Baha'i Life and Existentialism

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Abstract:[1] This paper explores selected dynamics of Bahá'í life, what Shoghi Effendi calls "living the life,"[2] through a correlation to theistic existentialism. This correlation demonstrates a partial harmonization between the Bahá'í teachings, which are based on revelation, and basic concepts of the modern philosophy of existentialism, which derive from reason and religious experience. "Religious experience" means here both the extraordinary, discontinuous experience and the continuous experience of day-to-day life.[3] It should be noted, however, that the comparison does not correlate on all points. To this end, I have followed the method recommended by Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957), the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, that the Bahá'í teachings be correlated with the "...the modern aspects of philosophy and science." In responding to a student who had completed advanced studies related to the Bahá'í Faith, he wrote through his secretary: "It is hoped that all the Bahá'í students will follow the noble example you have set before them and will, henceforth, be led to investigate and analyse the principles of the Faith and to correlate them with the modern aspects of philosophy and science. Every intelligent and thoughtful young Bahá'í should always approach the Cause in this way, for therein lies the very essence of the principle of independent investigation of truth."[4]

INTRODUCTION

Scholars will find a basis for dialogue and fruitful research in the relationship of existentialism to Bahá'í belief following two lines of approach: (1) a metaphysical philosophy of being (2) insights of the journey of the spiritual self and the concrete challenges of human existence. Ian Kluge has combined both aspects in his instructive paper "The Call into Being: Introduction to a Bahá'í Existentialism" (Lights of Irfán, Book Four, 79-96). I will follow here mainly option (2).This paper explores the experiences of the divine self (nafs-i-ilahí) engaged in the search for truth, which is synonymous with the search for God/Reality, by elucidating the following themes: (1) roots and basic concepts of existentialism. (2) the experiences of the seeking self, Kierkegaard's "inquiring subject" in the

passionate search for God. (3) the function of existence and essence while being-in-the-world. (4) extraordinary moments of spiritual crisis and divine illumination, "the existential moment" and "the epiphanic moment" respectively. (5) the return to the soul and a theology of hope. (6) existential themes in Bahá'í sacred history. (7) the "leap of faith" in Bahá'u'lláh's narrative theology of the true seeker. (8) existentialism in Bahá'í studies. (9) tensions between existentialism and Bahá'í belief.

THE ROOTS AND EXPRESSIONS OF EXISTENTIALISM

In the next two sections, I will set out some roots and basic concepts of existentialism to contextualize the discussion. Existentialism in general, and Christian French and German existentialism in particular, unlike most philosophical schools, engages with real psycho-moral-spiritual issues of the human condition. Existentialism philosophizes by interpreting the individual's lived experiences (le vécu) within a larger Lebensphilosophie (philosophy of life).

The Dane S?ren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), the father of existentialism, coined the term "existentialist" and the Catholic existentialist and playwright, Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973), first referred to the philosophy of "existentialism" in the 1940's, although he later disavowed the term, probably because of the word's close association with the atheism of Sartre ("The Drama of Existence," Philosophy Now 4). The various branches of existentialism are too loosely connected to form a school of thought, since no common set of doctrines has been formulated.[5] Existentialism is rather a style that treats common themes which have found diverse expression in philosophy, theology, literature, drama and psychiatry (Macquarrie, Existentialism 256-70).

Despite its recognizable modern voice, existentialism has ancient roots that reach back to the Greek myths of estrangement and loss which are depictions of the "human condition," an existentialist phrase that has seeped into popular culture. According to Paul Tillich (1886-1965), the self-styled "fifty-percent existentialist and fifty-percent essentialis theologian " (Perspectives on 19th and 20th Century Protestant Theology 245), a proto-existentialist theme is found in Plato's allegory of the cave in which the individual is liberated from the body of the cave through the soul's contemplation of the Form of the Good: "But Plato's existentialism appears in his myth of the human soul in prison, of coming down from the world of essences into the body which is its prison, and then being liberated from the cave" (Tillich, Perspectives 101).

The biblical roots of existentialism are found in the Genesis allegory of the banishment of humanity's original parents from the Garden of Eden which echoes a familiar existentialist theme of estrangement and loss (Gen. 3:1-24). The philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) based his concept of "Falleness," superficial, inauthentic living that results in estrangement from self and others, on a secularized interpretation of the fall of Adam (Being and Time 220). According to ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's interpretation of this myth (mythos, sacred story), the sin of Adam and Eve, traditionally interpreted in the

Judeo-Christian tradition as the breaking of a divine command, was prompted by the dictates of self, symbolized by the serpent, signifying attachment to the human rather than the divine world (Some Answered Questions 123-24).[6] This attachment or sin resulted in "exile" or estrangement from the divine self, which the church interprets, based on Romans 5: 12-21, as original sin by which man is born corrupt and guilty. Existential moods are also found in Blaise Pascal, St. Augustine, the Psalmist, Ecclesiastes and the Book of Job. In theology, some of the prominent theistic existentialists are Gabriel Marcel, Berdyaev, Buber, Brunner, Tillich, and at the antipodes of one another, Bultmann and Barth.[7] Walter Kaufmann hears in Dostoevsky's Notes From Underground (1864) the first notes of the jarring and strident voices of individualism that were to be heard later in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche (Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre 12-14).

The pessimistic stereotypes of the existent conveyed by atheistic existentialists, such as Sartre and Camus, contrasts with the more empathetic interpersonal relations of Heidegger's Sorge/Besorgen/Fürsorge (care/concern/solicitude), Buber's "I-Thou" relationship, his philosophy of dialogue and personal being, based on the notion of Begegnung (encounter), and Gabriel Marcel's optimistic "métaphysique de l'espoir" (metaphysic of hope). The positive face of existentialism is also found in the psychiatry of Ludwig Binswanger (1881-1966) and Médard Boss (1903-1990), who designated their system of analysis as Daseinsanalyse, terminology taken from Heidegger's concept of Dasein (lit. "being there"), the self-conscious being of human existence. The keynote of existential psychiatry is healing neurosis by finding meaning through the conscious, self-determination of one's attitude in the present moment. Consciously choosing to find meaning in suffering will help to cure neurosis and assist the patient to accept and even transcend the impediments of body, mind and environment. This approach has influenced thinkers and psychiatrists such as Rollo May, Eric Fromm, and Viktor Frankl who popularized this largely French and German continental philosophy in North America.

BASIC CONCEPTS OF THEISTIC EXISTENTIALISM[8]

(1) Generally philosophy avoids life. This is untenable. A philosophy of life must find its place in Bahá'í discourse.

(2) In Being and Time, his major work, Heidegger described the estrangement humans feel in Dasein, being-in-the-world. Only humans have conscious Dasein even though other life forms exist. Man feels inherently estranged and anxious. This estrangement results from being "thrown" (geworfen) into the world as the autonomous das Man, without knowing one's origin or destination. To overcome this anxiety Heidegger proposes that the individual respond to "the call of conscience" and fulfil the potential of his as yet unactualized being, "its [being's] utmost possibilities of being-in-the-world" (Being and Time 347, 137). By becoming responsible for his own self-understanding, he can become his true self. Being has an illuminating quality, and if man lives authentically, he can become an illuminated "shepherd of being" (Olson, An Introduction to

Existentialism 138-39). Heidegger recognizes an outside call but this idea remains undeveloped. He was silent on the question of God (Kluge, 85).

For Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, however, the call reflects the Divine Voice. The call to being and the "...quickening of the conscience of man" issue from the Will of God and are embodied in the teachings of the prophets and the institutes of religion: "A sprinkling from the unfathomed deep of His sovereign and all-pervasive Will hath, out of utter nothingness, called into being a creation which is infinite in its range and deathless in its duration" (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh 61); "Each of the divine religions embodies two kinds of ordinances. The first is those which concern spiritual susceptibilities, the development of moral principles and the quickening of the conscience of man" (The Promulgation of Universal Peace 105).

(3) Human existence cannot be fully grasped intellectually. The closed logical systems of traditional philosophy are not the most effective way to find truth and experience spiritual transformation. While the Bahá'í writings honour science and the powers of reason,[9] this honour is not unqualified. Bahá'u'lláh's mystical writings view the exclusive use of reason as a limitation in the search for God/Truth.[10] Science itself, indeed, all branches of learning, without the love of God, are described as purveyors of "madness" (Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, 181).[11] While the stereotype of the "mad scientist" is true in particular cases, I suggest that ‘Abdu'l-Bahá implied that madness is a metaphor for any type of learning that is not driven by the love of God, or which does not have God as its ultimate object. In absolute terms, this is a type of insanity. The complimentary relationship of religion and science means that for all its prestige and positive certainty, science is not qualified to answer significant questions of human existence which are treated in religion.

(4) We must distinguish between subjective and objective knowledge: "Knowledge is of two kinds. One is subjective and the other objective knowledge -- that is to say, an intuitive knowledge and a knowledge derived from perception" (Some Answered Questions 157).[12] While science, common sense and logic may deduce objective truths, the whole person must be involved in the search for truth. This concept is expressed in Kierkegaard's famous dictum: "Subjectivity is truth.", probably originally formulated as "...the subject is in the truth" (Concluding Unscientific Postscript 178) . This statement does not mean a non-discriminating relativism, that any truth is valid. It means rather personal engagement and decision: "As such, it implies that I have personal interest in or ‘passion' towards the object; that I value it as being important for me and my life; that I make a practical commitment to, or choice or option of, the object" (Max Charlesworth, Philosophy and Religion 120).

(5) The spiritual self is a vital agent for self-and-world-change, not merely a passive, analyzing, thinking subject as in Descartes. The self finds and fulfils itself in action. Exhortations to practice divine precepts fully are frequent in the Bahá'í writings. Bahá'u'lláh, for example, counsels: "It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate

that which hath been written into reality and action" (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh 166). For Aristotle, this action is praxis, which refers to conduct or goal-oriented, intentional action (Blackburn, "Praxis" Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy).[13]

(6) The non-rational, psychological or emotional elements of existence such as hope, faith, joy, sorrow, despair, alienation, suffering, salvation and death, are not treated in modern philosophy, but find a valid place in existential writing. These aspects of the human condition are acknowledged in Bahá'í scripture as the lot of the human being. However, these psychological states and emotions do not remain raw; they are transmuted by a philosophical attitude that yields insights into their role in personal development. Believers are encouraged to accept ostensibly negative conditions, often described as "tests" or "trials," and to strive to overcome them. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá views tests or trials in an entirely positive light: "Tests are benefits from God, for which we should thank Him. Grief and sorrow do not come to us by chance, they are sent to us by the Divine Mercy for our own perfecting"(Paris Talks 50).

(7) Existentialists do not propose a neat, discrete set of solutions to intellectual problems. Rather, they propose that the seeker engage in a "spiritual struggle" (David Roberts, Existentialism and Religious Belief 5) to accomplish transformation and fulfil one's potential. Spiritual struggle is called "striving" in the Bahá'í sacred writings. This striving or struggle and "the victory over self" (Lights of Guidance, 394:115) is the only legitimate form of jihad (lit. struggle). The main purpose of religion, as Bahá'u'lláh affirmed, is spiritual transformation, which has clear affinities with the "authentic life" mentioned by philosopher-mathematician-physicist-mystic Blaise Pascal (Sam Morris, "Angst and Affirmation in Modern Culture" 15). For Bahá'u'lláh, it is not only individual, but also collective transformation that matters: "And yet, is not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions?" (Kitáb-i-Iqán 240).

(8) The interactive search for God and self takes place as a process, a moving spiral, not a steady state, not a finality but a becoming. Kierkegaard wrote that "An existing individual is constantly in process of becoming...and translates all his thinking into terms of process" (Concluding Unscientific Postscript 79).[14] This is consonant with the Bahá'í writings which view spiritual progress as open-ended: "As we almost never attain any spiritual goal without seeing the next goal we must attain still beyond our reach, he urges you, who have come so far already on the path of spirituality, not to fret about the distance you still have to cover! It is an indefinite journey, and, no doubt in the next world the soul is privileged to draw closer to God than is possible when bound on this physical plane" (Shoghi Effendi, letter, March 3 1955 qtd. in Hornby 704:210).

(9) The human being is paradoxical. She stands midpoint between darkness and

light. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá said: "Therefore, we say that man is a reality which stands between light and darkness. From this standpoint his nature is threefold: animal, human and divine. The animal nature is darkness; the heavenly is light in light" (Promulgation 465). Kierkegaard's self or spirit is also paradoxical. It is a synthesis of the finite and infinite, the possible and the necessary which are extremes of imagination and ambition respectively. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's statement suggests an alternative to the existentialist explanation that anxiety stems from the fear of death. Standing midpoint between polar opposites creates an inward creative tension that drives the conscious soul to actualize her full potential as a divine being. Attempting to escape this responsibility results in the nagging angst, or "falleness" of inauthentic being, referred to above, that Heidegger expounds in Being and Time.

(10) While the human being has certain inescapable limitations, she remains nonetheless creative and free. The individual will best actualize his potential by consciously assuming full responsibility for his spiritual freedom to overcome the inertia of the lower self, or as ‘Abdu'l-Bahá exhorts, to be released from "the prison of self"(qtd. by Lady Blomfield in The Chosen Highway 166).[15]

(11) Existentialism is a protest against sterile rationalism, conformity, conventionalism, impersonality, tyranny, legalism and mass-mindedness. Bahá'u'lláh enjoins that we value the unique spiritual status of the human being as a divine creation: "Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value" (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh 260). While avoiding ego-centrism, this highvaluation on personhood acts as protection against the tyranny and impersonality of "the system," mindless anonymity and the herd mentality.

(12) While prophetic religion offers guidance for the problems and perplexities of the human condition, the individual must learn to apply this wisdom. This learning is an experimental, heuristic process that cannot be achieved except by assuming individual responsibility. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá says: "Each human creature has individual endowment, power and responsibility in the creative plan of God. Therefore, depend upon your own reason and judgment and adhere to the outcome of your own investigation; otherwise, you will be utterly submerged in the sea of ignorance and deprived of all the bounties of God" (The Promulgation of Universal Peace 293).

(13) Existential theism is not perforce anti-social, as is sometimes supposed. It embraces the communion of all authentic souls and reveals "...the fundamentally communal character of existence" with its valuation of the encounter experience (Macquarrie, Existentialism 118). Its individual transformation may be viewed as being coterminous with collective transformation. Charles B. Guignon, a Heidegger scholar, writes: "And because our lives are inseparable from our community's existence, authenticity involves seizing on the possibilities circulating in our shared "heritage" in order to realize a communal "destiny"" ("Heidegger," The Cambridge Dictionary of

Philosophy 372).

THE SELF AS RELIGIOUS SUBJECT IN THE PASSIONATE SEARCH FOR TRUTH/GOD

Bahá'u'lláh counsels an ardent search for truth: "He must search after the truth to the utmost of his ability and exertion, that God may guide him in the paths of His favour and the ways of His mercy" (Gems of Divine Mysteries 27);"Labor is needed, if we are to seek Him; ardor is needed, if we are to drink of the honey of reunion with Him; and if we taste of this cup, we shall cast away the world" (The Seven Valleys 7). A close reading of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's public addresses in Europe and North America (1911-1912) indicates that He privileged the search for truth which He consistently places first in His exposition of Bahá'í tenets.[16] His Paris Talks illustrate: " The first principle of the teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is the search for truth" (134). This teaching is rich, but among its multiple meanings must be included the knowledge of self. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá repeats the dictum of Jesus ‘Seek the truth, the truth shall make you free" (Paris Talks 137, John 8:32).[17] And "When we are earnest in our search for anything, we look for it everywhere" (Paris Talks 136).

The seeker is, of course, the necessary, inescapable factor in the search for truth, which Shoghi Effendi called a "primary duty"("A World Religion: The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh" 9),[18] a duty which does not cease after one's Bahá'í affiliation. Without the seeker, the immense force field of truth would remain mere abstraction: ethical and spiritual values would never be practiced. Consciousness itself and the transcendent ability of the self mean that the truth cannot be reduced to an objective body of knowledge waiting to be discovered "outside" the self. In one vital sense, the seeker is the truth since she is both subject and object of the search. This precept is consistent with Bahá'u'lláh's quotation of Muhammad's hadith: "He hath known God who hath known himself" (Kitáb-i-Iqán 101). Bahá'u'lláh warned against the loss that follows from not knowing oneself when He wrote: "True loss is for him whose days have been spent in utter ignorance of his self"(Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh 156).

According to Shoghi Effendi—paradoxically--the more an individual seeks herself, the less she finds herself. It is above all the search for God, and just as importantly, service to others, that enables the seeker to find herself. Shoghi Effendi wrote through his secretary: "The more we search for ourselves, the less likely we are to find ourselves; and the more we search for God, and to serve our fellow-men, the more profoundly will we become acquainted with ourselves, and the more inwardly assured. This is one of the great spiritual laws of life" (letter, 18 February 1954 qtd. in Hornby 391:115).Shoghi Effendi defined the self as follows:

...self has really two meanings, or is used in two senses, in the Bahá'í writings; one is self, the identity of the individual created by God. This is the self mentioned in such passages as ‘he hath known God who hath known himself etc.' The other self is the ego, the dark, animalistic heritage each one of us has, the lower nature that can develop into a monster of selfishness,

brutality, lust and so on. It is this self we must struggle against, or this side of our natures, in order to strengthen and free the spirit within us and help it to attain perfection (letter, December 10, 1947 qtd. in Hornby 386:113).

These two selves are not a dichotomy, not two separate selves, but one self governed by two opposing tendencies. Of the higher self, Bahá'u'lláh wrote in The Four Valleys: "On this plane, the self is not rejected but beloved; it is well-pleasing and not to be shunned" (The Four Valleys 50). Of the lower self, He revealed that "Indeed the actions of man himself breed a profusion of satanic power...the widespread differences that exist among mankind and the prevalence of sedition, contention, conflict and the like are the primary factors which provoke the appearance of the satanic spirit" (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh 176).

I have shown above that existentialism views psychological states as having a valid place in the search for God/Truth to the extent they inspire philosophical reflection or spiritual transformation that manifests in acceptance, striving and detachment. The epistemology of Bahá'u'lláh's preeminent doctrinal work, the Kitáb-i-íqán, makes spiritual passion a necessary ingredient in the search for God:

Only when the lamp of search, of earnest striving, of longing desire, of passionate devotion, of fervid love, of rapture, and ecstasy, is kindled within the seeker's heart, and the breeze of His loving-kindness is wafted upon his soul, will the darkness of error be dispelled, the mists of doubt and misgivings be dissipated, and the lights of knowledge and certitude envelop his being (Kitáb-i-Iqán 195-6).

Kierkegaard also privileged passion as a positive element in the search for truth, for it alone could confer certainty: "The conclusions of passion are the only reliable ones," he said in a memorable phrase. And "What our age lacks is not reflection but passion"(Either/Or: A Fragment of Life 1:180). For Kierkegaard, however, passion had atypical meanings that would expand it beyond raw emotion. In order to grasp the Absolute or God, Kierkegaard, like Bahá'u'lláh, proposed a via negativa. For the Danish philosopher "...the mind must radically empty itself of objective content. What supports this radical emptying, however, is the desire for the absolute. Kierkegaard names this desire Passion."[19] Likewise, Bahá'u'lláh writes: "Nor shall the seeker reach his goal unless he sacrifice all things. That is, whatever he hath seen, and heard, and understood, all must he set at naught, that he may enter the realm of the spirit, which is the City of God" (The Seven Valleys 7). Bahá'u'lláh requires the heart's purification and detachment on the path of search:

But, O my brother, when a true seeker determineth to take the step of search in the path leading to the knowledge of the Ancient of Days, he must, before all else, cleanse and purify his heart, which is the seat of the revelation of the inner mysteries of God, from the obscuring dust of all acquired knowledge, and

the allusions of the embodiments of satanic fancy (The Kitáb-i-íqán 191).

The role of passion in the search for Truth/God is not, consequently, unbridled passion. Passion must be balanced with purity of heart and detachment. Among the spiritual virtues, Bahá'u'lláh has given the highest priority to detachment in the prologue to the Book of Certitude:

No man shall attain the shores of the ocean of true understanding except he be detached from all that is in heaven and on earth. Sanctify your souls, O ye peoples of the world, that haply ye may attain that station which God hath destined for you and enter thus the tabernacle which, according to the dispensations of Providence, hath been raised in the firmament of the Bayán.(The Kitáb-í-íqán 3).

The iconoclastic, proto-existentialist, Nietzsche, in The Gay Science (Die Fröliche Wissenschaft) speaks of an age in which "preparatory men" will "carry heroism into the pursuit of knowledge"(The Gay Science 219). Like Bahá'u'lláh and Kierkegaard, Nietzsche had understood that "lovers of knowledge" had to pursue truth with a passionate daring and sense of adventure. This daring he vividly expressed as a veritable journey of discovery:

...men characterised by cheerfulness, patience, unpretentiousness, and contempt for all great vanities...Soon the age will be past when you could be satisfied to live like shy deer, hidden in the woods! At long last the pursuit of knowledge will reach out for its due: it will want to rule and own, and you with it!...For, believe me, the secret of the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment of existence is: to live dangerously! Build your cities under Vesuvius! Send your ships into uncharted seas! Live at war with your peers and yourselves! Be robbers and conquerors, as long as you cannot be rulers and owners, you lovers of knowledge!(219).

BEING-IN-THE-WORLD:[20] EXISTENCE AND ESSENCE

In Bahá'í theology, God is described as "the divine Being, and unknowable Essence" (Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-í-íqan 202). In this one phrase, being (existence) and essence are linked. The Bahá'í writings give a determining role to the spiritual essences that are called" the names and attributes of God" (asmá va sifát-i-illáhí), but these writings also emphasize the necessity for concrete moral, spiritual and social action. The exact nature of these essences remains an abstruse question, for they are axiomatic phenomena that remain undefined, although their actions and effects are described by Bahá'u'lláh in the various cosmological realms.[21] Nader Saiedi has shown that in the Báb's theology of the Seven Stages of Divine Creative Action (of the Word of God),[22] which are based on an oral tradition of the Imam Rida, existence and essence are the necessary binary components for any thing to exist. Existence and essence are brought together by the action of the Will (Existence) (Stage 1) and Determination (Essence) (Stage 2) which are combined in a distinctive form in Stage 3 (Destiny) which combines the first two stages. These three stages form a trinity.

The final four stages (Decree, Permission, Term, Book) accomplish the appearance of any created thing in the phenomenal world (Saiedi, Gate of the Heart 202-03). Existence and essence are one. Put differently, form and matter in the phenomenal world exist inseparably from one another. In the Bahá'í cosmological understanding, consequently, it is not question of either existence or essence; they belong together as the necessary components that make possible the great unity of all things (kullu shay).

For the existentialist, it is different. Existentialists hold that being and/or the genuine self, Jasper's Existenz, rather than the idea or the essence should become the object of reflection. For the existentialist, existence takes precedence over essence: man's essence is to exist. Sartre writes: "What they [existentialists] have in common is simply the fact that they believe existence comes before essence--or, if you will, that we must begin from the subjective"(Existentialism and Humanism 28). Sartre was simply repeating what Kierkegaard had observed a century earlier in the Concluding Unscientific Postscript (1846) on the relationship between existence and essence. But unlike the atheist Sartre, Kierkegaard argued that only ethico-religious knowledge could be related to the knower:

That essential knowledge is essentially related to existence does not mean the above mentioned identity which abstract thought postulates between thought and being; nor does it signify, objectively, that knowledge corresponds to something existent as its object. But it means that knowledge has a relationship to the knower, who is essentially an existing individual, and that for this reason all essential knowledge is essentially related to existence. Only ethical and ethico-religious knowledge has an essential relationship to the existence of the knower (77).

For Sartre, since God and the divine were excluded, existence could be no other than human existence: "Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism" (Existentialism and Humanism 28). Both theism and atheism, however, share this personal responsibility: "For the faith of no man can be conditioned by any one except himself" (Gleanings 143). Even atheists might accept that "faith" has an inescapable place in the individual's life, if based on Tillich's existential definition of faith as the state of "ultimate concern," the state of being infinitely, unconditionally and totally concerned. In Tillich's existentialist theology, this ultimate concern was the quest for the Ultimate Unconditioned, i.e. the ground of being, one of Tillich's definitions for God (Systematic Theology 1:11-12).[23] Sartre did not attempt to completely eliminate the concept of faith from his philosophy since to practice "bad faith" was to entertain the convenient self-deception that preferred to ignore the truth or not to choose to be responsible for one's own freedom and actions ("Bad faith," Dictionary of Philosophy 34).

Ancient philosophy originated, moreover, in deeper and systematic reflections upon life's common experiences and the human's relationship to the social order.[24] The "concrete situation," according to the Jewish, existential theologian Martin Buber (1878-1965) must be willingly embraced:

But he will not remove himself from the concrete situation as it actually is; he will, instead, enter into it, even if in the form of fighting against it. Whether field of work or field of battle, he accepts the place in which he is placed. He knows no floating of the spirit above concrete reality; to him even the sublimest spirituality is an illusion if it is not bound to the situation. Only the spirit which is bound to the situation is prized by him as bound to the Pneuma, the spirit of God (Eclipse of God 37-8).

Buber's statement retains the heroic sense of confronting life, as if in battle, which acts as antidote to the existentialist feeling of not belonging in the world. The writer G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936), who also produced cogent Roman Catholic theology,[25] wrote eloquently about his own sense of alienation while living-in-the-world, and the profound realization that brought his release. Chesterton felt estranged in the world until he realized that the world was not his home:

The Christian optimism is based on the fact that we do not fit in to the world. I had tried to be happy by telling myself that man is an animal, like any other which sought its meat from God...The modern philosopher told me again and again that I was in the right place, and I had still felt depressed even in acquiescence. But I had heard that I was in the wrong place, and my soul sang for joy, like a bird in spring...I knew now why grass has always seemed to me as queer as the green beard of a giant, and why I could feel homesick at home ("Orthodoxy" qtd by Pelikan in World Treasury 385).

Existential theism, then, does not ignore or deny the malaise of the subject who feels like a stranger in the world. But she must strive to overcome this alienation by accepting responsibility for her condition, by engaging the situation in which she finds herself, and by understanding herself as a spiritual being who lives by faith, hope, love, commitment and action. In his theology of hope, Gabriel Marcel advocated an attitude of "disponibilité" (availability) to the world which "...connotes openness, abandonment of self, welcoming. The man of hope remains open to the "absolute recourse" –he does not despair in the face of life's negativities" (Livingstone, Modern Christian Thought 355).

THE EXISTENTIAL MOMENT: SPIRITUAL CRISIS AND RESOLUTION

Alasdair MacIntyre writes: "But stress on the extreme and the exceptional experience is common to all existentialism. ("Exisentialism," The Encyclopedia of Philosophy 149).While we cannot claim that existentialism is a type of mysticism, we can say nonetheless that existentialism's extreme or exceptional experiences have mystical overtones. What I have called "the existential moment" and "the epiphanic moment" highlight two exceptional experiences that lead to spiritual transformation (J.A. McLean, Under the Divine Lote Tree: Essays and Reflections 115-16). The first is the way of trial; the second a moment of illumination. The first is a harrowing experience; the second an epiphany of joy. The existential moment shares affinities with Jasper's "boundary/limit situations" (Grenzsituationen), seemingly impenetrable moments of guilt, chance, suffering, conflict, death and even consciousness itself.

Through our own efforts, we can break through these boundary situations and experience singular moments of transcendence, i.e. new heights of consciousness that allow us to accept and overcome these limiting situations with courage and integrity. Paradoxically, while these limit situations seem to impinge upon our freedom and consciousness, they have the potential for the realization of more authentic living. ("Jaspers," The Encyclopedia of Philosophy 256). In transcending the boundary situation, we experience self-integration and find traces of what Jaspers calls the "footsteps of God" ("Jaspers," The Encyclopedia of Philosophy 257).

As I describe it, the existential moment is a sudden event characterised by unpredictability or surprise. It is accompanied by disturbing psychological states such as surprise, shock, confusion, grief, anger, anxiety, despair, or in Kierkegaard's phrase "fear and trembling".[26] For the Bahá'í, this moment is the exceptional and serious "life test".[27] In the Christian tradition, its ultimate forms would be Judas's betrayal of Christ, Peter's denial of Jesus and the crucifixion of the Christ. For every woman or man, it could be the end of a cherished relationship, the betrayal of a friend, a threatening illness or the inevitability of death. The existential moment brings the "the sickness unto death"[28] and generates a spiritual crisis of stark realism that suddenly removes the believer from the everyday concerns of the mundane world.

Despite its harrowing nature, the existential moment is ripe with spiritual potential. Bahá'u'lláh reveals: "O SON OF MAN! My calamity is My providence, outwardly it is fire and vengeance, but inwardly it is light and mercy. Hasten thereunto that thou mayest become an eternal light and an immortal spirit. This is My command unto thee, do thou observe it"(The Arabic Hidden Words, no. 51). It bears noting here that the Chinese word for "crisis" consists of two characters: one means danger, the other opportunity. This linguistic construction reflects a profound psychological insight. The existential moment presents an "either-or" situation in which the believer stands to gain or lose. Although the individual perceives this moment as a fearful visitation, as an unwanted It in Buber's terms, in reality, it manifests the Divine Presence. If the believer bows and accepts this spiritual crisis as an opportunity, she will experience "Nothing save that which profiteth them can befall my loved ones"(Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. by Shoghi Effendi in The Advent of Divine Justice 82).

In the existential moment, the believer faces the lower self, either in oneself or others, which Shoghi Effendi tells us can develop into "a monster of selfishness"(Lights of Guidance 386:113). There we encounter the self as "O QUINTESSENCE OF PASSION," or "O REBELLIOUS ONES," or "O CHILDREN OF FANCY,"or "O WEED THAT SPRINGETH OUT OF THE DUST"(Nos. 50, 65, 67, 68, Persian Hidden Words). In the existential moment, one must face one's own folly, weakness, sinfulness or ignorance, or that of others. The existential moment presents the believer with an opportunity to tear away the mask of the "insistent self," ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's shorthand description of Satan (Selections 256), to allow the face of the true believer to emerge.

THE EPIPHANIC MOMENT: DIVINE ILLUMINATION

Contrasting with the existential moment, the epiphanic[29] moment is the sudden manifestation of the higher register of the religious experience: exaltation, illumination, awe, celebration, rebirth are experienced by the soul who is "surprised by joy."[30] This epiphanic moment is a numinous manifestation. Its apotheosis is Bahá'u'lláh in the Garden of Ridvan or the believer finding Bahá'u'lláh in the sanctified presence of the heart. It may be a divine healing, a mystical encounter, a quiet realisation or winning the desires of the heart. The epiphanic moment is a meeting of an "I" with a "Thou," i.e. a personal encounter. Buber wrote that "...every genuine religious experience has an open or a hidden personal character, for it is spoken out of a concrete situation in which the person takes part as a person"(Eclipse of God 37). This moment is a dialogue with a "Thou," which Buber elucidated as the act of Begegnung (meeting/encounter): "All real living is meeting"(I and Thou 11). In all the spiritual events that significantly impact upon the soul, one finds the encounter of a greater "Thou" with a lesser "thou." Buber wrote: "In every sphere in its own way, through each process of becoming that is present to us, we look out toward the fringe of the eternal Thou; in each we are aware of the breath from the eternal Thou; in each Thou we address the eternal Thou"(I and Thou 6).

RETURN TO THE SOUL AND A THEOLOGY OF HOPE

In His understanding of the human reality, Bahá'u'lláh has given a superlative description of the nature of the soul. This passage affirms the high station occupied by this mysterious, divine reality:

Thou hast asked Me concerning the nature of the soul. Know, verily, that the soul is a sign of God, a heavenly gem whose reality the most learned of men hath failed to grasp, and whose mystery no mind, however acute, can ever hope to unravel. It is the first among all created things to declare the excellence of its Creator, the first to recognize His glory, to cleave to His truth, and to bow down in adoration before Him. If it be faithful to God, it will reflect His light, and will, eventually, return unto Him. If it fail, however, in its allegiance to its Creator, it will become a victim to self and passion, and will, in the end, sink in their depths (Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 158).

Existentialist writers like Dostoevsky, Kafka, Camus,[31] Sartre and Nietzsche have all depicted the alienation of the self from itself and others. The pathos and tragedy of the spiritual condition of moderns, in this self-and-other alienation, is the loss of belief in the soul. The resultant vacuum is being filled by the voracious materialistic appetite that has given rise to the angst and sense of futility that prevails in contemporary society. Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God has meant that the ensuing frenetic dance of escape has only been followed by the inertia of despair. Modern man feels lost in a meaningless world because he is no longer grounded to his soul as the anchor of personal being. Moderns feel anxiety or dread because they do not realize that estrangement from the soul is felt as a threat to their sense of personal identity and well-being. This estrangement may drive the existent to

despair or it may impel her to find or create an alternate system of values in which the soul feels at home, "whole" or "saved." Salvation may be understood as the integration of the once divided self. (The Latin word salvus may be translated as "whole" or "saved").

Predictably, the false gospel of modern scientism has contributed to self-estrangement and the eclipse of the soul. From the middle of the 20th to the beginning of the 21st centuries, scientists Desmond Morris, Richard Dawkins, Jacques Monod, inter alia, have been leading an aggressive campaign against belief in God. One of the results of the spread of this materialistic ideology has been to eliminate teleology and divine intervention from creation. In the promotion of this scientistic worldview, moral absolutes have been eliminated. Intelligence and morality have been reduced to the determinism of sociobiology and the cunning of supposed smart genes.

This ideological campaign is also undermining belief in the rational soul as a special divine creation, possessed of unique dignity, freedom and immortality. However, Keith Ward, author of the critically acclaimed God, Chance and Necessity (1996), cogently argued in In Defence of the Soul (1992) for a return to the belief in this foundational divine reality. He writes:

There is little that is more important in our culture than to reaffirm the existence of the soul and to show the shallowness of views denying it. For the most important thing in life, in the end, is to discover what we truly are and to live accordingly. If we are souls, created by God to know and love Him for ever, nothing could be more important for us to realize than that. The battle for the soul is real. What is at stake is the human freedom and dignity, morality and truth, the survival of human beings as moral and responsible beings (168-9).

Theistic existentialism restores belief in the soul, and gives place to a "theology of hope."[32] The French existentialist Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) sees the closest of connections between a belief in the soul and the virtue of hope:

I spoke of the soul. This word, so long discredited, should here be given its priority once more. We cannot help seeing that there is the closest of connections between the soul and hope. I almost think that hope is for the soul what breathing is for the living organism. Where hope is lacking the soul dries up and withers, it is no more than a function, it is merely fit to serve as an object of study to a psychology that can never register anything but its location or absence. It is precisely the soul that is the traveller; it is of the soul and of the soul alone that we can say with supreme truth that "being" necessarily means "being on the way" (en route) (Homo Viator 10-11).[33]

For Marcel, hope is not simply a virtue. Like love, freedom, will and being itself, hope is a "mystery," an entity that cannot be circumscribed intellectually. Marcel was fascinated by mystery as a metaphysical category as indicated by the title of the most comprehensive statement of his philosophy, the two-volume The Mystery of Being, delivered as the Gifford Lectures at the

University of Aberdeen in 1951-52. To understand hope, Marcel says, we must live in hope. Marcel does not rule out reflection on hope, but to experience it, we must eliminate the dichotomy between subject and object. For him, hope leads to personhood; personhood to engagement; engagement to community and community to reality (Macquarrie, Twentieth Century Religious Thought 360). Living by hope will counteract the "emptiness" which Rollo May characterised as the "chief problem of people in the middle decade of the twentieth century"(Man's Search for Himself 14), an emptiness that has only intensified in the opening decade of the new millennium.

EXISTENTIAL THEMES IN BAHá'í SACRED HISTORY (HEILSGESCHICHTE)

Reified Bahá'í sacred history is the historical interpretation of the documented events associated with the birth and development of the Bahá'í dispensation (1844-). But we should not lose sight of the fact that, at its core, this sacred history revolves around the lives of Three Central Figures, who are not merely detached subjects of historical research, but also the objects of deep love, reverence and devotion. The words and events associated with the lives of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu'l-Bahá are of great import, not only to determine the exact nature of these words and events, but also to inspire the believers who follow Them. Beyond the value of Bahá'í history qua history, the lives of the Three Central Figures have direct relevance for a spirituality of adversity, and a search for meaning for moderns living in a "strangely disordered world," as Shoghi Effendi succinctly describes our time (The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh 32). The missions of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu'l-Bahá were carried out under constant persecution, hardship, privation and threat of death, making the spirituality exemplified in Their lives profoundly real and credible.

The Báb's martyrdom, the imprisonment and exile endured by Bahá'u'lláh and‘Abdu'l-Bahá, whether it was the imposed exile of the sovereign's decree, or Bahá'u'lláh's voluntary retreat into the mountains near the village of Sar-Galu in Sulaymáníyyih, Kurdistan, afford an opportunity for the individual to discover how she too may find meaning and strength in adversity, and to face conflict, loss, alienation and loneliness courageously. By examining Their response, the believer is better empowered to understand, accept and overcome subjective feelings of personal "exile." In this perspective, Bahá'í history cannot be reduced simply to the objective reification of historical events. It serves, rather, to ground and orient the practice of an authentic spirituality.

THE LEAP OF FAITH AND BAHá'U'LLáH'S NARRATIVE THEOLOGY OF THE TRUE SEEKER

Two Bahá'í texts are particularly relevant to existential spirituality.These texts are pointed examples of narrative theology,[34] defined here simply as a parable or teaching story, and are used by Bahá'u'lláh in The Seven Valleys (Haft Vádí) and The Four Valleys (Cháhár Vádí). It should not be lost on the reader that both stories involve a literal leap, first, by the unnamed mystic knower, who leaps into the sea of reality, and second, by the mad lover,

Majnún, who leaps over a garden wall to save his life. This literal leap corresponds to the phenomenological "leap of faith" expounded by Kierkegaard.

Both theological narratives are based on Rúmí's Mathnaví. They suggest that an existential element is inherent to Sufism, the Islamic mysticism which reappears in Bahá'u'lláh's writings. Implicit to these parables is the moral of the loss and recovery of self and identity in the soul's search for the Beloved . The respected literary critic, Northrop Frye (1912-1991), has written that the grand theme of all literature is the loss and recovery of identity (The Educated Imagination 21).This point clearly applies to the theological narratives reinterpreted by Bahá'u'lláh.

The first story, which is based on a Rúmí's famous tale of the learned grammarian and the unlettered boatman (Nicholson, Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi I: 2835-2840) relates the journey of the mystic knower (‘aref) and the grammarian who personify the life of faith and the life of reason respectively. In the first unnamed valley of The Four Valleys, both travellers come to the "Sea of Grandeur," a metonym for the Being of God.[35] Bahá'u'lláh recounts:

The story is told of a mystic knower, who went on a journey with a learned grammarian as his companion. They came to the shore of the Sea of Grandeur. The knower straightway flung himself into the waves, but the grammarian stood lost in his reasonings, which were as words that are written on water. The knower called out to him, "Why dost thou not follow?" The grammarian answered, "O Brother, I dare not advance. I must needs go back again." Then the knower cried, "Forget what thou didst read in the books of Síbavayh and Qawlavayh, of Ibn-i-Hájib and Ibn-i-Málik, and cross the water"(The Four Valleys 51).

Bahá'u'lláh then quotes from the Mathnaví: "The death of self is needed here, not rhetoric/Be nothing, then, and walk upon the waves"(52).The wholehearted commitment to the life of faith, personified by the mystic knower, is reminiscent of the figure of Abraham presented by Kierkegaard as the courageous "knight of faith" who is commanded by God to sacrifice his son (Fear and Trembling 89-90).[36] The mystic knower stands in marked contrast to the fearful, rationalist grammarian who would not dare to advance without his books. But the ‘aref makes the "leap of faith"(Springet) and throws himself into the waves, the Sea of Reality/the Being of God. For Kierkegaard, the basic meaning of the leap was that the contingent or provisional nature of the historical truth about Christianity presented a gap that the believer had to be overcome with the "leap" that manifested the "unconditional certainly required by religious faith" (Hannay, Kierkegaard 98).[37]

A variation of the ‘aref's leap into the waves is the biblical miracle of Christ's walk on the waters of the Sea of Galilee (Mat. 14:25-32). Both phenomena symbolize the death of self (faná). To walk on water is to defy gravity, to overcome one lower's nature. Bahá'u'lláh's parable implies, moreover, a critique of the powers of reason to connect the seeker with God, which is also a favourite theme of Christian existentialists. Rhetoric, the reliance on words, will not do for the mystic knower; action is required. The

grammarian's dependence upon his books was in reality a desire to return to the familiar, logical forms of knowledge, whereas the ‘aref's experience of God lay clearly in direct action by the leap of faith.

The heroic self of the true seeker emerges as he casts behind him the despair and doubt that are left in reason's wake. By taking the leap of faith, the ‘aref transcends the dictates of reason that command self-preservation. The text records the dramatic "great reversal."[38] Instead of falling from grace, as did the natural Adam, the mystic knower rises. The spatial metaphor of the leap of faith suggests the confidence that accrues when fear is overcome, and one transcends the limits of reason, and the gravitational pull of the lower self, to trust in God without stint.

The other story is also borrowed form Rúmí's Mathnáví (II 265-76)[39] and is reinterpreted by Bahá'u'lláh. This story of the lost lover rediscovered, the bereaved Majnún who suddenly finds his beloved Laylí in a garden enclosure, is one of the brightest gems in all spiritual literature. This allegory may be taken as the fulfilment of the Genesis myth of Adam and Eve. In Bahá'u'lláh's version, which also takes place in a garden in the Middle East, the Genesis story comes full circle: the separated exiles return to the garden and recover the paradise of love they once knew. Majnún's reunion with Laylí symbolizes the triumph of bliss over despair in the soul's sudden, joyous reunion with God. In another sense, the reunion of the lost lovers may be viewed as the soul's full integration once it discovers its true identity.

Despite its classical status, the distinct modernity of Bahá'u'lláh's version of Rúmí's tale is vividly present as we read the most distressing elements portrayed by existentialist writers: pain, loneliness, depression, despair, alienation, and most significantly, the denial of love. Bahá'u'lláh's Majnún is driven beyond despair into the vortex of madness where he contemplates suicide: "Then one night he could live no more, and he went out of his house and made for the market-place"(The Seven Valleys 13). But the story suddenly resolves in the dramatic dénouement of the happy reunion.

Bahá'u'lláh's allegory contains a sharp contrast to what Sartre later called Huit Clos (No Exit), the title of his one-act play, in which three inhabitants of hell torment each other in a drawing room for all eternity. Majnún is hemmed in with no escape by the night-watchmen who symbolize the conspiring forces of evil. Unlike Sartre, however, Bahá'u'lláh provides a door of hope. His allegory of the lover (the soul) finding its true Beloved (God) is conveyed in a high paradox. The bereaved Majnún believed himself to be lost, and leapt over a garden wall to save his life when, on the other side, he suddenly finds his heart's desire "with a lamp in her hand, searching for a ring she had lost" (The Seven Valleys 14). His dire suffering, like that of Job, turns out to be the necessary prelude to his ultimate salvation. Unlike Majnún's reunion with Laylí, the characters in atheistic, existentialist literature remain trapped in the morass of their neurotic and fragmented states of mind, unable to love themselves or others.

EXISTENTIALISM IN BAHá'í STUDIES

The initial commentary on existentialism that has been made to 2010 by William Hatcher and Ian Kluge, who have both written widely in philosophy, have reached very different conclusions. On the one hand, in his "The Call into Being: Introduction to a Bahá'í Existentialism" (Lights of Irfán, Book Four, 2003, 79-96), Ian Kluge finds a qualified positive correlation of existentialism to the Bahá'í Faith. Kluge's article serves, as the title indicates, as a useful introduction to some basic concepts of existentialist philosophers which include inter alia Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Berdyaev, Sartre, Gabriel Marcel, Nietzsche and the theologian Paul Tillich. Kluge's exposition includes twenty-seven basic existentialist concepts such as the meaning of existence, being and becoming, self-transcendence, anxiety and "self-dissatisfaction," fallen existence, the call into being, authenticity, and self-alienation. Bahá'í concepts are interwoven into the main points, either as parallelisms or less frequently as divergences from existential thought. His specifically Bahá'í concepts include progressive revelation, the mystery of essence, the necessity of faith, the mystery of self and being. He concludes that both existentialism and the Bahá'í teachings are about the unfinished journey, perpetual becoming and the transition states of the self-in-the-making, in which "each moment is an arrival and departure" (Call 93). Ian Kluge reminds us through existentialism that we must be sensitive to the transitory nature of human existence.

On the other hand, in Logic and Logos, a collection of essays on science, religion and philosophy, Bill Hatcher, in a polemical assessment, rejects both existentialism and positivism, since he views them as being at odds with the Bahá'í teaching on the value of the scientific method and the complementary relationship of religion and science. Even though Dr. Hatcher's disclaimer has it that "There are many variants to each position, and so these labels must be understood in a very general way, heuristic way" (Logic and Logos 103), and although he admits that his characterization "is consciously exaggerated at some points" (Logic and Logos 108), nonetheless he maintains that the existentialist would not be bothered by the affirmation that the "scientific method cannot be applied to religion"; that the existentialist values the "chaotic", "uncommunicable", "private", "mystic and occult knowledge" brought by religion, a knowledge which can be communicated only in restricted symbolic forms (Logic and Logos 107).

Since Dr. Hatcher's existentialist is anonymous--he does not actually name any existentialist philosopher or work-- we cannot be sure whom he intends. But he seems to have Kierkegaard in mind, since the father of existentialism has often been accused of the deliberate obscurantism mentioned in Dr. Hatcher's brief analysis. This charge, however, has been rejected by philosopher of religion, Max Charlesworth. If we look beyond the bizarre rhetoric and pervasive hyperbole, Charlesworth finds "...the outlines of a philosophy of religion of a Pascalian and Kantian type, even if its metaphysical and epistemological underpinnings are not fully developed" (Charlesworth, Philosophy and Religion

117). Robert G. Olson also refutes the charge of illogicality: "Nothing would be more illogical, however, than to take the Christian existentialists' redefinitions of faith and religious truth as evidence of illogicality. These existentialist definitions are a tribute to logic of the very highest order" (An Introduction to Existentalism 99).

That the philosophical foundations are not fully developed comes as no surprise, for Kierkegaard was an avowed opponent of closed, rational systems, with their pretence to Hegelian omnipotence, a point Charlesworth makes in the same context (Religion and Philosophy 117). For the Danish philosopher, rational analysis is incapable of illuminating the concrete life of the religious subject. The life of the believer could not be subjected to systemization; the metaphysical demonstration could not bring happiness, salvation or certainty. Alastair Hannay comments that Kierkegaard does not believe in illusory "speculative happiness." Hannay quotes Concluding Unscientific Postscript: "For the speculating [philosopher] the question of his personal eternal happiness cannot present itself, just because his task consists in getting more and more away from himself and becoming objective" (Alastair Hanny, Kierkegaard, 124 from Concluding Unscientific Postscript 54). But despite Kierkegaard's dramatic rhetoric and pervasive use of paradox, a logical consistency informs his arguments which is not apparent at first reading.

Dr. Hatcher's rejection of existentialism seems to be driven by the conviction that existentialists must perceive science and scientific method as "...the soul-stultifying dryness, uniformity, formalism and mechanization of science" (Logic and Logos 106, 107). Here the picture appears more nuanced and complex. No existentialist philosopher or writer has been a de jure antagonist of either science or scientific method. But existentialist theologian, John Macquarrie, would be in qualified agreement with Bill Hatcher: "Let it be frankly said," he writes, "that many existentialist philosophers have done less than justice to science. They seem to feel that the abstract and theoretical point of view characteristic of scientific research is somehow a threat to a full human experience of the world" (Existentialism 89). This view, however, probably hangs more on the totalizing claims sometimes made for reason than with science itself, and the inadequacy for religious life of a narrowly scientific worldview.

The clear exception is Karl Jaspers who was both psychiatrist and existential philosopher. In his 2007 article, "Pluralism and Psychiatry: Karl Jaspers on Science," S. Nassir Ghaemi argues that one of Jasper's most important, but neglected contributions as a psychiatrist, has been his discussion of the nature of pluralism as a scientific method.[40] However, Jaspers' view of science is also nuanced. While Jaspers clearly respects science and maintains that scientific inquiry acts as antidote to dogma in religion, he cautions that science cannot provide a complete worldview because, by itself, science cannot provide the complete "cipher,"the symbolic representation of reality, because it excludes the observer ("Jaspers", The Encyclopedia of Philosophy 255, 257).

In other words, the human being cannot be eliminated from any comprehensive worldview.

Even Kierkegaard's paradoxical, anti-systematic, rhetorical approach to religion is internally consistent with itself, one of the signs of the "scientific" study of any phenomenon. The personalist approach to religion and human experience does not necessarily make it inherently inimical to science or the scientific method. It examines life phenomenologically rather than scientifically, and it should not be rejected because it does not privilege either science or scientific method in religion.

TENSIONS BETWEEN THE BAHá'í TEACHINGS AND EXISTENTIALISM

Although I have argued above that a fruitful correlation may be made between individual Bahá'í spirituality and existentialism, on balance, certain tensions must be indicated. This comparison is admittedly hazardous because of individual differences between existentialists. However, the following selected disparities generally hold true.

The Absence of Community or Hyper-Individualism.

As we have noted above, some scholars of existentialism correctly assert "the fundamentally communal character of existence" (Macquarrie). However, this communion remains largely between the individual and his own being. Interactions with others are for the purpose of refining the existent's understanding of authentic living as an individual, or in Kierkegaard's writings, attaining salvation as a Christian. Even religious existentialism offers no prescription for communal worship, fellowship, consultation or collective action which are all emphasized in the Bahá'í teachings. Existentialism is based on the strivings of the solitary individual who remains alone with his God (theistic existentialism) or with self and its freedom (atheistic existentialism). The existentialist's communion with self, a type of deeper self-questioning, which results in illumination, and which demands the necessary adjustments to begin authentic living, i.e. living sincerely, consciously and responsibly, remains at the individual level. If there is a danger to Nietzsche's "herd mentality" and Kierkegaard's peril of "the crowd," we must also speak about the dangers of isolated individualism.

We have only to look at Kierkegaard's life. Here is a brilliant and original thinker, to whom every existential philosopher who followed him, whether theistic or atheistic, remained indebted. But he renounced marriage, friendship, pastorate and professorship (Roberts, Existentialism and Religious Belief 140-41). Bahá'í life concerns, not only the individual and his personal quest, but also and especially, the necessary association of the individual with like-minded believers. As ‘Abdu'l-Bahá asserts, the individual cannot live alone and should seek reciprocity and cooperation with other humans (Foundations of World Unity 38). This individual-community relationship flows naturally from the wide-ranging belief in "unity in diversity" and seeing the reflection of God in every soul (Tablets of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá 3:669), as well as executing world-reforming projects based in

collective action.

The Denial of Social Reality

Since the community character of religious experience is not crucial, it follows that social reality and social engagement remain inconsequential. The notable exception is Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) who was active in the French Resistance during the Nazi occupation. But divine revelation, as Paul Lample avers, must be expressed collectively in the experimental forging of a new web of social reality, otherwise, divine revelation fails to attain its purpose: "The Word of God rends the fabric of social order by contradicting centuries-old agreements, while providing new standards and principles that yield new understandings with which to create a new social order" (Revelation and Social Reality 18). Social reality is the necessary concomitant of the individual.

Its Anti-Metaphysical, anti-Systematic Stance

Even though Kierkegaard developed a radical theology based on the Augustinian or Pascalian model of sin redeemed by grace, he remained an avowed opponent of comprehensive metaphysical systems such as Hegel developed. The main reason for his opposition to Hegel was that the individual subject, the concrete life of the philosopher, disappeared in the systematic elaboration of the metaphysical demonstration. Ambitious philosophical systems were for Kierkegaard a huge mansion in which nobody lived. For him, philosophical systems could not inform the life of the individual because they were basically irrelevant to lived experience. Moreover, the religious subject's life was fragmented and broken by sin. Only by dealing with these fragments could the sinner be redeemed and wholeness restored.

This approach is too radical. Kierkegaard failed to consider any other philosophical system except Hegel's who served as his lone stereotypical, negative model (Roberts 140). Metaphysics, the science of reality that includes ontology and cosmology, cannot be dismissed out-of-hand. Plato, Aristotle, Kant and even Hegel, however obtuse he may be, deserve the attention of the religious subject. Metaphysics is essential to the scientific study of religion since it inquires into the nature of reality itself which must include human consciousness and experience. Objective truths exist, even if our understanding of them is relative. The existence of the contingent relative requires the existence of the unlimited Absolute. Rational proofs for the existence of the Absolute and Its actions in the world are not to be excluded. Taken at one end of the spectrum, existentialism would be incompatible with the Bahá'í religion because the latter would be judged as being too certain, prescriptive and systematic.

Its Anti-Historical Standpoint

Kierkegaard dismissed history as being inconsequential to the decision of the Christian making the leap of faith into the arms of God: "How can something of a historical nature be decisive for an eternal happiness?" he asked (Concluding

Unscientific Postscript 86). The leap of faith was Kierkegaard's solution to the great divide that Lessing saw between the historical and the eternal, a divide Lessing could not cross. Kierkegaard also based himself on Lessing's famous deistic dictum that "the contingent truths of history can never be made the proof for the necessary truths of reason" (quoted by Christopher R. North, The Old Testament Interpretation of History 141). For the Danish theologian, Lessing's "truths of reason" became the truths of faith. Kierkegaard was suspicious of the relevance of the "facts" regarding the "Jesus of history" compared to the all-decisive "Christ of faith", a distinction coined in 1892 by Martin Kähler (1835-1912) to distinguish the Jesus of Historie, the historical Jesus, from the Christ whom the church proclaimed in its Gospels, the Christ of Geschichte, the historic Christ.

Kierkegaard's reasoning seems incompatible, however, with his own faith tradition, i.e. the Judeo-Christian understanding of God's decisive interventions in history through the prophets; the belief that revelation irrupts on the stage of human history with the prophetic announcement, protest and judgement. Granted that the Christian must make a personal decision and commitment in becoming a believer—this applies to the Bahá'í for that matter—but Kierkegaard has largely dismissed God's overlordship of a teleological history that is driving toward the coming messianic kingdom that would rule all mankind forever (Isa.9:6-7, Dan. 2:44). And what about providential history? Is God to be understood to act only in the life of the individual as a dispenser of salvation, but who remains in absentia in the larger history of mankind, lacking any saving design or purpose, despite the blackened annals of mankind's bloody history? In making his theology almost entirely dependent on the decisive moment when the individual becomes a Christian, Kierkegaard has rendered his personalist theology incompatible with the place of providential history in the Hebrew Bible or the Gospels. A history of humanity exists from which God cannot be banished. In the moving flux of history, the individual remains organically connected to generations past; he is not mere disconnected subjectivity. For Nicolas Berdyaev "The ‘historical' is a sort of revelation of the deepest essence of universal reality, of the destiny of the world focused in that of man. It is a revelation of noumenal reality" (North, quoted in The Old Testament Interpretation of History 142).[41]

For Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957), the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, as evidenced in The Promised Day is Come, the world order letters and God Passes By, it is clear that he views history as a teleological (God directed) phenomenon, very much along Judeo-Christian lines of the divine drama and latter day apocalypse. He proclaims that God has intervened in history once again in the promised coming of the Iranian prophets, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh ,who fulfil the messianic covenant of past ages. The tragic rejection of these "Twin Manifestations" by the kings and rulers, and the generality of mankind, has brought down the judgement of God upon a heedless world. The result is a "world-afflicting ordeal" (The Promised Day is Come 111) in which a "dual phenomenon" is at work which wreaks the simultaneous

destruction and integration of the old and new world orders: "The one is being rolled up, and is crashing in oppression, bloodshed, and ruin. The other opens up vistas of a justice, a unity, a peace, a culture, such as no age has ever seen" (The Promised Day is Come 17). This painful process of "birth pangs" and "death pangs" is "the greatest drama in the world's spiritual history" (The Promised Day is Come 17, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh 56). In this divine drama perspective, Shoghi Effendi envisions the main actors of the early Apostolic or Heroic Age of the Bahá'í dispensation (1844-1921), its grand era of disciples, saints, teachers and martyrs, as embodying superlative heroic virtues which command, not only deserved admiration, but which are susceptible of inspiring outstanding deeds by latter generations. Consequently, whether from the Judeo-Christian or Bahá'í point of view, the revelations of prophetic history, by which humanity's civilized life has been progressively advanced, cannot be of lesser importance than the individual's decisive act of faith.

Ontology and the Soul

Aside from the question of being itself, their great preoccupation, existential philosophers have avoided metaphysical discussion of essences such as the soul. Life itself is their great concern and the human being's interactions with the self and other beings in the environment. In allowing the word to drop from their vocabulary, the existentialists have anticipated postmodernism's turning away from attempts to understand the soul, following the obliteration of divine content from the human reality by materialistic psychology in the nineteenth century. Keith Ward comments that "Even the word ‘soul' is scarcely used any more, and few could say just what it means, or what the idea of the soul really is"(In Defence of the Soul 7). Ward goes on to say that science has convinced many that human beings are just basically animals, destined to die and rot like other life forms. In the cosmic scheme of things, we are allegedly small creatures that have been produced as the result of "random mutations and impersonal cosmic process" (In Defence of the Soul 7). Instead, Ward argues convincingly that the soul remains the great bastion of our identification with God, with human dignity and purpose, an eternal destiny and an awesome moral responsibility. It is the soul that makes us essentially human, that is, a divine creation.

As we have seen above, the notable exception was existentialist Gabriel Marcel who lamented the disappearance of the soul and its connection with hope. His words bear repeating in full:

I spoke of the soul. This word, so long discredited, should here be given its priority once more. We cannot help seeing that there is the closest of connections between the soul and hope. I almost think that hope is for the soul what breathing is for the living organism. Where hope is lacking the soul dries up and withers, it is no more than a function, it is merely fit to serve as an object of study to a psychology that can never register anything but its location or absence. It is precisely the soul that is the traveller; it is of the soul and of the soul alone that we can say with supreme truth that "being"

necessarily means "being on the way" (en route) (Homo Viator 10-11)

Bahá'u'lláh has clearly identified the nature of the soul as a mysterious divine creation "...a sign of God, a heavenly gem whose reality the most learned of men hath failed to grasp, and whose mystery no mind, however acute, can ever hope to unravel (Gleanings 158). This statement would resonate with Marcel's honouring of mystery as something that cannot be circumscribed by human intelligence.

However, we can indentify the soul, at least in its functional aspects in the world, with the existentialist's notion of the self, which can also be equated with the human spirit. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, in an economic explanation, has identified the soul with the human spirit:

The human spirit which distinguishes man from the animal is the rational soul, and these two names -- the human spirit and the rational soul -- designate one thing. This spirit, which in the terminology of the philosophers is the rational soul, embraces all beings, and as far as human ability permits discovers the realities of things and becomes cognizant of their peculiarities and effects, and of the qualities and properties of beings (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions 208).

The simplified formula, then, would be as follows: divine self=soul=human spirit. Simply put, there does not have to be any necessary disconnect between the self, being and the soul. Marcel was perceptive enough to have realized that the soul deserves to retain its rightful place as one of the great essences of being that fosters hope through belief in eternal life. Needless to say, such an affirmation is fully compatible with a Bahá'í understanding of being and the human reality.

CONCLUSION

One vital dimension of Bahá'í studies must necessarily concern "living the life" and the interpenetrative meanings of the self and the search for truth as integral features of Bahá'í spirituality. While certain tensions admittedly exist, Bahá'í theology may be nonetheless fruitfully correlated to theistic existentialism by elucidating the merits of the spiritual struggle in the search for God and understanding those dynamic factors that facilitate the emergence of the true self. In this ongoing process, moments of spiritual crisis provide potential opportunities for spiritual transformation, which serve to overcome estrangement from God, self, and others. Despite its preoccupation with ontology rather than essences, the existential perspective affirms belief in the immortal soul as the reality of man in a theology of hope. Existential themes may be found in Bahá'í history, in the life of suffering inflicted upon the Bahá'í Faith's Three Central Figures, a suffering which They overcame by detachment and radiant acquiescence to the Will of God. The existential perspective will potentially diversify the field of Bahá'í studies by switching the frame of reference from theoretical to real life concerns, and will serve to enhance the value of religious experience. This approach will provide, moreover, a basis for interreligious

dialogue with those who are philosophically and theologically informed. The suggested correlation of existential theism to Bahá'í studies will allow the voice of the engaged, religious thinker or spiritual philosopher to emerge, and to round off, the objective analysis of the academic.

NOTES

[1]. This paper is an expanded and revised version of a presentation made to the Philosophy Special Interest Group at the Annual Conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies, La Jolla (San Diego), California, August 29-1 September, 2008. My special thanks go to Ian Kluge for clarifying several issues about existential philosophy during the various drafts of this paper.

[2].Scores of passages exist on the theme of "living the life" in the writings of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá and the interpretations of Shoghi Effendi. For example: "The great thing is to ‘Live the Life' -- to have our lives so saturated with the Divine teaching and the Bahá'í Spirit that people cannot fail to see a joy, a power, a love, a purity, a radiance, an efficiency in our character and work that will distinguish us from worldly-minded people and make people wonder what is the secret of this new life in us" (letter, 2 February 1925 qtd. in Hornby 111).

[3]."Experience", Timothy Fitzgerald, Guide to the Study of Religion, eds. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon, 125-139. The distinction between "discontinuous" and "continuous" religious experience is found on 126.

[4]. Undated letter quoted in the compilation on Scholarship, prepared by the Research Department for the Universal House of Justice (1995) 17.

[6]. "The meaning of the serpent is attachment to the human world. This attachment of the spirit to the human world led the soul and spirit of Adam from the world of freedom to the world of bondage and caused Him to turn from the Kingdom of Unity to the human world. When the soul and spirit of Adam entered the human world, He came out from the paradise of freedom and fell into the world of bondage. From the height of purity and absolute goodness, He entered into the world of good and evil" (123-24) .

[7]. Although Karl Barth's prodigious Church Dogmatics (12 volumes and 7000 pages) and his Theology of the Word identify him as neo-orthodox, there are nonetheless existential dimensions to Barth's work. Barth was aware that revelation, the vertical line of transcendence and eternity, intersected the horizontal line of human existence in time. This meeting of time and eternity was paradoxical. Despite his dialectics, and against the dogmatician and the mystic, Barth believed that the knowledge of God is never immediate. Against Barth's work, which seemed to some to be too rigid and traditionalist, Bultmann based his theology of technical biblical criticism within an existential framework derived from the early work of Heidegger. Some critiqued Bultmann's theology for being too anthrocentric, even non-theological.

[8]. The following thirteen concepts have been drawn from a number of sources, which are indicated in the section, but John Maquarrie's Existentialism (1972)

and David E. Roberts's Existentialism and Religious Belief (1959) have been instructive. These concepts are filtered through a Bahá'í perspective.

[9]. The following passage is representative: "The virtues of humanity are many, but science is the most noble of them all. The distinction which man enjoys above and beyond the station of the animal is due to this paramount virtue. It is a bestowal of God; it is not material; it is divine. Science is an effulgence of the Sun of Reality, the power of investigating and discovering the verities of the universe, the means by which man finds a pathway to God. All the powers and attributes of man are human and hereditary in origin -- outcomes of nature's processes -- except the intellect, which is supernatural (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace. 49).

[10]. See below "The Leap of Faith and Bahá'u'lláh's Narrative Theology of the True Seeker"

[11]. "And every branch of learning, conjoined with the love of God, is approved and worthy of praise; but bereft of His love, learning is barren -- indeed, it bringeth on madness. Every kind of knowledge, every science, is as a tree: if the fruit of it be the love of God, then is it a blessed tree, but if not, that tree is but dried-up wood, and shall only feed the fire."

[12].While the subject of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's talk is "The Knowledge of the Divine Manifestations," it is clear that his distinction applies to ordinary human beings since he says that "...the knowledge of being (‘ilm-i vújúdí), is intuitive; it is like the cognizance and consciousness that man has of himself."

[13]. In Aristotle's philosophy praxis was to be distinguished from theoria and poiésis (skilled handicrafts).

[14]. Concluding Unscientific Postscript is usually regarded as the work that represents the point of view that objective reasoning is of little or no use in the life of religious faith.

[15]. "When one is released from the prison of self, that is indeed freedom!" Quoted from ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's famous statement to the American Bahá'ís, following His liberation after the revolution of the Young Turks (1908). "Freedom is not a matter of place, but of condition, etc."

[16]. Either the challenging nature of the meaning of "truth" or the deceptive simplicity of this teaching has caused it to suffer a certain scholarly neglect. For a further discussion on the search for truth see chapter one, "The Starting Point: The Search for Truth" in J.A. McLean, Dimensions in Spirituality: Reflections on the Meaning of Spirituality and Transformation in Light of the Bahá'í Faith. See also Gary L. Matthews' instructive article "The Searching Eye." In his talks in North America, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá consistently places the search for truth first in his sequential presentations of Bahá'í teachings. See, for example, His talks in Washington, Pittsburg, Philadelphia, Boston, Montreal, Sacramento, and on two occasions in New York, and also in His long exposé of Bahá'í teachings in Paris.

[17]. The formulation in the King James translation is slightly different: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

[18]. The complete quotation is: "It [the Bahá'í Faith] moreover, enjoins upon its followers the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth." This quotation is particularly noteworthy because of the italicized words. The search for truth is not just for those who are seeking truth in their pre-Bahá'í stage. The duty of the search continues in the post-Bahá'í stage. (emphasis mine).

[19].http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy_of_Søren_Kierkegaard.

[20]. Heidegger's Dasein, his word for human existence, is distinguished from Sein (Being). Heidegger has himself explained the meaning of Dasein in the introductory key sentence of Being and Time with this somewhat obscure statement: "Das "Wesen" des Daseins liegt in seiner Existenz" ("The essence of being there (Dasein) lies in its existence").

[21]. See Dr. Stephen Lambden's "A Tablet of Mirzá Husayn ʻAli Bahá'u'lláh of the early Iraq period: "The Tablet of All Food,"" Bahá'í Studies Bulletin 3:1, June 1984 5-67.

[22]. Based on the Báb's "Tablet to Mirzá Sa'íd" and His "Commentary on the Hadith of the Imam Rida" excerpted in Gate of the Heart 202-3

[23]. In Dynamics of Faith, Tillich clarified that this ultimate concern means that the human mind or spirit participates in the Ground of its own being. In this way, the separative, subject-object, God-man dichotomy is purportedly overcome.

[24]. The very early roots of Greek philosophy lie in Hesiod. After his poetic narrative, the Theogony (circa 700 BCE), which treated cosmology or the world order in light of the activities of three generations of the gods and goddesses, Hesiod wrote Works and Days, also in poetry, in which man, rather than the gods, occupies the central stage. John Mansley Robinson writes that "He is concerned with man as such, in his relations to the social order, to the gods, and to the necessities of life" (An Introduction to Early Greek Philosophy 3). Robinson writes that Aristotle had named Thales as the founder of Greek philosophy but states that it is unlikely that Aristotle had a first hand knowledge of Thales's views. Robinson views rather Anaximander, a younger contemporary of Thales, as the founder of Greek philosophy (23).

[25]. Religion scholar Jarsolav Pelikan comments in his introduction to Chesterton's extract from Orthodoxy that although Chesterton "was not a scholar or a theologian but a journalist and the author of the popular Father Brown detective stories" that nevertheless "in books on Francis of Assisi and Thomas Aquinas, "and in two interconnected works entitled Heretics and Orthodoxy, he defended the integrity of the theological tradition with a vigor that many professional theologians and scholars could (and did) envy" (The World Treasury of Modern Religious Thought 385).

[26]. From the title of Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death. Kierkegaard considered these books from the esthetic point of view to be "the most perfect" books that he had ever written (Translator's note18). The lucid prose of these books is free of that strain, complexity and passion that is characteristic of much of his other writing. .

[27].A phrase I have used in Dimensions in Spirituality to describe a test of exceptional severity. See Chapter 5, "A Paradigm of Spirituality and Life Tests" 128-58.

[28]. The Sickness Unto Death is a later, more mature version of the earlier Fear and Trembling (1843). The Sickness Unto Death remains to this day the preeminent study in the psychology of despair and heavily influenced the thinking of the existentialists who followed Kierkegaard, particularly Heidegger and Sartre. Kierkegaard explains that the sickness unto death is despair. Since death would mean the end of despair, he argues that "...the torment of despair is precisely this, not to be able to die. So it has much in common with the situation of the moribund when [he] lies and struggles with death, and cannot die. So to be sick unto death is, not to be able to die---yet not as though there were hope of life; no, the hopelessness in this case is that even the last hope, death, is not available" (150-151).

[29]. From the Greek epiphainomenon, meaning "to appear" or "to manifest."

[30]. This is the title of C.S. Lewis's spiritual autobiography in which he describes his conversion from atheism to Christianity. The title, however, does not describe the emotion surrounding his actual conversion which was, as he has specified, "not to Christianity" but to theism (184), and which was "strangely unemotional" (179). It was, rather, a conversion to the realisation of free choice. Riding on top of a bus in Oxford, "going up Headington Hill," Lewis felt himself to be entrapped in a suit of armour or a kind of "corslet." He became acutely conscious at that moment that he had been given the free choice either to keep this armour on or unbuckle it and go free. He was given the freedom to choose, but he did not seem to be able to do otherwise than to choose God. "Then came the repercussion on the imaginative level," says Lewis. "I felt as if I were a man of snow at long last beginning to melt...I rather disliked the feeling."

[31]. Camus said that he was not an existentialist because of his differences with Sartre but the label has stuck.

[32]. In the Christian tradition, see for example, Jürgen Moltmann's Theologie der Hoffnung (Theology of Hope), an eschatological study of Christianity in the light of history.

[33]. Gabriel Marcel, Homo Viator 10-11. In his essay, "Sketch of a Phenomenology and a Metaphysic of Hope" (une métaphysique de l'espoir), Marcel further develops his metaphysic of hope. See especially 49-67.

[34]. As its name suggests, narrative theology is an interdisciplinary field that proposes the use of narrative or story, instead of propositional

discourse, to rethink the nature, task and method of theology. See George Stroup's "Theology or Narrative Theology?: A Response to Why Narrative?" http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/jan1991/v47-4criticscorner.htm and Maarten Wisse's "Narrative Theology and the Use of the Bible in Systematic Theology" http://www.arsdisputandi.org/ publish/articles/000226/article.htm

[35]. Metonymy is the naming of a thing by one of its parts.

[36]. Fear and Trembling deals with Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac. It contests the Hegelian notion of a system or science of universals or absolutes by a juxtaposition and contrast of the individual, represented by Abraham, who chooses to violate a universal ethical norm (infanticide) which requires the sacrifice of his beloved son. Kierkegaard says: "The knight of faith is obliged to rely upon himself alone, he feels the pain of not being able to make himself intelligible to others, but he feels no vain desire to guide others" (90). "The true knight of faith is always absolute isolation, the false knight is sectarian" (89).

[37]. Kierkegaard acknowledged his debt to Lessing in his elaboration of the leap. See Kierkegaard's Papirer V. B 1, 3: 53. For Lessing and Kierkegaard truth meant religious truth. Alastair Hannay, Kierkegaard 98.

[38]. Here I mean the "the great reversal" in its dramatic or theatrical sense, but it takes on a specific meaning in a Bahá'í context. It is synonymous with vav va makousé (the reversed vav) which occurs in the writings of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsá'í (1753-1826 CE), founder of the Shaykhí school of Islam. Al-Ahsá'í interpreted the inverted or reversed Arabic letter wáw when written out in full (wáw-alif-wáw) as a sign of the advent of the promised Qá'im. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (¶ 157) Bahá'u'lláh also writes: "Behold, the "mystery of the Great Reversal in the Sign of the Sovereign" hath now been made manifest." With these words Bahá'u'lláh alludes to his own coming as fulfillment of prophecy. The great reversal refers more specifically to the eschatological phenomenon of the inversion of spiritual status between clergy and laity at the advent of the Prophet. See Stephen Lambden's provisional translation and commentary "The Translation and Significance of a Shaykhí Phrase in the "Most Holy Book" (al-Kitáb al-aqdas): "The Mystery of the Great Reversal in the Sign of the Sovereign" (sirr al-tankís li-ramz al-ra'ís), paper delivered at the Association for Bahá'í Studies, English -Speaking Europe, July 1993. See the Bahá'í Studies Bulletin [ref].

[39]. In Nicholson's translation it is found at the end of the third and the beginning of the fourth Daftar.

[40]. Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology 14:1, March 2007, 57-66

[41]. From Nicolas Berdyaev, The Meaning of History. 16.

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