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Subject: Irfan colloquium 1996b -- Abstracts

[Provisional program with abstracts]

Dear IRAJ & ROB,

Irfan colloquium 1996b

FRIDAY EVENING

7.00 pm. Welcome... Moojan Momen & Robert Stockman ...

Opening remarks: Baha'i Scholarship and the Irfan Colloquia , Iraj Ayman + Robert Stockman.

7.30 Stephen Lambden

- Christianity and the Baha'i Faith: An Historical and Doctrinal Overview

8.00 Iraj Ayman.

- The Mission of Religion,

SATURDAY MORNING

10.00 Nuha Sabour-Woolmington,

- Some Thoughts on the Surat al-Ism ("Surah of the Name") of Baha'u'llah

This presentation will center upon the Surat al-Ism ("Sura of the Name") of Baha'u'llah which was revealed for Mulla Şādiq-i Muqaddas-i Khurasanī on whom the title Ism Allāh al-Aşdaq ("The Name of God, the Most Truthful") was conferred. A Shaykhi then follower of the Bāb Ism Allāh al-Aşdaq was one of the few survivors among those Babis who had assembled in 1848/9 at the Shrine of Shaykh Tabarsi. Almost twenty years later, around 1866/7, he gave his allegiance to Baha'u'llah and was the recipient of the Surat al-Ism (c. 1867?). He passed away in 1889 CE being posthumously referred to by `Abdu'l-Baha in 1919 as one of the `Hands of the Cause of God'.

Roughly half of the (unpublished) Surat al-Isim was translated by Shoghi Effendi in his compilation of English translations *Gleanings From the Writings of Baha'u'llah* (1935; section CXXXVI). A well-known part of this translation reads, "Intone, O my servant, the verses of God that have been received by thee". Having examined the full Arabic text and attempted to complete the translation I shall comment upon its previously untranslated beginning and ending which offers glimpses into the life of Mullā Şādiq-i Khurasani. My presentation will also highlight the use of Arabic imagery to express particular spiritual truths and to convey them to the hearer/reader in a way that inspires contemplation and leaves a memorable effect.

11.00 **Moojan Momen,**

- **The God of Baha'u'llah**

In the writings of Baha'u'llah, there are many statements that relate to the Ultimate Reality which in the Western religions is called God. These statements can be and have been interpreted as pointing to several different views of this Reality. In this paper some of these different views are described. Baha'u'llah has also resolved this question of the way that human beings should think about Ultimate Reality, both at the theoretical level and the operational level. This paper attempts an exploration of these ways in which Baha'u'llah has resolved the question.

12.00 **Open session**

2.00 **Robert Stockman.**

- **Millennialism in the Baha'i Faith: Progressive and Catastrophic Themes**

4.0 **Fariba Hedayati.**

- **"Immortality and the Afterlife: Some Christian, Baha'i and Modern Western Secular Perspectives"**

The presentation will set the scene with a survey of clinical definitions of "life", "clinical death", "brain-stem death" and other intermediate human states. The technology of intensive-care has contributed greatly to the prolongation of life. It has, however, also created a new set

of medical, legal and societal problems. These include a reexamination of the accepted notions about death and the rights of the terminally ill and their families.

Concepts of the afterlife, the soul, human immortality and resurrection will be discussed with a primary focus on Christian and Baha'i doctrines. There will also be an examination of the nineteenth century popular belief of the causative relation between "death" and "religion", focusing upon select theories of a number of major thinkers, including Marx and Freud. This theory has been widely challenged and no longer holds weight within the modern academic community. Some counter-arguments will also be presented.

Rites of passage associated with death, as observed by various traditions, will be seen within the context of serving the dual functions of aiding the transition of the dead (individual) and that of the bereaved (society) into a state of equilibrium.

The phenomenon of the near-death experience (NDE) has been studied systematically since the mid 1970s. This has led to much public interest and speculation regarding the possibilities of the survival of the spiritual human reality after death. Certain Baha'is have examined aspects of the NDE phenomenon in the light of Baha'i scriptural passages in an attempt to confirm human immortality.

The quest for immortality within modern western secularized society takes the form of speculations, theories and futuristic sciences and methods. One popular instance is the science of "cryonics" which involves the freezing of parts of the human body for resuscitation at a future date when the technology permits this. The following observation shows the marketing techniques employed as a shift of emphasis from spiritual to physical immortality. It also demonstrates the appeal of the "death" industry to the quest of modern western society for the eternal continuation of the human being.

"Although scientists now know that death is an extended event, and that the brain and other body tissues live long after "death" is declared, most Americans view death as a singular event -- the transition of the soul from this reality to another. This cultural conflict is more than scientific versus religious, it's also rational (thinking) versus emotional (feeling). It is the emotional momentum of our considerations of death that resists the ideological challenge of cryonics. In the present, cryonicists may have to suffer the

experience of having people they love die unnecessarily (in a scientific sense) in order to satisfy the social myths about death. In the future, after our social understanding of death becomes more aligned with our scientific view, this will change." [Journal of the MegaHealth Society, Vol. 4, No. 5, Issue #19, October 1988]

SUNDAY

10.00 Stephen Lambden.

- **The Tablet of Baha'u'llah to Pope Pius IX (1846-1878)**

It was perhaps a year after his being exiled to the then Ottoman prison city of Akka' (Acre, Palestine) in August 1868 CE., that Baha'u'llah (d.1892) dispatched his almost twenty-page Arabic Tablet to Pope Pius IX (Pontificate, 1846-1878). The son of a count this pope, named Giovanni Maria Mastai-Ferretti, was born in Senigallia (Ancona, Italy) on May 13th 1792. It may not have been long after Baha'u'llah's dispatching the Tablet to the Pope that papal temporal power was virtually ended. Following the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War and the seizure and occupation of Rome by Victor Emmanuel (Sept. 1870) Pius IX came to see himself as a dethroned sovereign and a (self-imposed) prisoner within the Vatican where he died in 1878.

it was in December 1854 after consulting the cardinals and bishops that Pius IX solemnly defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Bull *Ineffabilis Deus* -- he has come to be known as 'The Pope of the Immaculate Conception'. Increasing the level of Catholic Marian devotion this non-Biblical dogma basically indicates that the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus, was herself born free of the alleged "stain of original sin". Among the most important events of the reign of Pius IXth was the convocation of the first Vatican Council (1869-70) at which a definition of papal primacy and infallibility was set forth. It may well have been during the course of this 20th ecumenical council that the Tablet to the Pope was communicated and received -- precise details are not known.

While as Christ returned in "his most great majesty" (bi-majdihi al-a`zam) Baha'u'llah extended the hand of salvation to all on earth, Pius IX maintained an intransigent attitude towards all deistic, humanistic and non-Catholic religious avenues to Truth and God. The

Pope gloried in the traditional axiom *extra ecclesium nulla salus* ("No salvation outside the [Catholic] church"). We do not know the reaction of Pius IX to Baha'u'llah's bold claim to be the return of Christ "come down from heaven" but it cannot have been favorable in the light of his exclusivist soteriological stance and claim of infallibility.

The Tablet to Pope Pius IX is the first of the 'Tablets to the Kings' appended by Baha'u'llah to the (revised) Surat al-Haykal ("Surah of the Temple", late 1869?) expressive of the 'New Jerusalem' of the Baha'i Faith. It may thus also be the Tablet accorded by Baha'u'llah the apocalyptic, Qur'anic epithet 'The [Destructive] Cry [of Punishment]' (al-sayhah) (Iqtidar, 298; cf. GPB:212). Shoghi Effendi referred to the Tablet to Pope Pius IX as a "most weighty Epistle" and contrasted the outwardly polarized earthly conditions of its imprisoned author and the powerful ecclesiastical recipient (GPB:209).

In this paper key themes and aspects of the Biblical interpretation implicit within the 'Tablet to Pope Pius IX' will be commented upon including the identification of the Bab as the "return" of John the Baptist and of its author as the returned Christ who is the "Father" (see Isaiah 9:6).

11.00 Seena Fazel.

- **Understanding Exclusivist Baha'i texts**

Baha'i scholars have begun to explore the literary qualities of Baha'u'llah's writings, arguing that a number of rhetorical techniques are used to make the religious doctrines of the Baha'i Faith immediate and plausible to readers. This paper examines other language games of the Baha'i writings from a study of those texts which appear exclusivist. I argue that the languages of survival, confession, and action can be used to reinterpret these texts in line with an explicitly pluralist Baha'i theology. This hypothesis is tested on three apparently exclusivist texts in Baha'i scripture: verses from the first paragraph of the Kitab-I Aqdas, the Tablet of Ahmad, and 'The Epistle from the Son of the Wolf'.

2.00 Open session / 2.00 Ismail Velasco / 3.00 Open session

