14) He refers to another related verse of the Qur'án:

God says in the great Qur'án: A day will come wherein the lights of unity will enlighten all the world. "The earth will be irradiated with the light of its Lord." In other words, the earth will become illumined with the light of God. That light is the light of unity. "There is no God but God."

And the earth shall shine with the light of her Lord, and the Book shall be set, and the prophets shall be brought up, and the witnesses; and judgment shall be given between them with equity; and none shall be wronged.⁴⁵

Theme six: The apostles of Christ proclaimed the good news of the coming of the kingdom of God ('the Father') – His kingdom has come

Therefore, each individual Bahá'í residing in North America must now aspire to become a herald of Bahá'u'lláh's kingdom in these vast and spacious lands

In a prayer to be recited by "whoever sets on a teaching journey to any place" in the second general Tablet to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (#7 of 14) 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes a Bahá'í who has arisen to proclaim the Divine "Word" and the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh as a "herald of the Kingdom":

O God, my God! Thou seest me enraptured and attracted toward Thy glorious kingdom, enkindled with the fire of Thy love amongst mankind, a herald of Thy kingdom in these vast and spacious lands, severed from aught else save Thee, relying on Thee, abandoning rest and comfort, remote from my native home, a wanderer in these regions, a stranger fallen upon the ground, humble before Thine exalted threshold, submissive toward the heaven of Thine omnipotent glory, supplicating Thee in the dead of night and at the break of dawn, entreating

and invoking Thee at morn and at eventide to graciously aid me to serve Thy Cause, to spread abroad Thy teachings and to exalt Thy Word throughout the East and the West.

Bahá'u'lláh describes to a Muslim cleric the fact that one of the greatest Prophets of the Bible gave the good news of His Day, the coming of the Lord God and the descent of the 'City of God' from heaven:

O Shaykh! Peruse that which Isaiah hath spoken in His Book. He saith: 'Get thee up into the high mountain, O Zion, that bringest good tidings; lift up thy voice with strength, O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings. Lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah: "Behold your God! Behold the Lord God will come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him."' This Day all the signs have appeared. A Great City hath descended from heaven, and Zion trembleth and exulteth with joy at the Revelation of God, for it hath heard the Voice of God on every side." [ESW 144-145]

For more than two thousand years now the Christians have prayed for the advent of the Kingdom of God:

... Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. [Matthew 6:9-11]

Travel-teaching – Bahá’ís must follow the example the Disciples of Christ who sacrificed themselves in distant lands to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom⁴⁶

‘Abdu’l-Bahá paraphrases Mark 16:15 four times in the fourteen Tablets, indicating quite clearly the critical importance of travel teaching in the charter:

(a) Tablet to the Northeastern States (#1):

It is stated in the blessed Gospel: Travel ye toward the East and toward the West and enlighten the people with the light of the Most Great Guidance. so that they may take a portion and share of eternal life.

(b) Tablet to the Southern States (#2):

It is also mentioned in the Gospel: Travel ye to all part of the world and give ye the glad tidings of the appearance of the Kingdom of God.

(c) Tablet to the Western States (#4):

It is also recorded in the blessed Gospel: Travel ye throughout the world and call ye the people to the Kingdom of God

(d) In the second Tablet to the United States and Canada (#6 of 14):

His Holiness Christ says: Travel ye to the East and to the West of the world and summon the people to the Kingdom of God.

The Biblical quotation is:

*He (Jesus) said to them (His disciples), “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all.”*⁴⁷

This instruction is also in the Gospel of Luke:

... proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God [Luke 9:60]

In a similar vein, 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the third Tablet to the United States and Canada (#7 of 14) states:

Therefore with hearts overflowing with the love of God, with tongues commemorating the mention of God, with eyes turned to the Kingdom of God, they must deliver the glad tidings of the manifestation of the Lord of Hosts to all the people.

Travel teaching is also the mandate of the other two charters of the Faith. In the Tablet of Carmel Bahá'u'lláh expresses the following wish that motivates and mandates His followers to arise and proclaim His Faith throughout the world:

... Oh, how I long to announce unto every spot on the surface of the earth, and to carry to each one of its cities, the glad-tidings of this Revelation ...

'Abdu'l-Bahá exhorts the friends also in His Will and Testament to emulate the Disciples of Christ (*Haváriyyún-i-Haḍrat-i-Massih*):

... ye that stand fast in the Covenant! When the hour cometh that this wronged and broken-winged bird will have taken its flight into the Celestial Concourse..., it is incumbent upon ... all the friends and loved ones, one and all to bestir themselves and arise with heart and soul and in one accord, to diffuse the sweet savors of God, to teach His Cause and to promote His Faith. It behooveth them not to rest for a moment, neither to seek repose. They must disperse themselves in every land, pass by every clime, and travel throughout all regions... must kindle the flame of Divine love in every assembly; that the light of truth may rise resplendent in the midmost heart of the world, that throughout the

East and throughout the West a vast concourse may gather under the shadow of the Word of God ...

In these days, the most important of all things is the guidance of the nations and peoples of the world. Teaching the Cause is of utmost importance for it is the head corner-stone of the foundation itself. This wronged servant has spent his days and nights in promoting the Cause and urging the peoples to service. He rested not a moment, till the fame of the Cause of God was noised abroad in the world and the celestial strains from the Abhá Kingdom roused the East and the West. The beloved of God must also follow the same example. This is the secret of faithfulness, this is the requirement of servitude to the Threshold of Bahá!

The disciples of Christ forgot themselves and all earthly things, forsook all their cares and belongings, purged themselves of self and passion and with absolute detachment scattered far and wide and engaged in calling the peoples of the world to the Divine Guidance, till at last they made the world another world, illumined the surface of the earth and even to their last hour proved self-sacrificing in the pathway of that Beloved One of God. Finally in various lands they suffered glorious martyrdom. Let them that are men of action follow in their footsteps!

Theme seven: The power of one individual to influence the course of religious history

As farmers we must plant the seed in a rich soil – the Divine showers will bless the effort with an abundant harvest

In the second Tablet of Divine Plan addressed to the Southern States ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states:

A person declaring the glad tidings of the appearance of the realities and significances of the Kingdom is like unto a farmer who scatters pure seeds in the rich soil. The spring cloud will pour upon them the rain of bounty, and unquestionably the station of the farmer will be raised in the estimation of the lord of the village, and many harvests will be gathered.

Our duty is to teach at least one soul

In the Tablet addressed to the Bahá'ís of Northeastern States (#1 of 14) He quotes the Qur'án to highlight the potentially manifold consequences of the action of one believer who arises to serve his Lord.

During the lifetime of Jesus Christ the believing, firm souls were few and numbered, but the heavenly blessings descended so plentifully that in a number of years countless souls entered beneath the shadow of the Gospel. God has said in the Qur'án⁴⁸: "One grain will bring forth seven sheaves, and every sheaf shall contain one hundred grains." In other words, one grain will become seven hundred; and if God so wills He will double these also. It has often happened that one blessed soul has become the cause of the guidance of a nation. Now we must not consider our ability and capacity, nay, rather, we must fix our gaze upon the favors and bounties of God, in these days, Who has made of the drop a sea, and of the atom a sun.

In the Tablet to the Southern States (#2 of 14) 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

... a person become the cause of the illumination of one soul, it is better than a boundless treasury... If God guide, through thee, one soul, it is better for thee than all the riches!

On another occasion ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

*... one sanctified soul will become the cause of quickening of a hundred thousand souls... for the guidance of one soul is greater than the sovereignty of a kingdom.*⁴⁹

Shoghi Effendi reinforces this point by quoting the above passage in *The Advent of Divine Justice*. He concludes:

It has often happened that one blessed soul has become the cause of the guidance of a nation. [ADJ 57]

In a similar vein he writes elsewhere:

Just one mature soul, with spiritual understanding and a profound knowledge of the Faith, can set a whole country ablaze – so great is the power of the Cause to work through a pure and selfless channel. [CC2 223]

One soul can be the cause of the spiritual illumination of a continent. [CC2 20]

In addition to its literal meaning, the following blessed verse of the Qur’án is imbued with a similar spiritual understanding:

*... whoso saveth the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind.*⁵⁰

This is attested to by Bahá’u’lláh:

Whosoever quickens one soul in this Cause is like unto one quickening all the servants. [BWF 204]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá illustrates this point in the Tablet to the Bahá’ís of the Southern States (#10 of 14) by referring to the sacrificial efforts of Bartholomew who opened up a whole country to the Faith of Christ:

Nearly two thousand years ago, Armenia⁵¹ was enveloped with impenetrable darkness. One blessed soul from among the disciples of Christ hastened to that part, and through his effort, ere long that province became illumined. Thus it has become evident how the power of the Kingdom works!

The power of the faith of the first guide ... become manifest in the lives of other believers, until one sanctified soul will become the cause of quickening a hundred thousand souls.⁵²

Undeterred by fewness of numbers

In the thirteenth Tablet 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

O ye believers of God! Be not concerned with the smallness of your numbers, neither be oppressed by the multitude of an unbelieving world. Five grains of wheat will be endued with heavenly blessing, whereas a thousand tons of tares will yield no results or effect. One fruitful tree will be conducive to the life of society, whereas a thousand forests of wild trees offer no fruits. The plain is covered with pebbles, but precious stones are rare. One pearl is better than a thousand wildernesses of sand, especially this pearl of great price, which is endowed with divine blessing. Ere long thousands of other pearls will be born from it. When that pearl associates and becomes the intimate of the pebbles, they also all change into pearls.

The 'Parable of the Sower'

'Abdu'l-Bahá reiterates this vital understanding in His Tablet to the Bahá'ís of the Central States (#11 of 14):

The sons and daughters of the kingdom are like unto the real farmers. Through whichever state or country they

pass they display self-sacrifice and sow divine seeds. From that seed harvests are produced. On this subject it is revealed in the glorious Gospel: When the pure seeds are scattered in the good ground heavenly blessing and benediction is obtained.

This is a reference to a parable of Christ given in the Gospel of Matthew. In this parable Christ had explained that His disciples should plant the seed and not be over-concerned with the results. He compares the Word of God and the Divine teachings to seeds that are scattered by a farmer. Some are not appreciated because of shallowness of belief, lack of preparedness, and mundane concerns. Others encounter opposition. But some are appreciated by understanding hearts and yield abundant fruit according to the receptivity of the individuals:

Behold, a sower went forth to sow;

And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up:

Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth:

And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:

But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

Who hath ears to hear, let him hear ...

But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also

beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. [Matthew 13:1-23]

Theme eight: ‘The mystery of reversal’ or ‘*sirru’-t-tanqís*’

At the beginning of every Dispensation certain human beings are exalted whilst others are debased. Lowly believers embrace the Faith and embody its spiritual principles, and undertake the arduous task of proclaiming its Truths. Conversely, others including some spiritual leaders are demeaned by their blindness, and lack of receptivity and response to the Message. Shaykh Aḥmad-i-Ahsá’í, who heralded the advent of the Faith of the Báb”, prophesied that at the appearance of the Promised One all things would be reversed, the last would be first, the first last.

Bahá’u’lláh in one of His Tablets refers to the “symbol and allusion” of the “mystery of the Great Reversal in the Sign of the Sovereign”. He states: “Through this reversal He hath caused the exalted to be abased and the abased to be exalted”, and He recalls that “in the days of Jesus, it was those who were distinguished for their learning, the men of letters and religion, who denied Him, whilst humble fishermen made haste to gain admittance into the Kingdom.” [KA note #171]

Hence, to encourage individual Bahá’ís to arise and not to be overwhelmed by any consideration of their limitations and the magnitude of the task before them, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá quotes from the Gospels and the Qur’án in the final Tablet addressed to the entire community of the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada (#14 of 14) that speaks to this principle.

Matthew 5 contains nine ‘Beatitudes’, the first one of which reads:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains:

In other words: Blessed are the nameless and traceless poor, for they are the leaders of mankind.

Likewise it is said in the Qur’án: “And We desire to show favor to those who were brought low in the land, and to make them spiritual leaders among men, and to make of them Our heirs.”⁵³ Or, we wish to grant a favor to the impotent souls and suffer them to become the inheritors of the Messengers and Prophets.

Notably, later in the Gospel Christ adds:

So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen. [Matthew 20:16]

In the same Tablet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá provides examples of this and refers to two dedicated female followers of Christ who fulfilled valuable functions in early days by promoting the Faith of Christ and supporting His disciples.

Consider! The station and the confirmation of the apostles in the time of Christ was not known, and no one looked on them with the feeling of importance – nay, rather, they persecuted and ridiculed them. Later on it became evident what crowns studded with the brilliant jewels of guidance were placed on the heads of the apostles, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of John.

In the Tablet to the Bahá’ís of the Western States (#12 of 14) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reveals the following prayer for those engaged in teaching:

O Lord! I am single, alone and lowly. For me there is no support save Thee, no helper except Thee and no sustainer beside Thee. Confirm me in Thy service, assist me with the cohorts of Thine angels, make me victorious in the promotion of Thy Word and suffer me to speak out Thy wisdom amongst Thy creatures. Verily, Thou art the helper of the weak and the defender of the little ones, and verily Thou art the Powerful, the Mighty and the Unconstrained.

Theme nine: Encouragement tinged with admonishment

The addresses to the American community are replete with encouragement, as exemplified by the following statement in the second Tablet to the entire Bahá'í community of the United States and Canada (#7 of 14):

The full measure of your success is as yet unrevealed, its significance still unapprehended. Ere long ye will, with your own eyes, witness how brilliantly every one of you, even as a shining star, will radiate in the firmament of your country the light of divine Guidance, and will bestow upon its people the glory of an everlasting life... The range of your future achievements still remains undisclosed. I fervently hope that in the near future the whole earth may be stirred and shaken by the results of your achievements.

And again, in the third Tablet to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (#8 of 14) 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

O ye Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh!

May my life be sacrificed for you! ...

Behold the portals which Bahá'u'lláh hath opened before you! Consider how exalted and lofty is the station you

*are destined to attain; how unique the favors with which you have been endowed.*⁵⁴

Shoghi Effendi expresses the same confidence in the American community:

Such vacillation, failure, or neglect, the American believers, the ambassadors of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, will, I am firmly convinced, never permit. Such a trust will never be betrayed, such hopes can never be shattered, such a privilege will never be forfeited, nor will such praises remain unuttered. Nay rather the present generation of this blessed, this repeatedly blessed, community will go from strength to strength, and will hand on, as the first century draws to a close, to the generations that must succeed it in the second the torch of Divine Guidance, undimmed by the tempestuous winds that must blow upon it, that they in turn, faithful to the wish and mandate of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, may carry that torch, with that self-same vigor, fidelity, and enthusiasm, to the darkest and remotest corners of the earth. [ADJ 74-75]

There are, however, a couple of instances where the letters exhibit impatience concerning the slow pace of progress. In the Tablet to the Bahá'ís of Canada and Greenland (#5 of 14) 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

Although in most of the states and cities of the United States, praise be to God, His fragrances are diffused, and souls unnumbered are turning their faces and advancing toward the Kingdom of God, yet in some of the states the Standard of Unity is not yet upraised as it should be, nor are the mysteries of the Holy Books, such as the Bible, the Gospel, and the Qur'án, unraveled.

In the Tablet to the Southern States (#10 of 14) 'Abdu'l-Bahá remarks:

It is about twenty-three years that the fragrances of God have been diffused in America, but no adequate and befitting motion has been realized, and no great acclamation and acceleration has been witnessed. Now it is my hope that through the heavenly power, the fragrances of the Merciful, the attraction of consciousness, the celestial outpourings, the heavenly cohorts and the gushing forth of the fountain of divine love, the believers of God may arise and in a short time the greatest good may unveil her countenance, the Sun of Reality may shine forth with such intensity that the darkness of the world of nature may become entirely dispelled and driven away...

Again, in the Tablet to the Central States (#3 of 14) 'Abdu'l-Bahá remarks:

So far the summons of the Kingdom of God and the proclamation of the oneness of the world of humanity has not been made in these states systematically and enthusiastically. Blessed souls and detached teachers have not traveled through these parts repeatedly; therefore these states are still in a state of heedlessness.

Again, in the Tablet to the Western States (#4 of 14) 'Abdu'l-Bahá remarks:

... the lamp of the love of God is not ignited in a befitting and behooving manner, and the call of the Kingdom of God has not been raised. Now, if it is possible, show ye an effort in this direction. Either travel yourselves, personally, throughout those states or choose others and send them, so that they may teach the souls.

Additionally, there are some implicit admonishments. In Tablet to the Bahá'ís of the Western States (#12 of 14), after

praising the beauty of the land and climate of the region, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states:

... Particularly was I greatly pleased with the meetings in San Francisco and Oakland, the gatherings in Los Angeles, and the believers who came from the cities of other states. Whenever their faces cross My memory, immediately infinite happiness is realized.

Therefore I hope that the divine teachings like unto the rays of the sun may be diffused in all the Western States, and the blessed verse of the Qur’án, “It is a good City and the Lord is the Forgiver!” may become realized.

The “good City” (*balad*; also country, region) is a reference in the Qur’án to a region in Yemen occupied by a tribe ‘*Shebá*’ or *Sabá*, which was characterized by pure air and good fortune.

*There was indeed a sign for Sheba in their dwelling-place: Two gardens on the right hand and one to the left: eat of the provision of your Lord and render thanks to Him. A good (fair) land (balad; also city or country) and a forgiving Lord!*⁵⁵

It is noteworthy that the next two verses carry an implicit warning. Despite the great prosperity bestowed upon them, the inhabitants of *Shebá* turned away from God and were consequently punished by an environmental disaster:

But they turned away. So we sent the flood of Arim (burst dam) upon them and exchanged their two gardens for two gardens bearing bitter fruit ...

*Thus did We recompense them for having disbelieved. And do We recompense any but the disbelievers?*⁵⁶

However, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá merely emphasizes the current good fortune of California and neighboring states and the indulgence of their Lord.

The next verse of the Qur'án that 'Abdu'l-Bahá quotes may also contain a similar admonition:

Likewise, the significance of another Qur'anic verse, "Do ye not travel through the land?"

There are several verses in the Qur'án with the phrase "do ye not travel through the land?" or "have they not journeyed (traveled) upon the earth". All relate to the adverse outcomes of earlier civilizations that were heedless of Divine Mercy:

Do they not travel through the earth and see what was the end of those before them? They were more numerous than these and superior in strength and in the traces (they have left) in the land: yet all that they accomplished was of no profit to them.

For when their apostles came to them with Clear Signs, they exulted in such knowledge (and skill) as they had; but that very (wrath) at which they were wont to scoff hemmed them in.

But when they saw Our Punishment, they said: "We believe in God, – The One God – and we reject the partners we used to join with Him."

But their professing the Faith when they (actually) saw Our punishment was not going to profit them. (Such has been) God's way of dealing with His servants (from the most ancient times). And even thus did the rejecters of God perish (utterly).^{F7}

Have they not journeyed upon the earth and observed how those before them fared in the end? They were greater than them in strength. They tilled the earth and built upon it more than have they, and their Messengers brought them clear proofs. For God would never wrong them, but themselves did they wrong.

Then the end of those who committed evil deeds was most evil, for they denied God's signs and mocked them.

God originates creation, then brings it back, then unto Him shall ye be returned.

And on the Day when the Hour is come, the guilty shall despair.⁵⁸

O ye who believe! If ye will aid (the cause of) God, He will aid you, and plant your feet firmly. But those who reject (God), for them is destruction, and (God) will render their deeds astray (from their mark).

That is because they hate the Revelation of God; so He has made their deeds fruitless.

Do they not travel through the earth, and see what was the end of those before them (who did evil)? God brought utter destruction on them, and similar (fates await) those who reject God.

That is because God is the Protector of those who believe, but those who reject God have no protector.⁵⁹

Do they not travel through the land, so that their hearts (and minds) may thus learn wisdom and their ears may thus learn to hear? Truly it is not their eyes that are blind, but their hearts which are in their breasts.⁶⁰

Nor did We send before thee (as apostles) any but men, whom We did inspire, – (men) living in human habitations. Do they not travel through the earth, and see what was the end of those before them? But the home of the Hereafter is best, for those who do right. Will ye not then understand?⁶¹

Do they not travel through the earth, and see. What was the end of those before them, though they were superior to them in strength? Nor is God to be frustrated by

anything whatever in the heavens or on earth: for He is All-Knowing, All-Powerful.

If God were to punish men according to what they deserve, He would not leave on the surface of the (earth) a single living creature: but He gives them respite for a stated term: when their term expires, verily God has in His sight all His servants.⁶²

‘Abdu’l-Bahá then returns to the heartwarming good news of God’s ability to transform the individual and society if they arise to act as His instruments and His counsels:

... and of the verse, “Behold the traces of the Mercy of God!” become revealed in the utmost effulgence.

This is a reference to the following verse of the Qur’án:

Look, therefore, at the prints (traces, marks, vestiges, evidences) of God’s mercy (in creation): how He quickeneth the earth after her death. Lo! He verily is the Quickener of the dead, and He is Able to do all things.⁶³

Theme ten: Bahá’ís must study the Bible and the Qur’án

They must “propagate the holy teachings revealed in the sacred books through the divine inspiration.”

Our Writings including the Tablets of the Divine Plan provide several reasons why Bahá’ís in North America are urged to study the Bible and the Qur’án.

Belief in Islám (Muḥammad and the Qur'án) and Christianity is essential to being a follower of Bahá'u'lláh – it defines a Bahá'í

Indeed, the essential prerequisites of admittance into the Bahá'í fold of Jews, Zoroastrians, Hindus, Buddhists, and the followers of other ancient faiths, as well as of agnostics and even atheists, is the wholehearted and unqualified acceptance by them all of the divine origin of both Islám and Christianity, of the Prophetic functions of both Muḥammad and Jesus Christ... [PDC 110]

“An essential preliminary” to teaching

We are far more effective in teaching Christians and Muslims if they determine that we truly believe in their religions and consider their scriptures part of our own. Study of the Bible and the Qur'án is thus critical to our mission to promote the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, and thereby create the unity of mankind and the reconciliation of the antagonistic religions. Notably, Bahá'u'lláh at the beginning of the Kitáb-i-Íqán states that we should “consider the past” [KI 4]. The originally phrase, “*názer be ayyam Qabl shavid,*” translates “observe the ‘days’ of past dispensations . These dispensations are best considered in the context of their scriptures and teachings as exemplified by the following statement of Bahá'u'lláh in His Book of the Covenant: “Consider ye and call to mind that which the All-Merciful hath revealed in the Qur'án” [Kitáb-i-Ahd 1]. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá also admonished us to “consider the past (dispensations)” [BWF 394]. The Tablets of the Divine Plan affirm our unequivocal belief in Judeo-Christianity and Islám, and reignite our determination to study their scriptures. It is worth noting that Marcus Bach, a Christian to whom Shoghi Effendi presented the Bahá'í Faith, was left in no doubt about the Guardian's love for Christ:

But the thing that struck me most as our meeting progressed was his unquestioned devotion to the Galilean (Jesus).⁶⁴

Central to our appreciation of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh

The Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi often refer to the Bible and the Qur'án in their Writings. Study of the Bible and of the Qur'án therefore increases the understanding of our faith. Shoghi Effendi placed special emphasis on the study of the Bible and the Qur'án in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, an indispensable letter addressed to the Bahá'ís of North America in 1938, setting out the spiritual prerequisites for success in every activity directed at advancing the Faith.

Those who participate in such a campaign, whether in an organizing capacity, or as workers to whose care the execution of the task itself has been committed, must, as an essential preliminary to the discharge of their duties, thoroughly familiarize themselves with the various aspects of the history and teachings of their Faith... They must strive to obtain, from sources that are authoritative and unbiased, a sound knowledge of the history and tenets of Islám — the source and background of their Faith — and approach reverently and with a mind purged from preconceived ideas the study of the Qur'án which, apart from the sacred scriptures of the Bábí and Bahá'í Revelations, constitutes the only Book which can be regarded as an absolutely authenticated Repository of the Word of God. [ADJ 49]

Shoghi Effendi urged us to make the necessary effort:

... the Guardian would certainly advise, and even urge the friends to make a thorough study of the Qur'án, as the knowledge of this sacred Scripture is absolutely indispensable for every believer who wishes to adequately understand and intelligently read, the writings of Bahá'u'lláh... [DG 63]

With regard to the school's program (Louhelen) for the next summer; the Guardian would certainly advise, and even urge the friends to make a thorough study of the Qur'án, as the knowledge of this sacred Scripture is absolutely indispensable for every believer who wishes to adequately understand and intelligently read, the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. Although there are very few persons among Western Bahá'ís who are capable of handling such a course in a scholarly way, the mere lack of such competent teachers should encourage and stimulate the believers to get better acquainted with the Sacred Scriptures of Islám. In this way, there will gradually appear some distinguished Bahá'ís who will be so well versed in the teachings of Islám as to be able to guide the believers in their study of that religion. [DG 63]

As regards the [Summer School] courses, he would advise you to continue laying emphasis on the history and teachings of Islám, and in particular on the Islamic origins of the Faith.⁶⁵

... We must remember that every religion sprang from some root, and just as Christianity sprang from Judaism, our own religion sprang from Islám, and that is why so many of the teachings deduce their proofs from Islám.⁶⁶

Shoghi Effendi hopes that your lectures will not only serve to deepen the knowledge of the believers in the doctrines and culture of Islám, but will set their hearts

afire with the love of everything that vitally pertains to Muḥammad and His Faith. [LG #1664]

All humanity have the capacity to reflect the divine light. We therefore proclaim Bahá'u'lláh's Message to all, and do not direct our teaching efforts merely at like-minded individuals. Our study of the scriptures allows us to address both liberal as well as conservative Christians and Muslims. Otherwise, how could we witness the miraculous ability of the Divine Word to open the eyes and ears, to soften the hearts, and thus transform seemingly more recalcitrant beings? Many Christians and Muslims in North America are very familiar with their scriptures. Therefore, we often have to fortify our presentations with explanations by Bahá'u'lláh of the truths enshrined in the Bible, and the Qur'án. Otherwise, our presentations will not resonate with most Christians and Muslims, and whilst possibly appearing enticing and attractive they will be rejected and resisted on the grounds that they are non-scriptural and dangerously naïve.

While 'Abdu'l-Bahá was writing the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, Europe was waging some of the bloodiest battles of World War I.⁶⁷ There were then only a few thousand Muslims in the United States, mostly migrants from the Ottoman Empire and the Indian subcontinent. It is therefore worth meditating as to why He included in these letters addressed to North America fourteen direct quotations from the Qur'án. One can only conclude that He foresaw the need for the American believers to become familiar with the scripture and prepare themselves for the time when Muslims will become a prominent part of the landscape. Since then Islám has become the fastest growing religion in North America, and an independent research group estimates that in 2015 there were about 3.3 million Muslims of all ages living in the United States, or about 1 per cent of the population, compared to about 71% Christians, and 5.7 million Jews and 2.1 million Hindus.⁶⁸ By 2050, the American Muslim

population is projected to reach 8.1 million people, or 2.1% of the total population.⁶⁹

The resurgence of Islám, the increasing number of Muslims in predominantly Judeo-Christian Western democracies and the unfortunate escalating violence in the name of Islám have added to the urgency of the call to action embodied in the Tablets of Divine Plan. The world-wide evidences of nefarious results of religious fanaticism and hatred also underline the Guardian's urgent and specific exhortations to Bahá'ís almost eight decades ago to familiarize themselves with the Qur'án and Islám.

Essential for our presentations of the scriptural basis of 'One Common Faith' and 'Progressive Revelation' – acceptance of these precepts is critically important for the establishment of unity, our avowed goal

Our stated task is facilitated by the fact that every religion confirms earlier Dispensations and gives the good news that God will in due time reveal further truths. Additionally, the Dispensations of Moses, Christ, Muḥammad, and Bahá'u'lláh share identical eternal spiritual values. Hence, explanations that focus on the rebirth of the essential [PUP 445] ethical and moral teachings of Judaism, Christianity and Islám, rather than an emphasis on their clearly outdated social laws and effete traditions, promote organic unity.

In the Tablet to the Bahá'ís of the Northeastern States (#1 of 14) 'Abdu'l-Bahá thus defines the function of the individual:

... man must become the cause of the illumination of the world of humanity and propagate the holy teachings revealed in the sacred books through the divine inspiration.

Furthermore, Shoghi Effendi in *The Advent of Divine Justice* quotes from the Tablets of Divine Plan, dated April 5,

1916 and addressed to the Bahá'ís of Canada and Greenland (#5 of 14), in which Ábdu'l-Bahá links the lack of hoped-for progress in establishing harmony in several parts of the United States directly with the failure of the North American Bahá'í community to provide the scriptural evidence and basis for the unifying principles of our Faith, such as the Oneness of God, the Oneness of Faith and progressive revelation.

Although in most of the states and cities of the United States, praise be to God, His fragrances are diffused, and souls unnumbered are turning their faces and advancing toward the Kingdom of God, yet in some of the states the Standard of Unity is not yet upraised as it should be, nor are the mysteries of the Holy Books, such as the Bible (the Tanakh), the Gospel, and the Qur'án, unraveled. Through the concerted efforts of all the friends the Standard of Unity must needs be unfurled in those states, and the divine teachings promoted, so that these states may also receive their portion of the heavenly bestowals and a share of the Most Great Guidance. [ADJ 57-58]

It is the duty of Bahá'ís to provide the interpretations and explanations of the 'mysteries' of the Bible and the Qur'án

The Bible discourages Jews and Christians from interpreting the scriptures⁷⁰. Muslims are similarly warned that attempts to explain the abstruse parts of the Qur'án (the *mutashabihát*) that are susceptible to interpretation (*ta'wíl*) is likely to cause divisions.⁷¹ The *ta'wíl* and the explanations (*tafsír*) of the *mutashabihát* are reserved for a future Day of God.⁷² It is therefore the duty of Bahá'ís to provide the scriptural interpretations in the light of the extensive explanations of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi. It is of interest that in response to a query of the Hand of the Cause of God, *Ibn-i-Abhar*, as to how he could, confined and chained in

a prison, best teach the Faith, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá lovingly advises him to read the Qur’án night and day and to provide its *ta’wíl* and its *tafsír*.⁷³

It is instructional that in the Tablet to the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada (#6 of 14) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá emphasizes the importance of teaching the Catholics of Mexico through explanations from the Bible. It is also noteworthy in this context that since then Roman Catholicism has lost influence in Mexico and South America whilst Bible-based evangelical Protestant groups have made significant advances.⁷⁴ One can only speculate the magnitude of the success that American and Canadian Bahá’ís would have enjoyed had they earnestly heeded ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s admonition.

Likewise the republic of Mexico is very important. The majority of the inhabitants of that country are devoted Catholics. They are totally unaware of the reality of the Bible (Old Testament or Tanakh), the Gospel and the new divine teachings. They do not know that the basis of the religions of God is one and that the holy Manifestations are like unto the Sun of Truth, rising from the different dawning-places. Those souls are submerged in the sea of dogmas. If one breath of life be blown over them, great results will issue therefrom. But it is better for those who intend to go to Mexico to teach, to be familiar with the Spanish language.

Additionally, in the context of Judeo-Christianity and Islám, the World Order letters written by Shoghi Effendi (March 28, 1941) state unequivocally as a “fundamental principle of religious truth”, that “declared ... the primary purpose (of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh) is to enable every adherent of these Faiths to obtain a fuller understanding of the religion with which he stands identified, and to acquire a clearer apprehension of its purpose” [WOB 58].

At a time when the light of Islám is dimmed by atrocities carried out in its name, it is our duty to defend the spiritual truths of Islám, for while Bahá'u'lláh has unconditionally abrogated the Dispensation of Islám He has not abrogated the Faith or religion of Islám

Shoghi Effendi wrote in 1936:

The truth is that Western historians have for many centuries distorted the facts to suit their religious and ancestral prejudices. The Bahá'ís should try to study history anew, and to base all their investigations first and foremost on the written Scriptures of Islám and Christianity.⁷⁵

It was with feelings of great joy, pride and satisfaction that Shoghi Effendi declared that a Christian Queen⁷⁶ had through her recognition of the Mission of Bahá'u'lláh expressed her belief in the prophetic function of Muḥammad:

... God is All, everything. He is the power behind all beginnings.... His is the Voice within us that shows us good and evil. But mostly we ignore or misunderstand this voice. Therefore, did He choose His Elect to come down amongst us upon earth to make clear His Word, His real meaning. Therefore, the Prophets; therefore, Christ, Muḥammad, Bahá'u'lláh, for man needs from time to time a voice upon earth to bring God to him, to sharpen the realization of the existence of the true God. Those voices sent to us had to become flesh, so that with our earthly ears we should be able to hear and understand. [PDC 109]

Shoghi Effendi considered this expression of faith in Muḥammad by Queen Marie of Romania as a testimony of our dedication to the principle of 'One Common Faith':

What greater proof ... can the (Muslim clergy) ... require wherewith to demonstrate the recognition by the followers of Bahá'u'lláh of the exalted position occupied by the Prophet Muḥammad ... What greater evidence of our competence can they demand than that we should kindle... the spark of an ardent and sincere conversion to the truth voiced by the Apostle of God, and obtain from the pen of royalty this public, and indeed historic, confession of His God-given Mission?
[PDC 109]

It would therefore be a grave departure from this essential principles of the Bahá'í Faith for any believer to speak disparagingly of Islám, Muḥammad or the Qur'án:

(let no Muslim) ... think for a moment that either Islám, or its Prophet, or His Book, or His appointed Successors, or any of His authentic teachings, have been, or are to be in any way, or to however slight a degree, disparaged. [PDC 108]

To exemplify the principle of One Common Faith, 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke about the Faith of the Nazarene in the Synagogues and defended the Prophet of Arabia in Synagogues and Churches. The beloved Guardian writes:

There is so [much] misunderstanding about Islám in the West in general that you have to dispel. Your task is rather difficult and requires a good deal of erudition. Your chief task is to acquaint the friends with the pure teachings of the Prophet as recorded in the Qur'án, and then to point out how these teachings have, throughout succeeding ages, influenced nay guided the course of human development. In other words you have to show the position and significance of Islám in the history of civilization.

The Bahá'í view on that subject is that the Dispensation of Muḥammad, like all other Divine Dispensations, has been fore-ordained, and that as such forms an integral part of the Divine Plan for the spiritual, moral and social development of mankind. It is not an isolated religious phenomenon, but is closely and historically related to the Dispensation of Christ, and those of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. It was intended by God to succeed Christianity and it was therefore the duty of the Christians to accept it as firmly as they had adhered to the religion of Christ.

You should also cautiously emphasize the truth that due to the historical order of its appearance, and also because of the obviously more advanced character of its teachings, Islám constitutes a fuller revelation of God's purpose for mankind. The so-called Christian civilization of which the Renaissance is one of the most striking manifestations is essentially Muslim in its origins and foundations. When medieval Europe was plunged in darkest barbarism, the Arabs regenerated and transformed by the spirit released by the religion of Muḥammad, were busily engaged in establishing a civilization the kind of which their contemporary Christians in Europe had never witnessed before. It was eventually through Arabs that civilization was introduced to the West. It was through them that the philosophy, science and culture which the old Greeks had developed found their way to Europe. The Arabs were the ablest translators, and linguists of their age, and it is thanks to them that the writings of such well-known thinkers as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were made available to the Westerners. It is wholly unfair to attribute the efflorescence of European culture during the Renaissance period to the influence of Christianity. It was mainly the product of the forces released by the Muhammadan Dispensation. From the standpoint of

institutionalism Islám far surpasses true Christianity as we know it in the Gospels. There are infinitely more laws and institutions in the Qur'án than in the Gospel. While the latter's emphasis is mainly, not to say wholly, on individual and personal conduct, the Qur'án stresses the importance of society. This social emphasis acquires added importance and significance in the Bahá'í Revelation. When carefully and impartially compared, the Qur'án marks a definite advancement on the Gospel, from the standpoint of spiritual and humanitarian progress. The truth is that Western historians have for many centuries distorted the facts to suit their religious and ancestral prejudices. The Bahá'ís should try to study history anew, and to base all their investigations first and foremost on the written Scriptures of Islám and Christianity.⁷⁷

And again,

It is for (Bahá'ís) to try and gradually undermine this prejudicial attitude towards Islám, and to bring to full light the great historical accomplishments which that Faith achieved ... the friends should emphasize the study of Islám and its scripture. They should not depend too much on the Western writers on that subject, but should rather thoroughly investigate themselves, basing their studies first and foremost on the Qur'án, which is absolutely authentic.⁷⁸

The Guardian urged the friends to defend Islám by examining and emphasizing the spiritual fruits, and cultural and scientific achievements of Islám in its early phases. The present tragedy of Islám is largely due to insistence by a clergy on the "non-essential"¹⁵ social laws that, as anticipated in the Qur'án⁷⁹, have been abrogated by Bahá'u'lláh. Shoghi Effendi wrote in defense of Islám in 1933:

... (Islám) is not only the last of the world religions, but a fuller Revelation than any one preceding it. The Qur'án is not only more authoritative than any previous religious gospel, but it contains also much more ordinances, teachings and precepts, which taken together constitute a fuller Revelation of God's purpose and law to mankind than Christianity, Judaism or any other previous Dispensation. This view is in complete accord with the Bahá'í philosophy of progressive revelation, and should be thoroughly accepted and taught by every loyal Christian Bahá'í.⁸⁰

And again in 1948,

Islám attained a very high spiritual state, but western scholars are prone to judging it by Christian standards. One cannot call one world Faith superior to another, as they all come from God; they are progressive, each suited to certain needs of the times.⁸¹

Beyond defending Judaism, Christianity and Islám, the Bahá'í Faith is vested with the important role of resurrecting and re-animating these religions as anticipated in the Bible and in the Qur'án:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. [John 5:25]

How can ye withhold faith from God? Ye were dead and He gave you life; next He will cause you to die; next He will restore you to life: next shall ye return to Him! [Qur'án 2:238]

Shoghi Effendi explains further:

(The Faith's) avowed, its unalterable purpose is to widen their basis, to restate their fundamentals, to reconcile

their aims, to reinvigorate their life, to demonstrate their oneness, to restore the pristine purity of their teachings, to coordinate their functions and to assist in the realization of their highest aspirations. These divinely-revealed religions, as a close observer⁸² has graphically expressed it, “are doomed not to die, but to be reborn... ‘Does not the child succumb in the youth and the youth in the man; yet neither child nor youth perishes?’ [WOB 114]

Summary

The Tablets of the Divine Plan mandate the Bahá'ís of North America to arise and, individually and collectively, travel and proclaim the advent of the Kingdom of Bahá'u'lláh. The many references to the Bible and the Qur'án serve to imprint on our minds and souls the Oneness of Faith. We are asked to emulate the zeal and sacrificial endeavors of the disciples of Christ, to undergo a spiritual rebirth, and to become sanctified from mundane attachments. We are assured that the Holy Spirit and the heavenly Hosts will rush to lend their assistance to our efforts. Spiritually transformed and well informed teachers must create unity by explaining the truths of the scriptures and thereby demonstrating the oneness of divine purpose. The creation of religious unity will promote the unity of mankind, which in turn will assure global peace and tranquility.

NOTES

¹ From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, September 29, 1977.

² *al-Baqarah*, The Cow, 2:10:

فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَّرَضٌ فَزَادَهُمُ اللَّهُ مَرَضًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْفُرُونَ

³ *al-Fátihah*, The Opening, 1:1-7:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿١﴾

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٢﴾

الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿٣﴾

مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ﴿٤﴾

إِلَهِكَ تَعْبُدُ وَإِلَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ﴿٥﴾

اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ﴿٦﴾

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ﴿٧﴾

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds,

The Beneficent, the Merciful.

Master of the Day of Judgment,

Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help.

Show us the Straight Path (*Sirát almustaqeema*),

The path (*Sirát*) of those whom Thou hast favoured;

Not the (path) of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray.

⁴ Traditionally, '*Sirát*' is interpreted literally and incredibly as a narrow sharp bridge which every person must pass on the Day of Resurrection and the Day of Judgment or '*yawmi alddeen*' to attain paradise. The sinners fall into the fires of hell but the righteous will successfully navigate the bridge and quench their thirst by imbibing from the cool and refreshing waters of '*kawthar*', a river 'of abundance' in paradise. The Church is afflicted by similar literal imagery of a bridge, ladder, or stairway to heaven.

⁵ *Há-mím* (Abbreviated Letters), or *Fuṣṣilat*, Expounded or 41:30:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَمُوا تَتَنَزَّلُ

عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَلَّا تَخَافُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَبْشِرُوا بِالْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي

كُنْتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

⁶ *Suratu'l Nus'h*: Provisional Translation This is *Suratu'l-Nus'h* (Admonition or Exhortation). For those who want to heed God's admonitions. Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh for Siyyid Ja'far-i-Yazdí, Provisional Translation by Afaf A. Stevens.

⁷ *al-An'ám*, The Cattle, 6:39:

وَالَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا صُمُّ وَبُكْمٌ فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ مَن
 يَشَأِ اللَّهُ يُضِلَّهُ وَمَن يَشَأِ يُجْعَلْهُ عَلَى صِرَاطٍ
 مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٣٩﴾

⁸ *Ál-i-Imrán*, or The Family of *Imrán*, 3:194:

رَبَّنَا وَعَايَتِنَا مَا وَعَدْتَنَا عَلَى رُسُلِكَ وَلَا تُخْزِنَا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّكَ لَا تُخْلِفُ
 الْوَعْدَ ﴿١٩٤﴾

“Our Lord! Grant us what Thou didst promise unto us through Thine Apostles, and save us from shame on the Day of Judgment: For Thou never breakest Thy promise.”

⁹ *al-Baqarah*, The Cow, 2:256:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَن يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ
 وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انفصامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ
 عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٥٦﴾

Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from error: whoever rejects evil and believes in God hath grasped the most trust worthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And God heareth and knoweth all things.

¹⁰ *al-Baqarah*, The Cow, 2:212-213:

رُذِينَ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا وَيَسْخَرُونَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا
 وَالَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا فَوْقَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَاللَّهُ يَرْزُقُ مَن يَشَاءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ
 ﴿٢١٢﴾

كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ النَّبِيِّينَ مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ وَأَنْزَلَ
 مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ فِي مَا اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ وَمَا
 اخْتَلَفَ فِيهِ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ أُوتُوهُ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَتْهُمْ الْبَيِّنَاتُ بَغْيًا بَيْنَهُمْ^ط
 فَهَدَى اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لِمَا اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ مِنَ الْحَقِّ بِإِذْنِهِ^ط وَاللَّهُ يَهْدِي
 مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿١١٣﴾

¹¹ *Al-i-'Imrân*, The Family of *Imrân*, 3:74:

يَخْتَصُّ بِرَحْمَتِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿٧٤﴾

¹² *al-Baqarah*, The Cow, 2:105:

مَا يَوَدُّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ وَلَا الْمُشْرِكِينَ أَنْ يُنَزَّلَ عَلَيْكُمْ
 مِنْ خَيْرٍ مِمَّنْ رَّبُّكُمْ^ط وَاللَّهُ يَخْتَصُّ بِرَحْمَتِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ
 الْعَظِيمِ ﴿١٠٥﴾

¹³ Tanakh is referred to as Old Testament by Christians. It is an acronym of the first Hebrew letter of Torah ("Teachings"), Nevi'im ("Prophets) and Ketuvim ("Writings").

¹⁴ *Zukhruf*, Gold Ornaments, 43:22-23:

بَلْ قَالُوا إِنَّا وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا عَلَىٰ أُمَّةٍ وَإِنَّا عَلَىٰ آثَرِهِمْ مُهُتَدُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾
 وَكَذَلِكَ مَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ فِي قَرْيَةٍ مِّنْ ذُنُوبٍ إِلَّا قَالَ
 مُتْرَفُوهَا إِنَّا وَجَدْنَا آبَاءَنَا عَلَىٰ أُمَّةٍ وَإِنَّا عَلَىٰ آثَرِهِمْ مُتْتَدُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

Nay, They say, "we found our father following a creed, and surely we are rightly guided in their footsteps".

Likewise, "We sent no Warner before thee to any people, but the wealthy ones among them said: "We found our fathers following a certain religion, and we will certainly follow in their footsteps."

Also, *Hud* 11:9:

فَلَا تَكُ فِي مِرْيَةٍ مِّمَّا يَعْْبُدُونَ هُؤُلَاءَ مَا يَعْْبُدُونَ إِلَّا كَمَا يَعْْبُدُ آبَاؤُهُمْ مِّن قَبْلُ

Be not then in doubt as to what these men worship.

They worship nothing but what their fathers worshipped ...

¹⁵ *al-'Ankabút, The Spider, 29:69:*

¹⁶ *Baní-Ísrá-il, The Children of Israel, 17:36:*

وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَئِكَ
كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا ﴿١٦﴾

¹⁷ *al-Hujurát, The Private Apartments, 49:6:*

يَتَّيْهُمَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِنْ جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَنْ تُصِيبُوا
قَوْمًا بِجَهْلَةٍ فَتُصْبِحُوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نَادِمِينَ ﴿١٧﴾

¹⁸ *Tá-Há, 20:114:*

زِدْنِي عِلْمًا رَبِّ

¹⁹ *al-Baqarah, The Cow, 2:282:*

وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

²⁰ *al-Zumar, The Crowds, 39:9:*

قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

²¹ Note the similarity of 'One' in the Hebrew (Echad) and the Arabic (Ahad).

²² Deuteronomy 6:4: Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad

²³ *al-Ikhlás, Sincerity, 112:1:*

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ ﴿١﴾

Qul huwa Allahu aḥadun

²⁴ *Maryam, Mary, 19:36:*

وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبُّكُمْ فَأَعْبُدُوا هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ ﴿٣٦﴾

²⁵ John 5:39-47:

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.

I receive not honour from men.

But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you.

I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.

How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?

Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust.

For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me.

But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?

- ²⁶ Those that unnecessarily multiply entities or concepts such as God (those that make distinctions between religions or the Godhead such as Trinitarians).

- ²⁷ *Shúrá*, 42:13:

شَرَعَ لَكُمْ مِنَ الدِّينِ مَا وَصَّى بِهِ نُوحًا وَالَّذِي أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ وَمَا وَصَّيْنَا بِهِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ
وَمُوسَى وَعِيسَى أَنْ أَقِيمُوا الدِّينَ وَلَا تَتَفَرَّقُوا فِيهِ كَبُرَ عَلَى الْمُشْرِكِينَ مَا
تَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَيْهِ اللَّهُ يَجْتَبِي إِلَيْهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي إِلَيْهِ مَنْ يُنِيبُ

- ²⁸ *al-Baqarah*, the Cow, 2:213:

كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ النَّبِيِّينَ مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ وَأَنْزَلَ
مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ فِي مَا اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ وَمَا
اخْتَلَفَ فِيهِ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ أُوتُوهُ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَتْهُمْ الْبَيِّنَاتُ بَغْيًا بَيْنَهُمْ^ط
فَهَدَى اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لِمَا اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ مِنَ الْحَقِّ بِإِذْنِهِ^ط وَاللَّهُ يَهْدِي
مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٢١٣﴾

- ²⁹ *al-Mulk*, Sovereignty, 67:3:

الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ طِبَاقًا مَّا تَرَى فِي خَلْقِ الرَّحْمَنِ مِنْ تَفَوتٍ^ط
فَارْجِعِ الْبَصَرَ هَلْ تَرَى مِنْ فُطُورٍ ﴿٣﴾

- ³⁰ Name and subject of the 78th Súrah of the Qur'an, *al-Naba*, The Tiding or Great News.

- ³¹ *al-Insán*, Man, 76:29:

إِنْ هَدِيَهُ تَذَكَّرَ فَمَنْ شَاءَ اتَّخَذَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ سَبِيلًا ﴿٢٩﴾

³² Revelation 21:6: “I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.”

³³ The counterpart of *Israfil* is the angel Raphael (Hebrew, 'God Heals') in Judeo-Christianity. In Islamic tradition the angel *Israfil* will blow the trumpet announcing the coming of the Day of Resurrection.

³⁴ 'The Epistle of Mathetus to Diognetus', describing Christians in 2nd century AD.

³⁵ *Ál-i-‘Imrán*, The Family of *‘Imrán*, 3:103:

وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ
كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَى
شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِنَ النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُمْ مِنْهَا كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ
تَهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٠٣﴾

³⁶ From a letter on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, April 18, 1941. *Lights of Guidance*, #1604.

³⁷ *al-Baqarah*, The Cow 2:87 and 2:253; and *al-Má'idah*, The Table Spread, 5:110.

³⁸ *al-Má'idah*, 5:110 and *al-Nahl*, 16:102.

³⁹ ESW 21: “Verily we shall render Thee victorious by Thyself and Thy pen.”

⁴⁰ *al-Hajj*, The Pilgrimage, 22:5:

وَتَرَى الْأَرْضَ هَامِدَةً فَإِذَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْهَا الْمَاءَ اهْتَزَّتْ وَرَبَتْ وَأَنْبَتَتْ مِنْ كُلِّ رَوْحٍ يَبْرِجُ

⁴¹ *Ibráhím*, or Abraham, 14:24-27:

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا كَلِمَةً طَيِّبَةً
كَشَجَرَةٍ طَيِّبَةٍ أَصْلُهَا ثَابِتٌ وَفَرْعُهَا فِي السَّمَاءِ ﴿٢٤﴾
تُؤْتِينَ أُكْلَهَا كُلَّ حِينٍ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهَا وَيَضْرِبُ اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَالَ لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ
يَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

وَمَثَلُ كَلِمَةٍ خَبِيثَةٍ كَشَجَرَةٍ خَبِيثَةٍ اجْتُثَّتْ مِنْ فَوْقِ الْأَرْضِ مَا لَهَا مِنْ
قَرَارٍ ﴿٢٦﴾

يُثَبِّتُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِالْقَوْلِ الثَّابِتِ فِي الْحَيَاةِ
الدُّنْيَا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ وَيُضِلُّ اللَّهُ الظَّالِمِينَ وَيَفْعَلُ اللَّهُ مَا يَشَاءُ



⁴² *al-Muddaththir*, The Covered One, 74:31:

وَمَا جَعَلْنَا أَصْحَابَ النَّارِ إِلَّا مَلَائِكَةً وَمَا جَعَلْنَا عِدَّتَهُمْ إِلَّا فِتْنَةً لِلَّذِينَ
كَفَرُوا لِيَسْتَيَقِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ وَيَرُدُّوا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِيمَانًا وَلَا
يَرْتَابَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَلِيَقُولَ الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ
مَرَضٌ وَالْكَافِرُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا كَذَلِكَ يُضِلُّ اللَّهُ مَن يَشَاءُ
وَيَهْدِي مَن يَشَاءُ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ خُتُودَ رَبِّكَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَمَا هِيَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْبَشَرِ



⁴³ *al-Nur*, Light, 24:35:

﴿اللَّهُ نُورٌ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ مَثَلُ نُورِهِ كَمِشْكَاةٍ فِيهَا مِصْبَاحٌ
الْمِصْبَاحُ فِي زُجَاجَةٍ الزُّجَاجَةُ كَأَنَّهَا كَوْكَبٌ دُرِّيٌّ يُوقَدُ مِن شَجَرَةٍ
مُّبَرَكَةٍ زَيْتُونَةٍ لَا شَرْقِيَّةٍ وَلَا غَرْبِيَّةٍ يَكَادُ زَيْتُهَا يُضِيءُ وَلَوْ
لَمْ تَمْسَسْهُ نَارٌ نُورٌ عَلَى نُورٍ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ لِنُورِهِ مَن يَشَاءُ وَيَضْرِبُ
اللَّهُ الْأَمْثَلَ لِلنَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ﴾

⁴⁴ *al-Baqarah*, The Cow, 2:257:

اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ
وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَوْلِيَاؤُهُمُ الطَّاغُوتُ يُخْرِجُونَهُم مِّنَ النُّورِ إِلَى
الظُّلُمَاتِ أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

⁴⁵ *al-Zumar*, The Troops, 39:69:

وَأَشْرَقَتِ الْأَرْضُ بِنُورِ رَبِّهَا وَوُضِعَ الْكِتَابُ وَجِئَتْ بِالسَّابِقِينَ
وَالشُّهَدَاءِ وَقُضِيَ بَيْنَهُم بِالْحَقِّ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ

⁴⁶ The Disciples of Christ were an unlikely group to be sent forth on his mission to reach the world. There was nothing special or spectacular about them. The twelve apostles were just ordinary working men. One was a tax-collector. At least four of the apostles were fishermen (probably the reason that one of the earliest and most prominent Christian symbols was the fish – the Greek word for fish, *ichthus*, formed an acrostic: *Iesus Christos Theou Uios Soter*, which means “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior”.) But Jesus entrusted them with the most extraordinary task of proclaiming the advent of the kingdom of God to the entire world including one of the mightiest empires ever known.

Peter was crucified upside down about 66 AD in Rome.

Paul was beheaded about the same time also in Rome.

Andrew traveled and preached widely in Russia, Asia Minor, Turkey and in Greece. He was crucified in Greece.

“Doubting” Thomas was active in Syria and according to tradition in India where he died pierced by spears of four soldiers.

Philip had a ministry in North Africa and then in Asia Minor where he converted the wife of a Roman proconsul and was consequently cruelly put to death by him.

Matthew ministered in Persia and Ethiopia and is reported to have been stabbed in Ethiopia.

Bartholomew travelled to India, Armenia, Ethiopia and Southern Arabia. There are various accounts of his martyrdom.

James the son of Alpheus taught in Syria where he was stoned and then clubbed to death.

Simon the Zealot went to Persia and was martyred after refusing to sacrifice to the sun god

Matthias (elected to replace Judas) went to Syria and was burnt to death.

John traveled to Ephesus and was exiled to the island of Patmos. according to an early Latin tradition was cast into boiling oil in Rome.

⁴⁷ King James Version: every creature;

God's Word version: tell everyone the good news;

Easy Read Version translation of the Bible: Go everywhere in the world. Tell the good News to everyone)

(The Greek word is *κτίσις* or *ktisis* – all created beings 'believers and unbelievers, and institutions).

⁴⁸ *al-Baqarah*, The Cow, 2:261:

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ حَبَّةٍ أَنْبَتَتْ سَبْعَ سَنَابِلٍ فِي كُلِّ
سُنْبُلَةٍ مِائَةٌ حَبَّةٌ وَاللَّهُ يُضْعِفُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَسِعَ عَلَيْهِمُ ﴿٣١﴾

⁴⁹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Provisional Translations, *Star of the West* (Volume 1).

⁵⁰ *al-Maida*, The Table Spread, 5:32:

مِنْ أَجْلِ ذَلِكَ كَتَبْنَا عَلَى بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَنَّهُ مَنْ قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ أَوْ
فَسَادٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَكَأَنَّمَا قَتَلَ النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَحْيَا النَّاسَ
جَمِيعًا وَلَقَدْ جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ ثُمَّ إِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنْهُمْ بَعَدَ ذَلِكَ فِي
الْأَرْضِ لَمُسْرِفُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

On that account: We ordained for the Children of Israel that if any one slew a person — unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land — It would be as if he slew the whole people: and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people. Then although there came to them Our Apostles with Clear Signs, yet, even after that, many of them continued to commit excesses in the land.

⁵¹ The History of the Armenian Church:

Along with his fellow apostle Jude Thaddeus, Bartholomew is reputed to have brought Christianity to Armenia in the 1st century. Thus, both saints are considered the patron saints of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Eusebius of Caesarea's *Ecclesiastical History* (5:10) states that after the Ascension, Bartholomew went on a missionary tour to India, where he left behind a copy of the Gospel of Matthew. Other traditions record him as serving as a missionary in Ethiopia, Mesopotamia, Parthia, and Lycaonia. Popular traditions and legends say that Bartholomew preached the Gospel in India, then went to Greater Armenia.

He is said to have been martyred in Albanopolis in Armenia. According to one account, he was beheaded, but a more popular tradition holds that he was flayed alive and crucified, head downward. He is said to have converted Polymius, the king of Armenia, to Christianity. Astyages, Polymius' brother, consequently ordered Bartholomew's execution.

The 13th century Saint Bartholomew Monastery was a prominent Armenian monastery constructed at the site of the martyrdom of Apostle Bartholomew in the Vaspurakan Province of Greater Armenia (now in southeastern Turkey).

⁵² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Provisional Translations, *Star of the West* (Volume 1).

⁵³ *al-Qasas*, The Story, 28:5:

وَنُرِيدُ أَنْ نَمُنَّ عَلَى الَّذِينَ اسْتُضِعُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَنَجْعَلَهُمْ أَئِمَّةً
وَنَجْعَلَهُمُ الْوَارِثِينَ ﴿٥٦﴾

And We wished to be gracious to those who were being depressed in the land, to make them leaders (in faith, imáms) and make them heirs

⁵⁴ Also quoted by Shoghi Effendi in ADJ 62-63 and WOB 77.

⁵⁵ Sabá or Shebá, 34:15:

لَقَدْ كَانَ لِسَبَإٍ فِي مَسْكِنِهِمْ آيَةٌ جَنَّتَانِ عَنْ يَمِينٍ وَشِمَالٍ كُلُوا مِنْ رِزْقِ
رَبِّكُمْ وَأَشْكُرُوا لَهُ بَلَدَةٌ طَيِّبَةٌ وَرَبُّ غَفُورٌ ﴿١٥﴾

⁵⁶ Sabá or Shebá, 34:16-17:

لَقَدْ كَانَ لِسَبَإٍ فِي مَسْكِنِهِمْ آيَةٌ جَنَّتَانِ عَنْ يَمِينٍ وَشِمَالٍ كُلُوا مِنْ رِزْقِ
رَبِّكُمْ وَأَشْكُرُوا لَهُ بَلَدَةٌ طَيِّبَةٌ وَرَبُّ غَفُورٌ ﴿١٦﴾

فَاعْرَضُوا فَاذْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَبِيلَ الْعَرَمِ وَبَدَّلْنَاهُمْ بِجَنَّتَيْهِمْ جَنَّتَيْنِ
ذَوَاتِى أُكُلٍ خَمْطٍ وَأَثَلٍ وَشَيْءٍ مِّنْ سِدْرٍ قَلِيلٍ ﴿١٧﴾

ذَٰلِكَ جَزَآئُهُمْ بِمَا كَفَرُوا وَهَلْ نُجَازِي إِلَّا الْكَافِرَ
﴿١٧﴾

⁵⁷ *Mú-min*, or The Believer, 40:82-85:

أَفَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ
كَانُوا أَكْثَرَ مِنْهُمْ وَأَشَدَّ قُوَّةً وَأَعَارًا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَمَا آغَتْ عَنْهُمْ مَّا كَانُوا
يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

فَلَمَّا جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُم بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَرِحُوا بِمَا عِنْدَهُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ وَحَاقَ بِهِمْ
مَّا كَانُوا بِهِ يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾

فَلَمَّا رَأَوْا بَأْسَنَا قَالُوا ءَامَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَحَدُّهُ وَكَفَرْنَا بِمَا كُنَّا بِهِ مُشْرِكِينَ
﴿٨٤﴾

فَلَمْ يَكْ يَنْفَعُهُمْ إِيمَانُهُمْ لَمَّا رَأَوْا بَأْسَنَا شِئْتَ اللَّهُ الَّتِي قَدْ خَلَتْ فِي
عِبَادِيهِ ۗ وَخَسِرَ هُنَالِكَ الْكَافِرُونَ ﴿٨٥﴾

⁵⁸ *Al-Rúm*, The Byzantines, 30:9-12:

أَوَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ
كَانُوا أَشَدَّ مِنْهُمْ قُوَّةً وَأَثَارُوا الْأَرْضَ وَعَمَرُوهَا أَكْثَرَ مِمَّا عَمَرُوهَا
وَجَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُم بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيَظْلِمَهُمْ وَلَٰكِن كَانُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ
يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿٩١﴾

ثُمَّ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا السُّوْءَىٰ ۗ أَن كَذَّبُوا
بِعَايَاتِ اللَّهِ وَكَانُوا بِهَا يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ ﴿٩٢﴾

اللَّهُ يَبْدُوُ الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُ ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٩٣﴾

وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ يُبْلِسُ الْمُجْرِمُونَ ﴿٩٤﴾

⁵⁹ *Muhammad*, 47:7-11:

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَتَعَسَا لَهُمْ وَأَضَلَّ أَعْمَالَهُمْ ﴿٨٠﴾

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَرِهُوا مَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأَحْبَطَ أَعْمَالَهُمْ ﴿٨١﴾

﴿٨٢﴾ أَوَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ

دَمَّرَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ ۗ وَلِلْكَافِرِينَ أَمْعَالُهَا ﴿٨٣﴾

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ مَوْلَى الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَأَنَّ الْكَافِرِينَ لَا مَوْلَى لَهُمْ ﴿٨٤﴾

⁶⁰ *al-Hajj*, The Pilgrimage, 22:46

⁶¹ *Yúsusuf*, Joseph, 12:109:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ إِلَّا رِجَالًا نُوْحِيَ إِلَيْهِمْ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْقُرَىٰ أَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا
 فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَدَارُ الْآخِرَةِ
 خَيْرٌ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

⁶² *Fáṭir*, The Originator of Creation; or *Maláika*, The Angels, 35:44-45:

أَوَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ
 وَكَانُوا أَشَدَّ مِنْهُمْ قُوَّةً وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُعْجِزَهُ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَلَا
 فِي الْأَرْضِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ عَلِيمًا قَدِيرًا ﴿٤٤﴾

وَلَوْ يُؤَاخِذُ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ بِمَا كَسَبُوا مَا تَرَكَ عَلَىٰ ظَهْرِهَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ وَلَكِنْ
 يُؤَخِّرُهُمْ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ۖ فَإِذَا جَاءَ أَجْلُهُمْ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِعِبَادِهِ بَصِيرًا
 ﴿٤٥﴾

⁶³ *al-Rúm*, The Byzantines, 30:50

⁶⁴ *Shoghi Effendi*, by Marcus Bach, published in *The Circle of Faith*, Chapter 3, pp. 49-83, New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1957 and also *A meeting with Shoghi Effendi*, by Marcus Bach One World publications, p.37: “But the thing that struck me most as our meeting progressed was his (Shoghi Effendi's) unquestioned devotion to the Galilean (Jesus).”

⁶⁵ From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer dated October 14, 1936 published in *Bahá'í Institutions* p. 95.

⁶⁶ From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer dated March 5, 1957 published in *Compilation* no. 66.

⁶⁷ Battles of Verdun, Jutland and Somme.

⁶⁸ Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015: *America's Changing Religious Landscape*

⁶⁹ Basheer Mohammad, Pew Research Center, January 6, 2016: *A new estimate of the U.S. Muslim population.*

⁷⁰ Deuteronomy 4:1-2:

Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you.

Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you

2 Peter 1:20:

“knowing this first: that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation” (i.e. the scriptures do not come from a private understanding nor must it be subjected to interpretation by the individual).

Revelation 22:18-19:

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:

And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

⁷¹ *Ál-i-'Imrán, or The Family of Ímrán, 3:7:*

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ
وَأُخَرٌ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ
أَبْغَاءَ أَلْفِئْتَةٍ وَأَبْغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ ۗ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي
الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ

﴿٧﴾

He it is Who hath revealed unto thee the Scripture wherein are clear revelations — they are the substance of the Book — and others (which are) allegorical. But those in whose hearts is doubt pursue, forsooth, that which is allegorical seeking (to cause) dissension by seeking to explain it. None knoweth its explanation (ta'wíl) save God. And those who are of sound instruction say: We believe therein; the whole is from our Lord; but only men of understanding really heed.

⁷² *al-A'ráf, The Heights, 7:52-53:*

وَلَقَدْ جِئْنَاهُمْ بِكِتَابٍ فَصَّلْنَاهُ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ هُدًى وَرَحْمَةً
لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا تَأْوِيلَهُ ۗ يَوْمَ يَأْتِي تَأْوِيلَهُ ۗ يَقُولُ الَّذِينَ نَسُوهُ مِنْ قَبْلُ
قَدْ جَاءَتْ رُسُلُ رَبِّنَا بِالْحَقِّ فَهَلْ لَنَا مِنْ شَفَعَاءَ فَيَشْفَعُوا لَنَا أَوْ نُرَدُّ
فَتَعْمَلْ غَيْرَ الَّذِي كُنَّا نَعْمَلُ ۗ قَدْ خَسِرُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ وَضَلَّ عَنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا

يَفْتَرُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾

And now have we brought them the Book: with knowledge have we explained it; a guidance and a mercy to them that believe.

What have they to wait for now but its interpretation (ta'wil)? When its interpretation (ta'wil) shall come, they who aforetime were oblivious of it shall say, "The Prophets of our Lord did indeed bring the truth; shall we have any intercessor to intercede for us? or could we not be sent back? Then would we act otherwise than we have acted." But they have ruined themselves; and the deities of their own devising have fled from them!

⁷³ reference.bahai.org/fa/t/o/MASH2/mash2-233.html

⁷⁴ John L. Allen Jr. The dramatic growth of evangelicals in Latin America. National Catholic reporter. Aug. 18, 2006.

⁷⁵ *Lights of Guidance* #1664: From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, April 27, 1936.

⁷⁶ Queen Marie of Romania

⁷⁷ From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer dated April 27, 1936 published in *Lights of Guidance* 1664.

⁷⁸ Shoghi Effendi, letter, 7 May 1936.

⁷⁹ *al-Baqarah*, The Cow, 2:106:

﴿ مَا نَنْسَخْ مِنْ آيَةٍ أَوْ نُنسِهَا نَأْتِ بِخَيْرٍ مِّنْهَا أَوْ مِثْلَهَا أَلَمْ تَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴾

None of Our revelations (verses) do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar: Knowest thou not that God Hath power over all things?

⁸⁰ *Lights of Divine Guidance* #1670: From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, November 12, 1933.

⁸¹ From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian by his secretary to an individual believer, November 19, 1945: *Bahá'í News*, No. 210, p. 3, August 1948.

⁸² Ibsen, Emperor and Galilean.