

Shaykhī Bābī-Bahā'ī and Religious Studies Seminar, Newcastle upon Tyne July 2012



Abstracts - in alphabetical order by author...

Francesco Cappellari (Edinburgh, UK)

- **'Light upon Light : Three Hermeneutical approaches to the Qur'ānic Text (24:35)'**.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the hermeneutical richness of the Qur'ān, showing and comparing three different and emblematic interpretations of the suggestive Qur'ānic light verse (*ayāt al-nūr*), from a *sunni*, *shī'ī* and *ṣūfī* standpoint respectively. The selected representative authors are the classical Sunnī commentator Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), the Shī'ī 'Alī bin Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (tenth century), the Andalusian Sufi Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī, known as al-Shaykh al-Akbar (d. 1240). A brief contextualization will first introduce the science of interpretation in Islam and then the Qur'ānic context in which the light verse is located.

Phyllis Ghim-Lian Chew (Singapore)

- **The Four Gods of China**

China has long been considered by the Bahá'í Faith as a country with a great future—not just political, social and economic but also spiritual; possessing the capacity to be “a bright candle of the world of humanity”, and “promoting the principles of divine civilization.” This paper gives an etymological analysis of the four Gods of China, through the use of Chinese terminologies, namely, Shen 神, Shangdi 上帝, Tien 天, and Tao 道. These logographic inscriptions then become the framework from which we will be able to view the respective

emergence and practice of Shenism, Judaism, Confucianism, and Taoist-Buddhism in China. This paper concludes with a summary of the religio-cultural understanding of “the four Gods of China” and ends with a discussion of China’s religious future in relation to Baha’i principles and precepts.

Seena Fazel (Oxford, UK)

- **'Lessons learned and challenges ahead for contemporary Baha'i studies'.**

This paper will examine developments in academic Baha’i studies over the last decade, and present data on trends in outputs (such as publications, citations, and conferences). It will discuss the extent to which direct and indirect actions of individual Baha’is and others have contributed to these changes. A series of proposals to improve the current state of Baha’i studies is presented.

Stephen Lambden (UC-Merced, USA)

- **The Khaṣā'il-i sab`a (Seven Directives) of the Bāb, Some further considerations.**



This Risāla khaṣā'il-i sab`a ('The Treatise of the Seven Directives") of the Bāb is, aside from certain sūrahs of the Qayyūm al-asmā' and a few other pre-1845 CE writings, among the earliest legal-ritualistic writings of the Bāb. It sets forth the tokens, hallmarks or parameters for the conduct of the true believers in the Bāb consonant with the establishment of the pure religion of the new age of the millennial Kingdom of God. It was most probably composed in or near Bushire towards the end of the Bāb's extended (land and sea Ḥajj) pilgrimage journey (began from Shiraz-Bushire in September 1844) of 1844-5 CE before his arrival back in Shiraz, his birthplace and home city, in mid-late June or early July 1845.

Some details will be presented in this paper about the mss., text(s), translations or paraphrases and circumstances of revelation of the Risāla Khaṣā'il-i sab`a ('The Treatise of the Seven

Directives'), the seven religio-legal admonitions or injunctions. In concise summary form these seven hallmarks of early Bābī religiosity are that the true believer should observe (1) the carrying of a circular talisman; (2) the abandonment of smoking the 'hubble-bubble' or 'water-pipe' (qalyan); (3) the drinking of Chinese tea in the company of the 'people of certitude'; (4) mention of the Secreted Pillar [the Bāb] (al-rukṅ al-mustasirr) in the Shīṯī adhān ("Call to prayer") after the shahāda (Islamic testimony of faith); (5) devotional praise and prostration through the clay Turbat al-Ḥusayniyya (a token "Shrine of Imam Ḥusayn); (6) the recitation of the Ziyārat al-jami`a (the 'Comprehensive Visitation Prayer'; for Muhammad Fatima and all the twelve Imams) originating with the 10th Imam `Alī al-Hādī (d. 254/868) -- or less probably, the Bāb himself -- at certain devotional gatherings and other occasions, and (7) the wearing of an engraved white carnelian signet-ring.

- Riḍwān renewed, رِضْوَانٌ - رِضْوَانٌ : from the Bible to the Sūrat al-Riḍwān of the Bāb



This paper is about the term Riḍwān and its cognates in semitic lexicography, the Bible and select Islamic sacred writings. It is intended to provide something of the background to the key term riḍwān (=Per. riḍvān) in Bābī-Bahaṯī sacred literatures including the Sūrat al-Riḍwān and select other writings of Sayyid `Alī Muhammad Shirazi, the Bāb (d. Tabriz, 1850 CE). Occasional reference will also be made to alwāḥ (scriptural writings) of Mīrzā Ḥusayn `Alī Nūrī, Bahā`-Allāh(d. Acre, 1892) and his Bahāṯī successors. It is hoped that this survey will provide something of a context for communicating my provisional translation of the aforementioned Sūrat al-Riḍwān of the Bāb. Some light may also be thrown upon the numerous references to Riḍwān in Bahaṯī primary sources.

Moojan Momen (Biggleswade, UK)

- **'Apocalyptic Thinking and Process Thinking: The Bahā'ī Approach to the Religious Word'.**
- **Paper II –Title and abstract forthcoming**

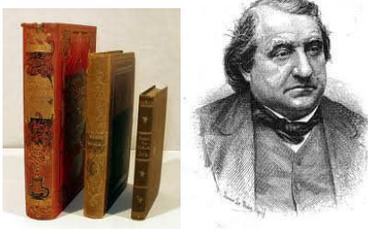
Wendi Momen (Biggleswade, UK)

- **'Abdu'l-Baha's Elucidation of the Concept of the Oneness of Humanity on His Western Travels.**

The central teaching of the Bahā'ī Faith is the oneness of humankind. Although wholly associated with the Bahā'ī Faith today, it was a very difficult concept for Bahā'īs in earlier times to put into practice in their personal lives. As 'Abdu'l-Bahā travelled in the West in 1911 and again in 1912-13, He not only spoke extensively about this principle in numerous meetings but demonstrated its meaning in practical ways and challenged His followers to take up the fight against racism within themselves and their society. This paper looks at 'Abdu'l-Bahá's elucidation of the principle of the oneness of humankind in His talks in the West, primarily in the United States, and through His own actions.

Geoff Nash (Sunderland, UK)

- **'A Lesson from History: Ernest Renan's narrative of early Christianity'.**



Renan's reputation does not rest on his philological studies in Semitic languages or his History of The Origins of Christianity, but - as Edward Said argued - on his reputed racism. As an expert in Biblical studies he cedes authority to his German contemporaries: Strauss, Welhausen, Graf and Gunkel. However, while his narrative of Christian origins does incorporate his (supposedly) anti-Semitic views, it also

approximates to the challenge of modern ideas about religion much more closely than the academic Germans as well as in comparison with Robertson Smith, who in spite of his advanced Biblical Criticism still maintained a committed Christian view.

Renan addresses the kind of issues which surfaced in his own time and which are now general in the secular criticism of religion: religious authority (especially theocracy, with its surveillance over the morally suspect and exclusion of the unorthodox) v individual freedom (the right of the individual to freedom of thought and to dissent); belief in the supernatural (which often amounted in Renan's view to superstition) v belief in science and rationalism; traditionalism v progress.

Renan's historical narrative necessarily focuses on well-aired issues surrounding the emergence of Christianity: its separation from Judaism; its struggle to maintain orthodoxy in the face of multiple sects; its relations, replete with persecution and martyrdom, with the Roman authorities; its challenge to the pagan world, and its eventual vanquishing of paganism. In *History of The Origins of Christianity* Renan offers an astute warts-and-all portrayal of the growth of a religion from obscurity to the verge of world leadership. He charts along the way its polemical contempt towards pagan religion and practice; its designation of a persecutor like Nero as anti-Christ; Church leaders' obsequious petitioning of emperors in the belief that it was the Church's destiny to take over the empire; the bitter feud with Jews and the latter's self-destruction in fruitless uprisings against the Romans, paving the way for the victory of Christianity.

In short the French historian – noted by Bahā'īs for Shoghi Effendi's inclusion of quotations from his works in footnotes to *The Dawnbreakers* – represents a peculiarly salutary example of the study of the early years of religion advocated by the Guardian. Renan's narrative, I would contend, presents a challenge both in the way that it charts the rise of a formidable historical force, its modern criticism of religion, as well as in the lessons it proffers for those who would follow in Christianity's footsteps.

Lil Osborne (London, UK)

- **'The extraordinary life and work of Robert Felkin – Bahā'ī Mage'**

In investigating the relationship between the Bahā'īs and the Western Esoteric Tradition several individuals emerge as important in both circles, however, none are as prominent in as many fields as Robert Felkin. Felkin was notable as a physician, a missionary, an Anglican, a magician and a Bahā'ī. The purpose of this paper is to examine his life and work in the context of his search for Ascended Masters and the multiplicity of identities and roles he assumed and in doing so I wish to reevaluate the relationship between Magical practice and religion in the context of multiculturalism.

- **'Pre-pubescent Pole Dancers and the re-emergence of Paganism'**

This is a work in progress which seeks to examine the role of the school curriculum in the re-emergence of Paganism in England. Children's literature has frequently been cited as a factor in the resurgence of belief in magic, from traditional fairy tales retold to Harry Potter, however, some material imbedded in the primary curriculum may have been a deliberate attempt to pass on to a new generation survivals of what was believed to be pre Christian festivals and culture. More curious still is the Baha'i connection to this school mystery.

Sholeh Quinn (UC-Merced, USA)

- **Interpreting the Mi'rāj in Shaykhī, Bābī, and Bahā'ī texts**



The story of the Prophet Muhammad's night journey into heaven, though initially associated with certain brief Qur'ānic verses, became a focal point for commentators, analysts, poets, artists, and others. Legends about the mi'rāj quickly developed in the first two centuries

after the establishment of Islam, as the story eventually found its way into numerous genres of Islamicate writing.

In 19th century Iran, certain elements in the story of the prophet's night journey had become a source of lively and robust debate. In particular, certain Shī'ī and post-Shī'ī commentators focused on the question as to whether or not the ascension of the Prophet was a spiritual or physical event. Among the groups that participated in this debate were the Shaykhis, the Bābīs, and the Bahā'īs. The authors to be examined in this study include Karīm Khān Kirmānī (1810-1871), Sayyid 'Alī Muhammad Shirazī "the Bāb" (1819-1850), and Mīrzā Ḥusayn 'Alī Nūrī, "Baha'u'llah" (1817-1892). That these three contemporaries interpreted the mi'rāj in different ways reflects the diversity and fluidity of the topic at this time. The purpose of this paper is to compare and contrast the positions of these three figures in order better to understand the varying perspectives of their religious movements.

Ismael Velasco (Bristol, UK)

- **A Bahā'ī pantheism?**

This paper will explore previously undiscussed dimensions of the Bahā'ī concept of the Primal Will. It will include a consideration of such passages as assert that "God is like the sea and all creation as its waves". This given that the Primal Will is also identical with Nature and may indicate the spiritual station of the Manifestation of God.
