

## The Bābī- Bahā transcendence of khātamiyya (Q.33:40b), the finality of prophethood.

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مَا كَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ أَبَا أَحَدٍ مِّن رِّجَالِكُمْ وَلَكِن رَّسُولَ اللَّهِ وَخَاتَمَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا

Muhammad is not the father of any man among but he is the rasūl-Allāh (Messenger of God) and the khatām al-nabbiyyīn (the `seal' , `last'. `acme) of the prophets (Q. 33:40).

Understanding the reading khātām to mean "last" in Q. 33:40, Muslims have considered this verse foundational for the post-qur'ānic doctrine of the `finality of prophethood`, that no nabī (or rasūl) would appear after Muhammad, the final rasūl Allāh (messenger of God). Probably echoing earlier claims of Manī (d. c. 277), the son of a Parthian prince and messianic claimant (al-Bīrūnī, Sachau, 1879:190) the (Aramaic loanword?) khātām came throughout the Muslim world to indicate that the succession of prophets was "sealed up" or "ended" in Muhammad just as it had been in Manī. It was thought that after Muhammad, even after the eschatological consummation, no future prophet would appear to found a new or renewed religion. Many commentators on Q. 33:40 have it that the Islamic belief in the second coming of Jesus indicates the reappearance of this nabī (a prophet) in a role subservient to Muhammad and Islamic law on the Day of resurrection (Zamaksharī, al-Kashshāf, 3:544-5).

The finality of prophethood through Muhammad became a firmly accepted Islamic dogma. Even though it is not at all clear that the absolute finality of prophethood was the original intention of Q. 33:40, this is today a firmly entrenched in

both Sunnī and Shīī orthodoxy (Friedmann, 1986; 1989: 49ff). Any hint of another post-Islamic prophetic claim or a challenge to the *ʿajz al-Qurʿān* (inimitability of the Q.) has generally met with the dire consequences of theological castigation, accusations of heresy and imprisonment or death. Early on in his *Izhāq al-bāṭil* (The Crushing of Falsehood, 1845) on the basis of his analysis the QA the third Shaykhī leader Karīm Khān Kirmānī (d. 1871) correctly accused the Bāb of such heresy as went well beyond the constraints of Shīī piety.

From the outset of his six year messianic career (1844-50) the Bāb in his QA. (mid. 1260/1844) and other writings (INBMC 91) challenged both the finality of prophethood and the inimitability of the Q. In the light of his eschatologically charged, high Shīī- Shaykhī imamology, he modified the standard understanding of the 'finality of prophethood' by incorporating rewritten forms of the *khātim al-nabiyyīn* (Q.33:40b) into his first major work (QA):

O people of the earth! God did not create Muhammad the father of any of your men but he made him in the midmost heart of the celestial Throne ( *fī kabd al-ʿarsh*) for His greatest [eschatological] Day. God, hath in very truth concluded this matter as something hidden and treasured up (QA 44:164)...

The Bāb's rewrites of Q. 33:40 such as the above modify or pass over the note of finality which most Muslims read into Q. 33:40b. He regularly all but negates any tone of the finality of prophethood in Q. 33:40b. Through his supernatural link with the *Dhikr*, and/or occulted twelfth Imām, the *Ḥujjat-Allāh* (messianic 'Proof of God'), the Bāb

several times radically modified any straightforward notion of the finality of prophethood.

In QA 4 the Bāb addresses the ahl al-madīna ("people of the city" of Shīrāz?) accusing them of polytheism if they acknowledge Muhammad as the "seal of the Prophets" and affirm his book (the Q.) yet fail to bear witness to the fact that God also revealed the QA to the Bāb ("Our servant"; cf. Q. 2:23) which is certainly "the like of it" (the Q.). In QA 64 the Bāb similarly set down a messianic rewrite of Q.12:63 in the light of Q. 33:40. He exhorts believing Muslims gathered before Muhammad, the khātam al-nabiyyīn, to utter the following words:

O Our father [Muhammad] the [messianic] Dhikr ("Remembrance"), is a further measure (al-kail) which has been denied to us. So dispatch with us, the sign of the Dhikr for the greater magnification (li' l-takbīr al-akbar)... (QA 64:260).

A few sūras later in QA 66 the Bāb speaks of a "Book" (= QA) sent down to inform the people that the messianic Ḥujjat -Allāh (Proof of God = 12th Imam) is closely associated with the Dhikr even the likeness of the Ḥujjat (Proof) nigh Muhammad, the khātam al-nabiyyīn. It seems to be implied that the messianic "Hour" is about to be realized through the close relationship between the Dhikr (Remembrance) and the twelfth Imam or Hujjat-Allāh, the messianic Proof of God. In subsequent years (1848-50) the sometimes thinly veiled 'messianic secret' of the Bāb's being the Qā'im / Mahdī was publicly broadcast and his more exalted claims openly promulgated.

In their writings the Bāb and Bahā'-Allāh never ceased referring to Muhammad as the khātām al-nabbiyyīn (INBMC 91; Bahā'-Allāh KI:05ff/ 87ff). Q 33:40b was not understood as underlining the finality of prophethood in the sense of outruling an eschatological theophany. Great messianic, theophanological importance was given by the Bāb and Bahā'-Allāh to the qur'ānic references to liqā'- Allāh, the latter day meeting or encounter with God (Q. 6:31;130,154; 7:51,147; 10:7ff; 13:2 etc). The word khātām in khātām al-nabiyyīn need not signify "seal" implying "last" of the prophets but more appropriately indicate Muhammad as the "acme of the prophets" during the era before the yawm al-qiyāma (Day of Resurrection) when the liqā' - Allāh through a messianic maẓhar-i ilāhī would be realized. Then the liqā'- Allāh is realized through the parousia of the theophanic maẓāhar-l ilāhī. In it on these lines that Bahā'-Allāh in his K. īqān argues that khatām al-nabiyyīn as an epithet of Muhammad underlines the elevated nature of the Arabian prophet and not the absolute finality of prophethood. Understood with the sense of utter finality, khātām al-nabiyyīn degenerates into one of the subuḥāt al-jalāl ("veils of glory") which hinder the realization of unfolding reality (KI:129f/ 107f,136-7).

Among the earliest passages of Bahā'-Allāh dealing with the issue of the khātām al-nabiyyīn (Q. 33:40b) is his testimony to the theophanic mission of the Bāb in his L.Ḥurūfāt al-muqaṭṭa`āt (Tablet on the Isolated Letters, c. 1858). The Bāb, it is said, came with all manner of "dazzling proofs" though the people "waxed proud" in their

denial despite the qur'ānic promise of the liqā'- Allāh. When God sealed prophethood (khatama al-nubuwwat ) through Muhammad (Q. 33:40) "he gave the servants the glad-tidings of the encounter with Him [God]" and the matter was "definitively resolved" (khatama al-makhtūm). In the person of the Bāb

"God came [unto them] in the shadows of the clouds (fī ḡalāl al-ghamām, Q.2:210), breathed into the Trumpet of the Cause (nafakha fī ṣūr al-amr; cf. Q.18:99; etc), split the Heaven asunder (inshaqqat al-samā' cf.Q.55:37;69:16;84:1) and crushed the mountains to dust (Q.56:5;69:14, etc) whereupon all retreated back upon their heels (cf. Q.3:144;6:71) (Ma' idih, 4:65).

Bahā'-Allāh continued to argue that in spite of the theophany of the Bāb the people acted like Jews and Christians. They continued to await the realization of the promises and the eschatological liqā'-Allāh. In his decade or so later lengthy Persian Tablet to `Alī Muhammad Sarrāj (c.1867 CE), Bahā'-Allāh himself touches upon the subject of the obscurity of eschatological prophecies in Abrahamic religious scripture. He highlights the supremely clear implications (aṣraḥ al-kalimāt) of finality in khātam al-nabbiyyīn (Q. 33:40b) but thinks it as an unacceptable veil inhibiting post-Islamic faith in another supreme agent of God. Despite its implications of finality, pure-hearted persons still came to true faith in Point of the Bayān (bi-irfān nuqṭa-yi bayān = the Bāb). Indeed, Bahā'-Allāh adds, such pure-hearted persons so comprehended the matter of khātimiyyat ("sealedness") that they would happily acknowledge the appearance of a

"prophet" (nabī) "from the beginning which has no beginning unto the end which has no end" (L. Sarrāj, Ma'idih, 7:28ff).

For the Bāb and Bahā'-Allāh the qur'ānic khātām al-nabiyyīn in no way rules out the theophany of divinity on the eschatological "Day of God" (yawm Allāh). Even if it is taken to outrule the finality of the appearance of a post-Muhammad nabī (prophet) or even rasūl (sent one) it does not outrule an eschatological theophany. Both the Bāb and Bahā'-Allāh claimed to be fully human yet fully divine maẓhar-i ilāhī in a way that transcends issues revolving around the meanings of khātām al-nabiyyīn. In fact Bahā'-Allāh so transcended these matters that in numerous theophanological passages he presents himself as having sent out the nabī and rasūl of the pre-Islamic era. In an important Arabic Tablet of the Acre period Bahā'-Allāh defends himself against accusations that he has contradicted the Muslim understanding of Q. 33:40b by stating:

You have assuredly confirmed [the truth] by what you have announced [in citing Q. 33:40b]. We do indeed testify that through him [Muhammad] messengership and prophethood (al-risāla wa' l-nubuwwa) were sealed up. Whomsoever after him [Muhammad] makes claim to such an elevated station is indeed in manifest error.... The carpet of prophethood (bisāṭ al-nubuwwa) has been rolled up and there has appeared the one who sent them out (arsal) [=Bahā'-Allāh] in manifest sovereignty... (Untitled Tablet to Ḥasan [L. Khātām al-nabbiyyīn]).

Bahā'ī arguments against the finality of prophethood usually operate on a somewhat lower level than these elevated theophanological challenges. In modern

Bahā'ī apologetics a distinction is often made between a future rasūl as a founding maẓhar-i ilāhī (Manifestation of God) and the role of the (lesser) nabī or secondary prophet. Diverse lexical and Islamic understandings of khātām (kh-t-m) are commented upon in the light of the non-finality of prophethood. The Islamic understandings of Q. 33:40b might, it is sometimes held, outrule the further appearance of Israelite type nabiyyīn (prophets) but this phrase does not negate future appearances of rasūl or mursalīn (sent messengers) the like of which is hinted at in the following Qur'ānic verse:

O children of Adam! There shall come among you mursalīn (sent messengers) from among yourselves rehearsing my signs unto you... (Q. 7:43)

Many thousands of eschatological traditions were assiduously compiled into sometimes bulky Istidlāliyya (testimonia) tracts by 19th-20th century disciples of the Bāb and Bahā'-Allāh. Considerable attention was given to overcoming any finality implied by Q. 33:40b. <sup>1</sup> Some, at Bahā'-Allāh's command, followed the lead of the Bāb's Dalā'il-i sab'ih and his own K-īqān. This with a view to arguing that all manner of messianic predictions and apocalyptic "signs" had come to pass (cf. INBMC 80). Bābīs and Bahā'īs claimed that for many thousands of years divine messengers (rusul) or maẓhar-i ilāhī (divine Manifestations) will found and progressively renew the eternal religion of God (= Islam).

It is today a central Bābī- Bahā'ī teaching that future divine messengers (rusul) or maẓhar-i ilāhī (divine manifestations) will, for many thousands of years, found and

progressively renew the eternal religion of God (= 'Islam'). The Bāb's claim to be the Shī'ī messiah did not prevent or inhibit his also predicting numerous future messianic advents of the originally Sufī figure man yuzhiruhu-Allāh (Goldziher, 1921 tr. Lambden & Walker 1992). This is indicated in a passage from the Bāb's K. panj sha'n (Book of the Five Grades; 1850 CE) where the following words could be taken to indicate an infinite number of future theophanies of the Bābī theophanic messiah, man yuzhiru-hu-Allāh (He whom God shall make manifest').

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.. And after the Bayān it is [the theophany of] man yuzhiru-hu Allāh (He whom God will make manifest) [1]. And after man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [1] man yuzhiruhu Allāh [2]. And after man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [2] man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [3]. And after man yuzhiru-hu Allāh, [3] man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [4]. And after man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [4] man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [5]. And after man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [5] man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [6]. And after man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [6] man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [7]. And after man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [7] man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [8]. And after man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [8] man yuzhiru-hu Allāh [9]. (K. Panj: 314-5, cf. 397).

The position of the Bāb is thus the exact opposite of the Islamic proponents of the doctrine of the finality of prophethood. The mention of nine successive theophanies



most likely indicates their endless future realization. Towards the end of his life in his *Haykal al-dīn* (Temple of Religion, 1266/ 1850) the Bāb made increasing mention of "He whom God will make manifest". He variously indicated the time of his advent at after nine (=1269/1852), nineteen (= 1279 =1862-3) or between 1511 (abjad of Ar. *ghiyāth* = `the Assistance') and 2001 years (abjad of Ar. *mustaghath* = `The One Invoked for help') from 1260/1844 (MacEoin,1986:95-155). These latter figures were understood by Bahā'-Allāh as either numerically and messianically suggestive Names of God of non-chronological import, or allusions to the time of another theophany after himself (Bahā'-Allāh L. Khalīl Shīrāzī ; `O Thou Creator 'mss)

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**1** See *Gulpaygān ī*, K. Farā'id, index; *Isrāq Khavarī*, QI:383ff; *al-Tibyān wa'l-burhān*, I:59ff *Rawshānī*, *Khātamiyyat*; *Momen* 1999:34f, 87ff.