

Some aspects of Christian Doctrines in the writings of Sayyid `Alī Muhammad Shirazi, the Bāb (1819-1859 CE): Trinity and Incarnation, Sonship and the form-symbol of the Cross. ^[1]

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Though the Bāb makes infrequent and scant reference to Jewish beliefs and practises ¹his writings contain a fairly significant number of references to the Christian doctrine of the trinity and to the supposed origin of the symbol of the cross as spelled out in an obscure Islamic ḥadīth ascribed to the prophet Muhammad. His discussion of the former doctrine is rooted in Qur'ānic texts. What he has to say about the form of the cross is frequently couched in obscure alphabetical or "qabbalistic" or talismanic terminology. As will be seen below, the Bāb's writings do not lead one to believe that he had any detailed knowledge of either Jewish or Christian doctrines or direct knowledge of the Bible. Before proceeding further it will be appropriate to underline his frequent underlining of the absolute, transcendence and unknowability of the Dhāt Allāh, the Essence of Divinity or the Ultimate Reality of the Godhead. The theology of the Bab is quite distinctly and thoroughly apophatic. Without compromising his apophatic theology, the Bab claimed secondary "Divinity" and "Lordship" and conferred this on his major disciples in the light of the onset of the eschatological Day of God. The transcendent "pleroma" of him and his disciples formed an indication of the presence of God on the Day of God. Meeting the Bab as the *mazhar-i ilahi* (the personalized Divine theophany) was the tantamount of experiencing the eschatological *liqa'-Allah* mentioned several times in the Qur'an and expounded in the Bayan (as well as the Kitab-i Iqan of Baha'-Allah). The encounter with God anticipated in the Qur'an, biblical scripture and Islamic traditions had its personalized realization in identification with the Bab.

1) The Christian "Trinity" as tritheistic or heretical trinitarianism ^[2]

In line with the Qur'ān and numerous Shi'i polemical refutations of the doctrine of the Trinity from the at least time of Shi'ite Abū `Isā' al-Warrāq who wrote a *Radd `alā al-Nasārah* ('Against the Trinity= mid. 3rd/9th cent.; trans. Thomas, 1992), the Bāb repeatedly underlined the heretical nature of such key Christian doctrines as those of the tritheistic Trinity and literalistic Sonship of Jesus (Q.9:30-31;19:35). Following Islamic norms informed by anti-trinitarianism statements in the Q. (4:171; 5:73; cf. 5:116; cf. 23:91;25:2; 102:3-4) he viewed the doctrine of *tathlīth* ("the Trinity") as a form of tritheism. In his affirmation of an apophatic theology and the centrality of the doctrine of *tawḥīd* (the Oneness of God) the Bāb firmly and repeatedly objected to anything which suggested that the Godhead had a direct relationship with the world or was somehow multiple in nature. Anything suggestive of *ḥulūl*, the incarnational indwelling of the one apophatic Deity was countered. God, the Bāb taught, can never have had any direct relationship with his creation other than indirectly through His *mashiyya* (Will) centered in the Logos-like reality or nafs ("Self", "Person", "Identity"...) of the pre-existent *mazhar-i ilāhī* (Manifestation of God).

The Bāb's doctrine of *tawhīd* and the theology of the *mashīyya* is partially based upon traditions contained in the *Kitāb al-tawhīd* recorded as found in al-Kulayni's *al-Kāfi*. In particular he seems indebted to forms of the following tradition ascribed (among others) to the sixth Imam Ja'far al-Jādiq (d. c. 740):

There is not a single thing in the heavens or in the earth but came to be through seven factors (*al-khiṭāṭ*): [1] the *al-Mashīyya* (the Divine Will), [2] *al-Irada* (the Divine Intention), [3] *al-qadar* (the Divine Foreordainment), [4] *al-qidā* (the Divine Accomplishment), [5] *al-idhn* (the Divine Authorization), [6] *al-kitāb* (the [archetypal] Book) and [7] *al-ajal* (the Divinely allotted Time) (Kulayni, *al-Kāfi* 1:149).

This frequently cited tradition lies at the centre of the Bāb's theology, cosmology, prophetology and *'ilm al-hurūf*. In particular these first three of these seven causes of existence are foundational. How the third of them *al-qadr* (Divine Foreordainment) is perceived to relate to the others is crucial to the maintenance of the divine unity and the fourfold nature of the world of existence (R. Nubuwwa:235bff.; Untitled Persian letter in INBMC 14:433-51).

In line then, with mainstream Shī'ī theology the Bāb taught that the single and ultimate Godhead is absolutely transcendent. He quoted with approval the tradition to the effect that "the perfection of *al-tawhīd* [demands] the negation of the [Divine] Attributes (*al-ṣifāt*)". [3] and many times underlined God's Unknowability, Namelessness and Eternality. [4] *waḥdat al-wujūd*, or (loosely) existential monism, (heretical) "trinitarianism" conceived as a form of "tritheism" and the extremist view that Imām Alī is God are absolutely rejected in scores of his writings [5] Not directly responsible for the world of creation the unfathomable attributeless Essence of Divinity which alone should be worshipped, originated existence through His *mashīyya* (= the Divine Will) which He created through his own Logos-Self (*nafs*) closely associated with the pre-existent Reality of the divine theophanies or manifestations of God. It could also be said that creation came about indirectly through seven hypostatic intermediaries the essences of which are facts of the Logos-Self of God [6]

Most of the Bāb's major works contain refutations of "trinitarianism" and other forms of shirk ("associationalism"). Commenting on Q. 2:111 in his early *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara* the Bāb denied that Jewish materialists who worship God in "fourfold form" (*shakl tarbi'*) [7] and Christians who associate themselves, Jesus and God in "a tritheistic form" (*fī haykal al-tathlāth*) will enter paradise. God is not "a fourth among four" or the "third of three" (cf. Q. 5:77, etc). His oneness precludes any direct link between His essence and His creation. [8]

At one point in his QA the Bāb draws on Q. 4:169 and 5:77 and warns his contemporaries against repeating the tritheistic utterance of the Christians that God is the "third of three". To do so would be to slander the Dhikr and compromise the divine oneness (QA. LXI (f.104b-105a). He also exhorts the "people of the earth" not to take "two gods" for themselves (see Q. 16:51) and thereby underlines the importance of turning to him as the bāb or dhikr who utters the monotheistic declaration of divinity:

"O people of the earth! Hearken unto my Call from the direction of the Dhikr, 'I verily am God, no God is there except me'. O My servants! Do not take "two Gods". God is assuredly one. We, in very truth, shall not forgive associationalism (*al-shirk*)...". [1]

Those who suppose that God exists in "tritheistic form" (*fī haykal al-tathlāth*) are like those who wrongly maintain that God is the "third of three" gods (Ibid.LXII f.107a). Such as, the Bāb remarks in his *Tafsīr sūrat al-kawthar*, maintain that he has claimed to be "gate of the remnant of God" (bāb baqiyyat Allāh) make an error of the same magnitude as Christians who assert that "God your Lord is the third of three", Jews who claim that "Ezra is the Son

of God" (see Q.9:30) and Arabs who say that "God is indigent and we are rich" (see Q.3;181; T. sūrat al-kawthar, f.7).

Quoting various Islamic traditions in his Tafsīr Bismillāh the Bāb counters the polytheistic assertions of the "people of love" (ahl al-maḥabba = Sufis?) and the Christians. God is neither the "third of three" nor is his transcendent Essence (*dhāt*) to be directly identified with "love" (*al-maḥabba*), the "lover" (*al-muḥibb*) or the "loved one" (*al-maḥbūb*). Tritheism, whether Christian or Sufī, is a grievous error since only God himself has knowledge of his own reality.²

At several points in his *Tafsīr sūrat al-`aṣr* the Bāb objects to and counters that tritheistic trinitarianism ascribed to Christians in the Qur'ān. While the signs of God are manifest in all things in the "world of multiplicity" (*`ālam al-kathirāt*) Christians who claim that God is the "third of three" fail to befittingly reduce the object of worship to a "single point" (*nuḡṭat al-wadāt*) (T. sūrat al-`aṣr, f. 66f). Those who hold that God is a "third among two" or "a third other than two" are "indeed in grievous loss" (Q.103:2).³

3). The significance of the form- symbol of the Christian Cross

A cross is basically the intersection of two lines transverse to each other which became a widespread symbol of life in pre-Christian antiquity. From the 2nd cent. CE the cruciform became an important symbol of the Christian religion on account of Jesus' death by crucifixion (Grossi, `Cross= EEC 1:209).

The Cross in the Qur'an and post-qur'anic Islam

Most of the six Qur'anic references to crucifixion relate this practise to ancient Egypt at the time of Joseph (12:41, 7:124, 20:71 26:49 cf. 5:33). Perhaps influenced by Christian doecetism reflected in non- canonical and Gnostic Gospels the single reference to Jesus crucifixion seemed to Muslim exegetes, in line with their understanding of the phrase *shubbiha la-hum* (Q. 4:157a, `it [Jesus death] but seemd to them [to have taken place] or, ` a semblance was made for them"), that Jesus himself was not actually crucified but someone else (e.g. Judas Iscariot) was crucified in his place (Wensinck[Thomas] `al-Jal)b=, EI2 VIII:980-1; 1991:106f;171-2). Jesus the messenger of God was (bodily) lifted up to heaven by God (Q. 4:158) where he remains until the Day of resurrection (--> 6.X).

The image of the cross of the crucified Jesus was thus for Muslims something historically meaningless, aberrant or irrelevant to the true, pristine religion of the non-crucified Jesus. There is little or no Muslim polemical interest in concepts of atonement centered upon the crucifixion of Jesus. For the B0b, in line with an obscure prophetic (*ḥad*)*th*, the symbol of the cross had its origin in the Christian heresy of the incarnation, the meeting of the Divine Godhead and the human world as suggested by the intersection of the two lines of the cross. This implied the Trinity which presupposes the incarnation of the Godhead in three persons, including the human yet divine figure Jesus of Nazareth.

The Bab on the form-symbol of the cross

The Bab refers to the *shakl al-ṣalīb* (form, shape, symbol of the cross), the origin of the form or symbol of the cross, in many of his major and minor writings; most especially those of the early period (1844-1848). In many instances he drew on or quoted part of a tradition (*ḥad*)*th* usually attributed either to the Prophet Muhammad or to

Imam `Ali). Though his quotations sometimes vary an example is shown below, with the translation to the right of the box:

"The hadith of the Prophet [Muhammad], for he said, exalted be his mention, in refutation of the Christians, `And from this [theologically aberrant concept] the Christians took the form [symbol] of the cross (*shakl al-ṣalīb*) and the descent (*ḥall*) of the Divinity (*al-lāhūt*) into the human sphere (*al-nāsūt*). But exalted be God, Lofty and Mighty, above that which these transgressors assert". [1]

It can also be noted here that the use of the Syriac loan words *lahut* and *nasut* for "Divinity" and "humanity" have a long history in Islamic trinitarian discussions. This is illustrated, for example, in the use of these terms by the Zaydi al-Qasim b. Ibrahim in his *Radd `ala al-Naṣāra* (ed. Di Matteo, 317ff) and al-Shahrastani in the section on Christians in his *al-Milal wa'l-nihal* (2:220) where a Christian opinion is expressed to the effect that Jesus' ascension involved an awareness of *al-lahut* (Divinity) in / through *al-nasut* (the humanity). *Tasfir literatures on Q. 4:156 ADD...*

Varieties of this tradition are quoted, for example, in the following works of the Bab:

- *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara* (Commentary on the Surah of the Cow, Q. 2) (f. 195 (Q.2:62),
- *Ṣāhifa bayn al-ḥaramayn* (The Epistle Between the Two Shrines) Leiden mss. ADD
- *Tafsīr Bismillāh* (Commentary on the Basmalah (TBA Ms. 6014C) f.339(b);
- *Tafsir sūrat al-kawthar* (Commentary on the Surah of the Abundance, Q.) (Browne Coll. Ms. Or. F 10[7]), f.19b;
- *Tafsīr al-hā'*(l) (Commentary on the letter "H"(al-ha') [No.1] (INBMC 14), f. 268;
- *Tafsīr sūrat al-`aṣr* (Commentary on the Surah of the Afternoon, Q.) INBMC .69: f. 29;
- *Commentary on the hadīth `alamani akhā rasul Allāhi* (INBMC 14), f. 414;
- `Reply to a question about the *Lawḥ al-maḥfūz*' ("The Preserved Tablet"), TBA Ms. 6006C., f.79-80;
- Untitled piece (INBMC 14: 163-80) and his
- `Reply to questions of Mīrzā Muhammad Sa`id Zawara' (INBMC 69:425)

Several of the texts will be cited and commented upon below. It will be seen that the contexts within which the Bāb quotes or alludes to this tradition and the qabbalistic and talismanic deductions he made on the basis of it, are frequently abstruse. The Bab not only related it to Christian notion of the incarnation of the Deity and tritheistic

trinitarianism summed up in the Qur'ānic phrase "the third of three" *thalith^u thalthathⁱⁿ* (Q. 5:73[77] cf. Q. 4:171[169]) but connected the symbol of the cross with the letter lām (= abjad 30 = 3x10) of the three disconnected letters Alif-Lām-Mīm (see Qur'ān suras 23 3, 29-32). He also associated the triplicity of the cross with the *kalimat al-tawhid* or *shahada* = lā ilāha ilā Allāh which has 12 letters [1+2 = 3] but only three different letters [within 4 words] including the letter lām . i.e., the 'root letters' *alif, lām* and *hā'*. [2](#)

Conceived as an essentially tripartite form expressive of a tritheistic heresy the Christian cross represents an heretical conjunction of the human and the Divine. It is an aberrant talismanic image of the appearance of the real 'tripartite form' (*shakl al-thulth / tathlith* which is in one sense, the relationships between three of the seven Shi'i cosmogonic loci (), namely,

- (1) *al-mashāya*, the [Primal Divine] "Will"
- (2) *al-irada* the Divine "Intention"
- (3) *al-qadr* the Loci of "Destiny"

within in the fourfold elemental world or Person-Logos centered haykal a-tarbi' (Quadratic Temple) such as the four-lettered name Muhammad = M=Ḥ-M-D or Ḥusayn = Ḥ-S-Y-N. [3](#)

The Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara (Commentary on the Surah of the Cow, Q. 2)

ADD TEXT

(f. 195 (Q.2:62),

Drawing on the ḥadīth quoted above in his Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara (early 1844) in his comments on Q. 2:62^[1] the Bāb speaks of Christians as a community who derived the 'form of the cross' (*shakl al-salīb*) "from every image of the word of negation": reading, *kullu sūrat kalimat lā'*) by locating the "sign of the Divinity " (*āyāt al-lāhāt*) in the human sphere (*al-nasūt*). They falsely imagine that the transcendent, Most High ('ulyā') Divine Essence was transfigured in the very Logos-Self (*nafs*) of Jesus.¹ The Bab first refers to the fact that God uncovered through his bounty in Q, 2:62 the limitations of all who in their various ways approach God. The Jews are such as are unfamiliar with or disavow the sign of the Divine Ipseity (*ayat al-huwiyya*) relative to the true nature of the theophany before Moses (*mujalliyat li-mūsa*). The Christians are described as such as derive from every form of the "particle of negation" (*kalimat la*) the *shakl al-salib* ("form of the cross") and the "descent of the Sign of Divinity (*ayat al-lahūt*) into the human sphere (*al-nasūt*)." They falsely imagine that the Exalted Divine Essence ('ulya') was transfigured in the very Logos-Self (*nafs*) of Jesus (*tajalli li-'ADD bi-nafsihi*). The Sabeans are represented as the people of the stopping place (*ahl al-waqūf*) among the denizens of limitation (*ma`ashir al-hadd*) who complain about the power of God (*qudrat Allah*) relative to the negation of limitations restricting (*imam*) `Ali (T.Baqara f.195).

Qayyum al-asma' (mid. 1844)

Similar theological convictions are presupposed in difficult passages of the Bāb's *Qayyūm al-asmā'* (= QA.; mid. 1844/ 1260). Commenting on the story of the two youths imprisoned with Joseph (see Q.12:36f) in His QA, the Bāb connects the miserable fate of Pharoah's baker who was crucified (crucifixion, Q.12:41) with a tritheistically rooted shirk, the theological error involving unbelief in Him as the messianic Dhikr Allāh (Remembrance of God) who represents the Hidden Imam and whom the Bāb mediates. Pharoah's butler, on the other hand, exists in

al-shakl al-rab` ("fourfold form") and dreams of his pressing wine and serving the expected Imam (?). Existing in shakl al-thulth, ("threefold form"), the "form of shirk" or heretical associationalism which confounds the tawhīd or "Oneness of God", the baker is an "unbeliever in Our Dhikr" (= the Bāb) ends up "crucified in the fire" with birds eating off the top of his head (see QA.XXXVIIff (fol.52bff; see also QA.XXXII (fol.52b); LXXXI (fol.140aff) etc.

In his QA and other writings the Bāb frequently uses such expressions as al-shakl al-rab` ("fourfold form") and shakl al-thulth, ("threefold form"). Refer for example, QA. XXXII [fol.52b] where it is taught that God made the Bāb "the triadic shape" (hi'at al-tathlīth) "in the quadrangular [fourfold] form" (fi shakl min al-tarbā`) in an ocean of congealed blood (see also ibid. XLIV [fol.92a]; LXXXI [fol.140a]; LXXXVIII [fol.154a])

See the Bab's QA 37:134ff (on Q. 12:36f).

Sahifa bayn al-haramayn (1844-5)

Similar convictions regarding Christians and the "cross" are presupposed in some difficult passages on talismanic knowledge in the Bāb's Ṣaḥīfa bayn al-ḥaramayn (The Epistle between the Two Shrines). This in the course of replying to questions of Mirza Muhammad Husayn, Muīt Kirmani. The Bab gives some advice about the mysteries of talismanic subjects and warns Kirmani not to give heed to Christian ideas expressive of the tritheistic heresy:

And inasmuch as you were of the people of the tempestuous billows of the waves in the midmost-heart of a mighty exultant expanse (buhbat fi `izz al-ibtihaj), know that [the secret of] the regulation of the triangular [talisman] (hukm al-tathlīth) through thine own knowledge. Pay no heed to that fact that the Christians had deduced from this shape, the talisman of the cross (haykal al-salīb) and the [heretical] descent of the divine (lahūt) into the [mundane] world of the creatures (al-nasūt). Praised indeed be God! exalted and glorified [be He] above the depiction of those given to assimilationism (al-shubḥah. So recite this book [letter] of your Lord. Judge not except through wisdom, for God is One who Heareth, Knoweth (INBA Ms. 6007C, 360ff; Browne Coll. Or. F7(9), 31-2).

Tafsir Bismillah [Basmala] ()

The following interesting but hardly less obscure comment on the letter lām is contained in the Tafsīr Bismillāh: of the Bāb:

"The letter lām is a luminous name (ism nārānā), a lordly letter (ḥarf rabbānā) and a divine trace (rasm ilāhī). It is the manifestation of the (letter) "A" (alif) in the realm of oneness (al-waḥdat), the voice of singleness in the world of origination (al-mabda'). And from this (letter) the Christians took the form of the cross and the descent of the divinity (al-lāhūt) in the human sphere (al-nasūt)." ³

As indicated above the connection of the letter lām with the sign of the cross is probably due to the fact that this letter has an abjad value of 30 (a multiple of 3) and follows the letter alif in the Qur'ānic disconnected letters Alif-Lām-Mīm. When written out in full Alif has a numerical value of 111 and $1+1+1 = 3$; and $3 \times 10 = 30 = [abjad] lām$. As noted, lām is also one of the three `root letters' of the kalimat al-tawhād. It is found as the second letter of the word Allāh (lām being written with the doubling sign tashdād [ʷ]). The letters alif and lām are thus closely connected such that the latter is said by the Bāb to be a "manifestation" of the former. Alif precedes lām in the word Allāh and follows the initial alif of alif.lam. mim.

The following interesting though somewhat obscure comment on the letter "A" is contained in the T. Basmalah:

The letter "L" is a luminous name, a lordly letter (ḥarf rabban) and a divine trace (rasm ilahi). It is the manifestation of the [letter] "A" (alif) in the realm of oneness (al-wahda), the voice of singleness in the world of origination. And from this (letter) the Christians took the form of the cross and the descent of the Divinity (al-lahūt) in the human sphere (al-nasūt). (T. Basmalah: fol. 339b).

As indicated above the connection of the letter "L" with the sign of the cross is probably due to the fact that this letter has an abjad value of 30 (a multiple of 3) and follows the letter "A" (alif) in the qur'anic isolated letters alif-lam-mim (A-L-M). When written out in full the letter "A" (alif = A+L+F = 1+30+ 80) has a numerical value of 111 (and its second letter is again "A"). Adding its three integers (1+1+1) the result is again 3 and $3 \times 10 = 30$ which is the abjad numerical value of "L" (lam). The letter "L" (lam) is also one of the three 'root letters' of the kalimat al-tawhid or, the all important shahada (Islamic Testimony of faith). It is found as the second letter of the word Allah (the lam being written with the doubling sign tashd) [ʾ].

In conjunction it is the letters "A and "L" which form the Arabic definite article. The letters alif (A) and lam (L) are thus very closely connected such that the latter is said by the Bab to be a "manifestation" of the former. Alif (A) precedes lam (L) in the word Allah and follows the initial alif (A) of the isolated letters alif-lam- mim (A-L-M) prefixed to various suras of the Q. It is also significant that letter lam (L) on account of its shape namely, suggests a downward movement of the upper (divine) towards the lower (mundane) or human realm. Like "incarnation" the elevated vertical Reality intersects with the lower horizontal realm forming a "Cross".

Tafsīr sūrat al-kawthar (Commentary on the Surah of the Abundance)

It is also in the course of commenting on the letter lām (of faḍl) in his Tafsīr sūrat al-kawthar that the Bāb refers to the origin of the sign / symbol of the cross. It is accorded various significances in the traditional hierarchy of metaphysical spheres -- in the realms of lāhāt, jabarāt, malakāt and nasāt -- and associated with the Arabic particle of negation, lā' ("no"). From its appearance as the "no" (lā) which "God created in the heaven of the Kingdom (al-malakāt)" the Christians derived the form of the cross. [1] (T.Kawthar, f. 19b). [2] Again the shape of the word XXXX suggests movement from the upper divine realm to the lower terrestrial sphere.

Refer, Tafsīr sūrat al-kawthar, f. 19b. It should also be noted that lā' ("no") occurs at the commencement of the lā ilāha ilā Allāh (= kalimat al-tawid, "There is no god except God").

Tafsīr al-hā' (I)

In his Tafsīr al-hā' (I) the Bāb, in the context of a qabbalistically informed explanation of the origin of existence, explains how 'duality' became 'triplicity /threefoldness' by virtue of the emergence of the link (al-rabt) between the grades of Being. From the triplicity-threefoldness of Being expressed in triadic form in the beginning of a name which God singled out for Himself -- it is not spelt out but is most probably indicative of the three letters of Allāh ([1] alif [2]lām [3] hā) the Christians derived the form/symbol of the cross. Once again a the form of the cross seems to be related to the name Allāh and its first letter through its being manifest in triadic form; though essentially cruciform relative to the human world (T.al-hā' [I] INBMC 14:268).

Tafsīr sūrat al-`aṣr (Commentary on the Surah of the Afternoon [Era])

Towards the beginning of His Tafsīr sūrat al-`aṣr the Bāb comments on the various manifestations and significances of the letter alif. On one level the al-alif al-ghaybāya the "hidden [letter] "A" and represents the Divine Ipseity (huwiyya) and corresponds to the station of Imām Hasan (d.49/669), the second Shīṭ Imām. Perhaps due to this Imām's abdication of his rightful Imamate to Mu`āwiya in 41/661 and his leading a life of retirement in Medina, a kind of hiddenness or occultation.

The "hidden letter "A" is also the elided, "A" of the name Allah which, in the basmala is elided or passed across (= bi- [A elided] smillah) formula. It represents the huwiyya (lit. "He-ness"), the Divine Ipseity which corresponds to the station of the quietist "silent" second Twelver Imam Hasan (d. 49/669) son of `Alī [4] . It is a sign of "the manifestation of the degree of threefoldness (zuhūr rutbat al-tathlith)" and the "station of the Divine Decree (al-qadr)" and accounts for the multiplicity of the forms of existing things. This, most likely because the letter alif (A) (when written out in full) has an abjad value of 111 (1+1+1 = 3 > multiplicities) and in the light of the fact that al-qadr is the aforementioned third of the seven causes of creation!. Having said this the Bāb adds that Christians derived from the hidden "A" the form of the cross (see Tafsīr sūrat al-`aṣr, INBMC 69:29 / T. `Asr [69]:29). [5]

Frequent reference is made by the Bāb to the seven causes of creation (ultimately derived from Shīṭ cosmological ḥadāth), namely:-

- [1] The Divine Will (al-mashiyya);
- [2] The Divine Intention (al-irada);
- [3] The Divine Decree (al-qadr);
- [4] The Divine Providence (al-qada);
- [5] The Divine Authorization (al-udn);
- [6] The Appointed Time (al-ajal); and
- [7] The Book (al-kitāb).

The first three of them and al-qadr in particular (= No 3) account for the fourfold (cf. the latter 4 causes of creation and the 4 elements) world of existence (see for example, Risāla nubuwwa khaṣṣah, INBMC 14:235bff.; Untitled Persian Letter in ibid. pp.433-51).

UNTITLED LETTER

In an untitled letter contained in INBMC 40:163-80, the Bāb also relates Imam Ḥasan and al-qadr with the shape and origin of the Christian cross. He states that God decreed the tripartite form (shakl al-tathlith) for al-qadr and made it the "manifestation of the cross" (zuhūr al-ṣalīb). In the course of further abstruse comments He explains that none but God and such as He wills is cognizant of the mystery of "wisdom of the triad" (hukm al-tathlith) in Imām Ḥasan.

The ḥadīth `alamani akhi Rasul-Allāh ("He taught me, my brother the Apostle of God")

In his commentary on the ḥadīth `Alamani akhi Rasul-Allāh (INBAMC 14:414) the origin of the symbol of the cross is again related to the "station of the divine decree" (maqām al-qadr) and the threefold form (shakl al-thulth) as it is in his explanation of the Lawh al-mahfūz. [1] In the former work the Christian error concerning the "descent of Divinity (al-lāhut) in the human sphere (al-nasut)" is explained in terms of an inadmissible association of "the

world of the manifestation of the Divine Will" ('ālam zuhur al- mashiyya) with "a multiplicity of [messianic] Dhikrs [?] (maqām dhikr al-kathirāt) ('Alamani akhā Rasāl Allāh, INBMC 14:414).

The Khutba al-Jiddah (Sermon at Jeddah)

More of an esoteric homily than a sermonic discourse, the *khutba al-jidda* (Homily from Jedda) of the B0b contains several passages pertinent to the mystical significance of the "cross". Towards the beginning of this *khutba* the Bab discourses upon the most theologically elevated modes of the divine theophany expressed in Sinaitic terms (Lambden, 198). This to the end that everything might universally testify to the divine power (*qudrat*) as evident in the "theophanic self-manifestation in the Blessed Tree upon Mount Sinai (*zuhūr tajilliyat fi shajarat al-mubaraka 'ala al-tūr al-sina'*)" expressed through a (single) letter (probably an AA@ (= Ñ alif) or an [of"· huwa AHe is@ huwa?]) which is associated with the "crimson Pillar"('ala harf min al-rukḥ al-hamra') and the form of the *shahada*, "God, no God is there except Him". At this the divine power (*al-qudra*) was operative in various the modes of existence (*dhaw0t al-mawjud0t*) at the centre of the realm of pre-existence (*bubuhbuḥat al-qidam*). The gnosis of the effect of the self- transfiguration of the divine essence (*ma`rafat al-dhāt li=-dhāt*) was facilitated by the negation of the divine Names and Attributes. As a result God could give haltering voice by means of his *mashiyya* (Divine Will) into the inmost realities of existence of the "aformentioned form of the *sh0hada*", "God, no God is there except Him". At this the third of the previously mentioned seven *khiṣal* (dimensions, modes) *al-qadr* (the Divine Foreordainment) took effect;

.. whereupon was attained knowledge of the sea of Destiny (*yam al-muqaddar*), the surging tempest of the Threefoldness (*al-thathlīth*) before the multitudinous waves evident upon the oceans of the cross (*abḥār al-ṣalīb*). This such that Christians might vision the [single letter] "A" (*alif*) upright between two streams (*al-nahrayn*) (two "b"s of the Arabic word *Bāb*). This as opposed to their fleeting similitude [of the threefold or "Trinitarian" Jesus] evident in the two likenesses [of God] (*al-shubba fīl-mithlayn*) [within the false Trinity] or as opposed to the form [of the cross] with its two counterparts [suggesting incarnation and the persons of the Trinity] (*shakl al-akhtarayn*) ... (K. Jidda, INBMC 91:61-2).

This difficult passage seems to expresses the Bab's hope that Christians might see him as the centre of the divine unity, as the threefold letter locus of the word *Bab* (Ar. B+A+B) spelt in full with a single (*alif*, *abjad* one) symbolic of the Divine Oneness between the *al-nahrayn*, which appear to symbolize of the two letter "B"s with their twin "stream" like *nuqta* (points). This beatific vision of the Divine Oneness through the Bab is preferable to a focus upon the heretical triplicity of form of the cross. The triplicity of the word *Bab* with its central letter "A" indicative of the *ahadiyya* (divine oneness) when spelt out in full, is an ocean of affirmative *tawhid* in the sea of divine Providence. Christian trinitarianism is false and fleeting (*al-shubba* cf. this word in Q. 4:157a) assimilationist non-identification with God. A little further on the Bab in similar fashion polemicises against the *hukama' = al-tashrḥ*, presumably such *Ishraqi* philosophers as he differed with in Shiraz and elsewhere. They also erred in advancing their form of theological errors of a "trinitarian" (*tathlith*) kind (K. Jedda, 62-3).

The cross only "seemed" to

Another early and important reference to the Christian trinitarian heresy and the error of belief in the Sonship of Jesus is contained in an untitled deeply theological work of the B0b most likely dating from the second year of his ministry (INBMC 91: 41-47). The Bab underlines the transcendent unknowability of God and states, "not a single soul from among the creatures can fathom the gnosis of His Essence (*ma`rifat dhatih*)" Having made this point the Bab elevates the Godhead above such as "propose that God has likenesses (*al-mushshabihūn*)" identifying them as Christians (*al-nasari*) since

"They took the form of the cross (shakl al-salib) from the Threefold Person (haykal al-tathlith) and they positioned the signs of the Divine (ayat al-lahūt) in the sphere of limitation (f) sha'n al-tahdid). In so doing they invented a lie against God in line with the declaration of polytheism (kalimat al-shirk) for they had said that the Messiah is the Son of God (al-masih ibn Allah). But praised be God, and exalted be His authority stipulating [in the Q.] that Jesus, the son of Mary was naught but a Messenger (rasūl). Before him sent messengers (al-rusul, of God) were befriended [by God] (?) and after him was decreed [the mission of] Muhammad, the seal of the prophets (khatam al-nabiyyin). He [Jesus] is naught but a Messenger of God (rasūl Allāh) and the foremost of such as render service [before God] (awwal al-'abidin)."

Here the Bāb not only declares the cross indicative of the heresy of the incarnation but denies Jesus' "sonship" and divine uniqueness. Messengers preceded him and Muhammad followed him. His greatness is not in his Divinity or Sonship but in his being foremost among those who render divine service.

Having said this the Bāb again declares God exalted above the vain suppositions of the Peripatetics (al-mashi'iyūn) among the such as practise philosophy (ḥukama al-falsafiyūn), who suppose a direct rabt ("link") between the essence of the Lord God (al-rabb) and the creatures (al-khalq) They derive this conviction (ḥukm) from the creed of the Christians (kalimat al-nasāri) even though God differentiated Himself from the evidences of His love (āyāt muḥabbatihi) within their own realities. Not comprehending these matters the people went astray for the philosophers who has slipped up theologically. The people were misled as also were the Ishrāqī philosophers (ḥukamā' al-ishrāqīyyūn) and "some of the divines among the 'ulāma= ('ulamā' al-ilāhiyyin". The latter on account of their declaration of the universal presence [of the Essence of the Godhead] in the world of existence (kalimat al-jam'a fi'l-wujūd) (See INBMC 91:42-47).

Tafsir Lawh Maḥfūz

The Tafsir Lawh al-Maḥfūz is a response of the Bab to a question about the "Preserved Tablet", a quranic phrase Q XXXX). [6] In the former work the Christian error concerning the "descent of Divinity (al-lāhut) in the human sphere (al-nasut)" is explained in terms of an inadmissible association of "the world of the manifestation of the Divine Will" ('ālam zuḥūr al-mashiyya) with "a multiplicity of [messianic] Dhikrs (maqām dhikr al-kathirāt) which might indicate more than one representative of the messianic hidden Imām contrary to the divine Will.

SUMMARY NOTE

The foregoing notes illustrate that the Bāb, drawing on an obscure prophetic tradition, fairly frequently objected to the allegedly incarnationalist implications of the form /symbol of the cross. Though the "triadic form" in association with a "quadratic temple" is an instance of symbolism of positive significance in certain of his cosmological and prophetological revelations and despite his virtual deification of the succession of Divine Manifestations in his later writings, he saw the Christian cross as an unbecoming, potentially "tritheistic" image.

Islamic dimensions of the Bab and the cross

The often arcane symbolic, talismanic speculations which surround the Bāb's interpretation and evaluation of the form of the cross are not entirely without Islamic precedent. In considering these matters in the writings of the Bab aspects of the 'ilm al-hurūf (science of the letters) in the Futūḥat and other writings of Ibn al'Arabi and members of his 'school' are sometimes keys to fathoming out what is going on (see esp. Gril in Ibn 'Arabi, 1988:385-487). They

are important keys to understanding the Bab who was definitely intimately influenced by the esoteric gnosis of the Great Shaykh even though he considered his seeming lapse into compromising the divine transcendence an unfortunate theological error. The Great Shaykh dwells upon the esoteric senses of the letters "A" (alif) and "L" (lam) and their relationships as well as the relationship of these letters and the shahada in terms its having two poles of negation and affirmative.

Any source critical study of this aspect of the Bāb's teaching cannot, for example, overlook the detailed analysis of the symbolic concordance of the four words of the shahadat / kalimat al-tawhid and the four branches of the Christian cross in the Kitāb al-yanābā` ('The Book of Sources') of the 10th century Ismā'īlī thinker Abū Ya`qub Sijistānī (d.360/971). [1] Reference should in this respect be made to yanbu' [30-] 32 'On the Concordance [of the symbol] of the Cross and the shahadat').

Any source critical study of this aspect of the Bāb's teaching cannot, for example, overlook the detailed analysis of the symbolic concordance of the four words of the shahāda (<-->) and the four branches of the Christian cross in the Kitāb al-yanābā` ('The Book of the Wellsprings of Wisdom') of the 10th century Ismā'īlī thinker Abū Ya`qūb Sijistānī (d.360/971) [7] (See Abū Ya`qūb Sijistānī, Kitāb al-yanābī` in Henry Corbin (Ed), Trilogie Ismaelienne (Bibliothèque Iranienne Vol.9 ., Tehran & Paris 1961) p. 5ff). Sections 30-32 of this work are 'On the Concordance [of the symbol] of the Cross and the shahadat' and are to some degree echoed in statements of the Bāb about the shahāda and the shakl al-salib, the 'symbol of the cross'). While Sijistānī's exegetical comments are sometimes rooted in distinctly Ismā'īlī, the Bāb's are definitely neo-Shi'ī.

In Yanbū` thirty Sijistani (who unlike most Muslims acknowledges the crucifixion of Jesus) defines "cross" (al-salib) as "the name for a piece of wood on which man is crucified so that the whole population may see him, and what is crucified on it is a dead body" (tr. Walker, 93). He then states that Jesus, the "harbinger of the day of resurrection" (yawm al-qiyama), informed Christians that the "master of the day of resurrection" would "unveil the structural truths of those sacred laws that were constructed of truths and the people will know them and be unable to deny them" (text Corbin, 70ff/92ff ; tr, Walker, 1994:93). It seems to be indicated that the real significance of the "cross" is to be divulged by the eschatological messiah. "Crucifixion" indicates the visible disclosure of something "concealed". Christian veneration of the cross is said by al-Sijistani to be the equivalent of the Muslim shahada or profession of faith which is initially built on "denial" (al-nafy) and then an "affirmation" (al-ithbat). Like the two pieces of the "cross" the shahada has these two aspects. It is composed of four words just as the cross has four "extremities" (see Yanbū` 32, Walker 1994:94-95).

See Abu Ya`qub Sijistani, Kitāb al-yanābī` in Henry Corbin (ed), Trilogie Ismaelienne (Bibliothèque Iranienne Vol.9 ., Tehran & Paris 1961) 5ff; Henry Corbin, 'L'Ismaélisme et le symbole de la Croix', in La Table Ronde (Paris, December 1957), 122-134, esp. p.128f (cf. idem, Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis, (London: Kegan Paul International, 1983) esp. .88f.,192); Walker, 1994:91-95 (= yan0b) 30-32).

Though the Bab treatment of the origin of the shakl al-salib is wholly different from Sijistani's statements about the substance and meaning of the cross there is some similarity in the way the Bāb treats the shahada and some of Sijistani's comments outlined above. They both use the Arabic terms al-nafy and al-ithbat for the negative and positive poles or halves of the shahada. The Bab extends the polarity implied in the shahada very widely

theologically often having it indicate "good" and "evil" aspects of existent being. This polarity is a key aspect of the religion of the Bāyan, a key aspect of the exposition of existential and cosmic reality.

[1] Q. 2:62 reads as follows: "Surely they that believe, and those of Jewry, and Christians, and those Sabaeans, whoso believes in God and the Last Day, and works righteousness -- their wage awaits them with their Lord, and no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow" (tr. Arberry).

[2] ("no") occurs at the commencement of the kalimat al-tawhīd , lā ilāha ilā Allāh, (There is no god except God= ADD).

[3] A little further on the Bāb in similar fashion polemicalises against the ḥukamā' al-tashriq, presumably such Ishrāq) philosophers as he differed with in Shirāz and elsewhere. They also erred in advancing their form of theological errors of a "trinitarian" (tathlīth) kind (K. Jedda, 62-3).

[4] This perhaps due to this Imām's abdication of his rightful Imamate to Mu`āwiyya in 41/661 and then leading a life of retirement in Medina, a kind of hiddenness or occultation=.

[5]

In an untitled letter contained in INBMC 40:163-80, the Bāb also relates Imām Hasan and al-qadr with the shape and origin of the Christian cross. He states that God decreed the tripartite form (shakl al-tathlith) for al-qadr and made it the "manifestation of the cross" (zuhur al-salib). In the course of further abstruse comments he explains that none but God and such as He wills is cognizant of the mystery of "wisdom of the triad" (hukm al-tathlith) in Imām ḥasan.

[6] The Bāb's commentary on this ḥadīth (attributed to Imam `Ali) is contained in INBMC 14:409b-417 and that on the Lawḥ al-Hafiz in TBA Ms. 6006C: 79-80.

[Jewish and Christian notions of heretical "Sonship": The Sonship of `Uzayr \(Ezra-Enoch-Metatron?\) and Jesus](#)

The Bab occasionally refers to the qur'ānic notion that Jews regard Ezra as the "son of God" (Q. 9:30), as for example, in his Risālah Dhahabiyya (INBMC 86:70-98), 76. This verse reads,

ADD TEXT

"The Jews say `Uzayr is the Son of God (ibn Allah); and Christians say, `Christ is the Son of God (ibn Allah)... May they be damned by God; how perverse are they" (Qur'an 9:30).

Both Muslim Q. commentators and western Islamicists have long tried to ascertain the reason why the (Medinan) Jews (or some other Jews?) considered `Uzayr, most frequently (incorrectly?) identified with Ezra as the "Son of God" (Ayoub: 1986). The reference to this mysterious `Uzayr in the first half of this apparently late Medinan

verse has recently been explained as pointing to Enoch who is identified with Metatron in various Merkabah texts (Wasserstrom 1995:183-4). Whatever its original sense the Bab, as the Q. clearly states, regards this filial elevation of `Uzayr as a theologically repulsive Jewish viewpoint. In his Risala Dhahabiyya, for example, the Bab mentions that Christians assert that God is the "third of three" (thalith al-thulth), Jews that `Uzayr is the ibn Allah (Son of God) and Arabs that "God is poor while we [Arabs] are wealthy and independent of Thy bounty". All these groups are very strongly condemned. The person(s) addressed assert that al-Haqq (Ultimate Reality) will CHECK (INBMC 86: [70-98]76).

[The Ibn Allah, Sonship of Jesus](#)

While repeatedly affirmed in the NT the Christological doctrine of the Sonship of Jesus is repeatedly rejected in the Q. It became standard feature of numerous Islamic refutations of Christianity and other polemically oriented Muslim works including, for example, in the al-Radd `ala al-Nasara by al-Jahiz (d. XXX/869), the Tathbit Dalail al-Nubuwwa and al-Mughni of `Abd al-Jabbar (d. c. 1025 --2.10) (Pines, 1967:190).

It is often the case in Islamic treatments, of the Sonship of Jesus ia a quite literal one and this is reflected in the writings of the Bab. In Qayyum al-asma' 62 and elsewhere the Bab held to the impossibility of there being any direct connection or link (rabt) between the sublime Godead and his creation. He writes:

The unbelievers are assuredly those who say that God make a link between Himself and between His creation as [implied] in the utterance which Jews and Christians make [saying] `We are the sons of God (ibn Allah). But exalted be God himself a witness elevated and mighty high above what they assert (QA 62:248).

A few sūras later in this same work the Bab castigates the hukama' (philosophers) for asserting that there exists a rabt between al-Haqq and al-makhlūq, the Ultimate Reality and the created domain. This assertion is like the [credal statement] utterance of the Christians (al-kalimat al-nasara) to the effect that al-masih ibn Allah, the Messiah is the Son of God. Christians illegitimately take for themselves "lords" (arbab^{an}) aside from the true God which are in fact his creation (QA 70:284).

The Bab's repeating the Islamic rejection of the Trinity and of a non-metaphysical understanding of the Sonship of Jesus is many times repeated in Baha'i) sacred writings addressed to both Muslims and Christians. Like a fair number of Muslim writers including [Pseudo-] al-Ghaz0l), al-Radd al-jami`, ed. Chidiac, 40ff), Baha'-Allah affirmed the spiritual truth of Jesus' "Sonship". Going further than Muslims, however, he occasionally himself referred to Jesus as Ibn Allah (the Son of God). Playing down any Christian notion that this was unique to Jesus he regarded all the Manifestations of God equally being the Son of God. So too humans in general who are believers in these Manifestations of God are also counted "sons of God". As Baha'-Allah

assumed, the biblical title al-ab ("The Father") he occasionally referred to Jesus as (Per.) ibn-am ("my Son").

[Christians and Christian influence upon the Bab: some concluding notes.](#)

From the forgoing sections it can be seen that while the Bāb seems to have been deeply impressed by Christians he said little or nothing positive about Christianity. Its theology and soteriology are both directly or indirectly eclipsed by Islamo-Bābi doctrinal norms which highlight both tawhid and a super-montesitic apophatic theology. The Bāb so elevated Islamic loci of the mashīyya (Divine Will) that Christocentric religiosity was very much a thing of the past.

The Bāb's statements about Christians and Christianity served to pave the way for the later Bahā'i rejection of consubstantial trinitarianism though they did not prevent Baha'-Allah from affirming and highlighting the cosmic salvific effect the concrete crucifixion of Jesus. Bahā'i scripture both categorically affirms the concrete historicity of the crucifixion of Jesus and gives a an interpretation to the *shubbiḥā la-hum* ("it seemed to them" Q. 4:157a) phrase which wholly bypasses the quasi-doecetic and traditional Islamic dedial of the crucifixion of Jesus himself. Abd al-Baha' explained the crucifixion of Jesus as a kind of martyrdom with definite salvific and timeless, universal ramifications without affirmation of the usual Christian doctrines of atonement for sin.

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[1]

2 I place trinity in quote marks for the reason that it is not always or necessarily orthodox trinitarianism that is rejected in the Qur'ān and writings of the Bāb cf. W .M.Watt, 'The Christianity Criticised in the Qur'ān' MW LVII (1967), pp.197-201.

3 These words are attributed to Imān `Alī in the Bāb's Risālah Dhahabiyya (INBMC) 86:94.

4 See for example, ibid., esp.93ff; Risāla fī al-nubuwwat khaṣṣah (INBMC) 14:321ff; Dalā'il-i sab`ah p.1ff

5 See for example, Ṣaḥīfa-yi `adliyya (n.p. n.d.), (III), p.15ff; QA LXII (f.107a).

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7 Possibly because the name Mūsā (Moses) begins with the letter mīm (= abjad 40).

8 Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara, f.254f. See also, ibid., f.12 (on Q. 2:1-2); f. 264 (on 2:116). cf. Tafsīr sūrat al-tawhīd (INBMC 69:2-13), p.10ff.

2 Tafsīr Bismillāh (TBA.MS. 6014C), p.361. cf. Tafsīr sūrat al-`aṣr, f.96f.

3 Ibid. f. 84ff, 98. See also T. al-hā' [I] (in INBMC 14), 238f, 257f; 'Reply to three questions of Mīrzā Muhammad Sa`id Zawara' (in INBMC 69), p.423ff.

1 This text is quoted in the Bāb's 'Reply to questions of Mīrzā Muammad Sa`id Zawara' (INBMC 69:425. See also, Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara f. 195 (Q.2:62); Tafsīr Bismillāh (TBA Ms. 6014C) f.339(b); Tafsīr sūrat al-kawthar (Browne Coll. Ms. Or. F 10

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[2](#) Cf. Tafsīr sūrat al-Baqara, f.11ff; Tafsīr Nahnu wajh Allāh (TBA Ms. 6006C) f. 68f.

[3](#) See for example, Ṣaḥīfa bayn al-ḥaramayn (Browne Coll. Ms. Or. F 7[9], fol.27ff. It is important to note in connection with the Bāb's use of such expressions as shakl al-tathlīth ("tripartite form") and haykal al-tarbā` ("quadratic temple") that the shahada contains three different letters (alif, lām and hā') in four words -- not that this is the only key to the Bāb's use of such terminology.

[1](#) See Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara f.195 (on Q.2:62). The full sense of the Bāb's comments are obscure.

[3](#) Tafsīr Bismillāh (TBA Ms. 6014 C), fol.339b

[5](#)

[1](#) The Bāb's commentary on this ḥadīth (attributed to Imam `Ali) is contained in INBMC 14:409b-417 and that on the Lawh al-Hafiz in TBA Ms. 6006C, pp.79-80.