

Resurrection

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THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

MEMORANDUM

To: The Universal House of Justice

Date: 14 September 1987

From: The Research Department

The Resurrection of Christ

With reference to the letter dated 9 July 1987, in which requests information on Baha'i concepts related to the Resurrection of Christ, we can offer the following information following our study of the question.

Before addressing the specific issue of the Resurrection, it is necessary to consider the general Baha'i standpoint with regard to Christianity and the Bible. In his letter dated 28 March 1941 addressed to the believers throughout the West, Shoghi Effendi emphasizes:

"As to the position of Christianity, let it be stated without any hesitation or equivocation that its divine origin is unconditionally acknowledged, that the Sonship and Divinity of Jesus Christ are fearlessly asserted, that the divine inspiration of the Gospel is fully recognized, that the reality of the mystery of the Immaculacy of the Virgin Mary is confessed, and the primacy of Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, is upheld and defended...." ("The Promised Day is Come", rev. ed. (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1980); p. 109)

With particular regard to the Bible, a letter dated 28 May 1984 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice in response to questions raised by an individual believer outlines two principles to be observed in studying this book.

"In studying the Bible Baha'is must bear two principles in mind. The first is that many passages in Sacred Scripture are intended to be taken metaphorically, not literally, and some of the paradoxes and apparent contradictions which appear are intended to indicate this. The second is the fact that the text of the early Scriptures, such as the Bible, is not wholly authentic..."

The House of Justice also gives an elucidation of the Baha'i understanding of Christ's Resurrection in this letter:

"Concerning the Resurrection of Christ you quote the twenty-fourth chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke, where the account stresses the reality of the appearance of Jesus to His disciples who, the Gospel states, at first took Him to be a ghost. From a Baha'i point of view the belief that the Resurrection was the return to life of a body of flesh and blood, which later rose from the earth into the sky is not reasonable, nor is it necessary to the essential truth of the disciples' experience, which is that Jesus did not cease to exist when He was crucified (as would have been the belief of many Jews of that period), but that His Spirit, released from the body, ascended to the presence of God and continued to inspire and guide His followers and preside over the destinies of His dispensation."

Selections of extracts from the Baha'i writings and from letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice concerning the Old and New Testament, and the Resurrection are enclosed for the Spiritual Assembly's information.

Baha'u'llah explains the purpose underlying the use of symbols and metaphors throughout the Holy Texts in "The Kitab-i-Iqan" (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1985) on page 49:

"Know verily that the purpose underlying all these symbolic terms and abstruse allusions, which emanate from the Revealers of God's holy Cause, hath been to test and prove the peoples of the world; that thereby the earth of the pure and illuminated hearts may be known from the perishable and barren soil. From time immemorial such hath been the way of God amidst His creatures, and to this testify the records of the sacred books."

It is thus in the nature of such symbolic terms as resurrection and return that differing views concerning their meaning develop. Indeed, there are differences among Christian scholars themselves regarding the Resurrection of Christ, as the "Abingdon Dictionary of Living Religions" (Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1981) points out on page 619: "A number of Christian theologians today regard resurrection as a metaphor which expresses the conviction that the whole self has a future beyond death, but others reaffirm the importance of the traditional belief that Jesus' body was raised from death."

In light of the ongoing discussion within Christian theological circles, it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to adduce a "proof" of the Baha'i understanding of Christ's resurrection which would be acceptable to all Christians. The Research Department suggests that it would be more fruitful to focus on such points of agreement as are outlined by the beloved Guardian on page 109 of "The Promised Day Is Come".

[THE COMPILATION ATTACHED TO THIS MEMO IS IN THE COMPILATIONS SECTION OF ARCHIVE UNDER "EXTRACTS CONCERNING THE RESURRECTION".]