



Towards a definition of Bahá'í theology and mystical philosophy

Abstract. Theology is not one of those “sciences that begin and end in words.” On the contrary, the Bahá'í writings teach a theology, which is usually defined as “divine philosophy,” and which has nothing to do with past, divisive, metaphysical hair-splitting. Its main objects are listed. Divine philosophy is not a mere intellectual knowledge of abstract ideas, but a conscious knowledge of spiritual reality, which every Bahá'í is invited to achieve, so that his life may be renewed. Three fruits of divine philosophy are described: inner knowledge, spiritual progress, and an enhanced capacity of loving. These fruits are vital means for the attainment of the object of the Bahá'í Faith: the oneness of humankind. Studying theology is not dangerous for the unity of the Bahá'ís, because the Bahá'í writings provide sufficient means of security: the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice, as the head of the Bahá'í Faith, and the interdiction to utter authoritative statements, unless specifically authorized by the writings themselves. Since Bahá'í theology is quite different from the theologies of the past, it is suggested to call it “divine philosophy,” according to the terminology used in the writings.

A number of Bahá'ís think that theology is one of those “sciences that begin and end in words,”¹ which Bahá'u'lláh recommends that people avoid. Therefore they think that theology is of lesser, or of no importance in their Faith. Their idea may be justified in the light of the concept of theology they have in their minds: “A system of theoretical principles; an (impractical or rigid) ideology,”² or: “A set of rigidly and dogmatically adopted criteria, customs and procedures.”³ These definitions describe a number of the features of the dogmatic theologies of the past, which were mostly elaborated by human minds, sometimes substituted for the Word of God and thus worshipped, often imposed by churches or religious *estab-*

Bahá'í Studies Review 11 (2003) 58–70.

¹ Bahá'u'lláh, “Tajalliyát,” in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978) 52.

² *The Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. John A. Simpson e Edmund S.C. Weiner, 2d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), s.v. “theology” 17: 898.

³ Salvatore Battaglia, *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana* 20 (Turin: UTET, 2000): s.v. “teologia” 910.

lishments as an essential element of faith to be dogmatically accepted. Those theologies are incomplete and often imperfect, inasmuch as they are of human origin, abstract, theoretical, almost always fruitless, and sometimes imbued with superstition. They have been an important factor of disunity, discord, conflict and even of bloody wars among their own followers and between the various religious denominations. Shoghi Effendi defined them as “Fruitless excursions into metaphysical hair-splitting,”⁴ and said that their “theological treatises and commentaries . . . encumber the human mind rather than help it to attain the truth.”⁵ In this paper, it is not so much scholastic theology, which was characterised in Islam as *kalám* and which aims at a rational and intellectual analysis of religious truth, that will be the subject of our attention but rather the “divine philosophy” or mystical philosophy that seeks to attain an inner spiritual knowledge.

The term “theology” in the Bahá’í writings

The term “theology” does not appear as such in the Bahá’í writings, that are written in Arabic and Persian. And in the English writings and translations by Shoghi Effendi it recurs only twice, in contexts that are not relevant to the aims of a definition

⁴ On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, to an individual believer, 15 February 1947, in *Unfolding Destiny. The Messages from the Guardian to the Bahá’ís of the British Isles* (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1981) 445.

⁵ On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, to an individual believer, 30 July 1956, qtd. in *Bahá’í News* 230 (April 1950): 1. After Shoghi Effendi said these words in 1947 and 1956 respectively, there have been interesting developments in theology in the field of inter-religious dialogue. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said in 1912: “We are considering the divine plan for the reconciliation of the religious systems of the world. Bahá’u’lláh has said that if one intelligent member be selected from each of the varying religious systems, and these representatives come together seeking to investigate the reality of religion, they would establish an interreligious body before which all disputes and differences of belief could be presented for consideration and settlement. Such questions could then be weighed and viewed from the standpoint of reality and all imitations be discarded. By this method and procedure all sects, denominations and systems would become one (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace. Talks delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during His visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*, ed. Howard MacNutt, 2d ed. [Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982] 233-4). In the light of these words, a good number of those recent developments in theology could be considered as a first step in the direction suggested by Bahá’u’lláh. And thus they cannot certainly be viewed as “fruitless excursions into metaphysical hair-splitting,” and as words that “encumber the human mind rather than help it to attain the truth.”

of theology.⁶ Shoghi Effendi also refers twice to the word “theologian”⁷ and thrice to the adjective “theological.”⁸ But also these passages are of little use in view of a definition of “theology.” The only concept that may be inferred from them is that Shoghi Effendi does not seem to appreciate “the wranglings of theologians”⁹ and “those theological treatises and commentaries that encumber the human mind rather than help it to attain the truth.”¹⁰ The most important Arabic and Persian terms that are similar to the English word “theology” and recur in the Bahá’í writings are: “*iláhiyát*,”¹¹ translated as “theology,”¹² “*ḥikmatu’l-iláhiyát*,”¹³ translated as “divine philosophy,”¹⁴ “*falsafiy-i-iláhi*,”¹⁵ translated as “divine philosophy,”¹⁶ “*ilm-i-lahúti*,”¹⁷ translated as “spiritual science,”¹⁸ “*ulúm-i-iláhiyyih*,”¹⁹ translated as “divine science,”²⁰ “[*ilm*] *az má wará’u’ṭ-ṭabí’at*,”²¹ translated as “supernatural science,”²² and “*ma’arif-i-díní*,”²³ translated as “theology.”²⁴

⁶ See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1957) 18, 286.

⁷ See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 123-4; *The Compilation of Compilations* Prepared by The Universal House of Justice 1963-1990 2 (Maryborough, Victoria, Australia: Bahá’í Publications Australia, 1991): 348.

⁸ See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 121; *The Promised Day Is Come* (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1941) 96; on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, to an individual believer, 30 November 1932, *Compilation 2*: 411.

⁹ Shoghi Effendi, *Compilation 2*: 348.

¹⁰ on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, to an individual believer, 30 November 1932, *Compilation 2*: 411.

¹¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *An Núru’l-Abhá fī Mufávaḍāt-i-‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Table Talks*, collected by Laura Clifford Barney, 2d ed. (Cairo, 1920) 12.

¹² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, trans. Laura Clifford-Barney, 3d ed. (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1981) 15.

¹³ Bahá’u’lláh, *Majmú‘iy-i-Alwáḥ-i-Mubárakih*, reprint (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1978) 45.

¹⁴ Bahá’u’lláh, “*Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat*,” in *Tablets* 145.

¹⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Majmú‘iy-i-Khaṭábát-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Langenhain: Bahá’í-Verlag, 1984) 571.

¹⁶ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 349.

¹⁷ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Majmú‘iy-i-Khaṭábát* 387.

¹⁸ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 138.

¹⁹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Majmú‘iy-i-Khaṭábát* 386.

²⁰ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 138, cf. 49.

²¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Majmú‘iy-i-Khaṭábát* 387.

²² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 138.

- 1 In the Islamic literature the Arabic and Persian word *ilāhīyāt*, which is the Arabic plural of *ilāhīyat*, “Divinity,”²⁵ is usually translated as “theology,”²⁶ but also as “Divine things . . . metaphysics; things pertaining to the supernatural.”²⁷ Henri Corbin explains that *ilāhīyāt* means “*Divinalia*” and that “metaphysics is usually considered as the science which deals with *Ilāhīyāt*.”²⁸
- 2 As to the locution “*ḥikmatu’l-ilāhīyat*” in the Islamic literature, *ḥikmat* is an Arabic and Persian word usually translated as “Wisdom, science, knowledge; a wise saying; philosophy, physic, medicine; mystery, occult science.”²⁹ *Ilāhīyat* is the feminine form of the adjective *ilāhī* usually translated as “divine, of God; theological.”³⁰ Corbin writes that *ḥikmat* “is the equivalent of the Greek *Sophia*.”³¹ He says moreover that the Arabic and Persian locution *ḥikmatu’l-ilāhīyat* “is the literal equivalent of the Greek *theosophia*.”³² And he explains that “after Sohrawardī [1155-1191],” the term has been increasingly used in the Islamic world “to designate the doctrine of the perfect wise man, who is both a philosopher and a mystique.”³³
- 3 In the Islamic world the Arabic and Persian word *falsafat* denotes not only philosophy as a whole, but also the specific Arabic philosophy of Greek ma-

²³ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tadhkiratu’l-Vafá’ Fí Tarjumat-i-Hayát-i-Qudamá’u’l-Aḥibbá’* (Haifa: Maṭbaih al-‘Abbásiyih, 1343 AH – 1924 AD) 268.

²⁴ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials of the Faithful*, trans. Marzieh Gail (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1971) 180.

²⁵ Francis Joseph Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary including the Arabic words and phrases to be met with in Persian literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), s.v. “*ilāhīyāt*” 96.

²⁶ Alessandro Coletti e Hanne Coletti Grunbaum, *Dizionario Persiano-Italiano* (Rome: Centro Culturale Italo-Iraniano, 1978), s.v. “*elāhiyāt*” 76.

²⁷ Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, s.v. “*ilāhīyāt*” 2 96.

²⁸ Henri Corbin, *Historie de la Philosophie Islamique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986) 14.

²⁹ Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, s.v. “*ḥikmat*” 427.

³⁰ Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Arabic-English), ed. J. Milton Cowan, 4th ed. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harassowitz, 1979), s.v. “*alh-ilāhī*” 30.

³¹ Corbin, *Historie de la Philosophie Islamique* 14.

³² Corbin, *Historie de la Philosophie Islamique* 15.

³³ Corbin, *Historie de la Philosophie Islamique* 219.

trix, with Peripathetical and Neo-Platonic tendencies that flourished after the ninth century AD, whose foremost representatives are al Farábí (872-950) and Avicenna (980-1037). Corbin remarks that “the terms *falsafa* e *faylasûf* . . . are not exactly the same as our concepts of ‘philosophy’ and ‘philosopher.’ The sharp distinction between ‘philosophy’ and ‘theology’ goes back, in the West, to Middle Age Scholastic. This distinction implies a ‘secularization’ of which Islam could not have any idea, for the simple reason that Islam had no experience of a Church, with all its implications and consequences.”³⁴ As a matter of fact, Islamic philosophy has always been strongly influenced by the teachings of the Koran.

- 4 As to the locutions “*‘ilm-i-lahút*” and “*‘ulúm-i-iláhiyyih*” in the Islamic literature, the Arabic and Persian word *‘ilm* is usually translated as “knowledge, learning.”³⁵ The Arabic and Persian word *‘ulúm*, which is the Arabic plural of *‘ilm*, is usually translated as “Sciences.”³⁶ *Láhútí* is the adjective derived from *láhút*, a theological term which describes the revealed divine nature. *Iláhiyyih* is the Persian equivalent of *iláhiyat*, the Arabic feminine form of the adjective *iláhi*. The Arabic and Persian locution *‘ilm-i-iláhi* is usually translated as “theology.”³⁷
- 5 As to the locution “[*‘ilm*] *az má wará’u’t-ṭabí‘at*” in the Islamic literature, *ṭabí‘at* means “nature.”³⁸ The locution *‘ilm at-ṭabí‘at* is usually translated as “physics; natural science,” whereas the locution *‘ilm* or *falsafih az má wará’u’t-ṭabí‘at* is usually translated as “metaphysics.”³⁹
- 6 As to the locution “*ma‘árif-i-dín*” in the Islamic literature, *ma‘árif* is the plural form of *ma‘rifat* and it is usually translated as “sciences.”⁴⁰ *Díní* is the adjective derived from the word *dín*, religion, which is usually translated as

³⁴ Corbin, *Historie de la Philosophie Islamique* 13-4.

³⁵ Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, s.v. “‘alima-‘ilm” 743.

³⁶ Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, s.v. “‘ulūm” 864.

³⁷ Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, s.v. “‘ilm-ilmi ilāhī” 863.

³⁸ Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, s.v. “ṭabī‘a” 645.

³⁹ Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, s.v. “ṭabī‘a” 645.

⁴⁰ Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, s.v. “ma‘ārif” 1264-5.

“Religious.”⁴¹ Therefore the literal translation of this locution is “religious sciences.”

In other talks by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá “divine philosophy”⁴² is also called “heavenly sciences”⁴³ and “the science of Divinity.”⁴⁴

“Divine philosophy”

In the writings and talks by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá “divine philosophy” is one of the branches of philosophy. And he defines philosophy through a reference to a well known Muslim tradition: “comprehending the reality of things as they exist, according to the capacity and power of man (*Hikmat ‘ibárat az idrák-i-ḥaqáyiḡ-i-áshyá’ ast alá má hiya ‘alayhi*).”⁴⁵ The other branch is “natural philosophy,”⁴⁶ or “material philosophy (*ḡikmat-i- . . . ṡabí‘yyih*),”⁴⁷ or “material science (*‘ulúm-i-máddíyyih*),”⁴⁸ corresponding to what today we generically define science. If we want to have a deeper understanding of what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá meant as “divine philosophy” we should, therefore, on the one hand understand what he meant as “philosophy” and on the other discover which ~~is~~ are, in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s explanations, the method and the object of philosophy.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s definition of philosophy is reminiscent of a passage of a prayer ascribed to Muḡammad and often quoted by the Sufis: “O Lord, show us things as they are (*‘Alláhumma ariná al-‘ashyá’ kamá hiya* [or *alá má hiya*

⁴¹ Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, s.v. “dīnī” 554.

⁴² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 31, 59, 87, 284, 326, 327; *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Paris in 1911-1912*, 11th ed. (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969) 173; *Abdul-Baha on Divine Philosophy* (Boston, Massachusetts: The Tudor Press, 1918) 99, 100, 135, 152.

⁴³ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Abdul-Baha on Divine Philosophy* 135.

⁴⁴ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 326.

⁴⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Mufávaḡát* 156; English translation: *Some Answered Questions* 221.

⁴⁶ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 326.

⁴⁷ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Risáliy-i-Madaniyyih* (Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá’í Verlag, 1984) 91; English translation: *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, trans. Marzieh Gail (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1952) 77.

⁴⁸ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Majmú‘iy-i-Khaṡábát* 387; English translation: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 138. *Máddíyyih* is the feminine form of the adjective *máddí*, whose meaning is “material, natural” (Steingass, *Persian-English Dictionary*, s.v. “maddī” 1138)».

‘*alayhi*]).” The Sufis interpret this prayer of their Prophet as a request that God may bestow upon the believer a power of perception that may enable him to see God in every thing, according to the Koranic verse: “God’s is the east and the west, and wherever ye turn there is God’s face (*vajhu’lláh*).”⁴⁹ Bahá’u’lláh explains that “the face of God” is the Manifestation of God. He writes: “All on the earth shall pass away; and this is the face (*vajh*) of your Lord, the Almighty, the Well-Beloved.”⁵⁰ A similar statement may be found in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*: “From their knowledge, the knowledge of God is revealed, and from the light of their countenance, the splendour of the Face of God is made manifest,”⁵¹ and in the “Tablet to Napoleon”: ““O ye peoples of the earth! Turn yourselves towards Him Who hath turned towards you. He, verily, is the Face of God amongst you, and His Testimony and His Guide unto you. He hath come to you with signs which none can produce.””⁵² Since the Manifestation of God is the human manifestation of the divine Command (‘*amr*), the capacity to perceive the Manifestation of God in every thing seems tantamount to the capacity to look “on all things with the eye of oneness” and to see “the brilliant rays of the divine sun shining from the dawning-point of Essence alike on all created things, and the lights of singleness reflected over all creation,”⁵³ which Bahá’u’lláh describes in the *Seven Valleys*. It is spiritual or inner knowledge (‘*irfán* or *ma’rifat*), also called certitude (*iqán*), described not only in the *Seven Valleys*,⁵⁴ but also in the *Four Valleys*,⁵⁵ in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*⁵⁶ and in *Javáhiru’l-Asrár*.⁵⁷ Bahá’u’lláh writes about this power: “We should with tearful

⁴⁹ Koran II, 115 (Edward Henry Palmer tr.).

⁵⁰ Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The Most Holy Book* (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1992) 57, ¶ 101.

⁵¹ Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-Íqán. The Book of Certitude*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2d ed. [Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1970] 142.

⁵² in Bahá’u’lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts: Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* [Bahá’í World Centre, Haifa, 2002] H134.

⁵³ Bahá’u’lláh, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, trans. Marzieh Gail, (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, rev. ed. 1991) 18.

⁵⁴ Bahá’u’lláh, *Seven Valleys* 11-7.

⁵⁵ Bahá’u’lláh, *Seven Valleys* 49-51.

⁵⁶ Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-Íqán* 196-200.

⁵⁷ Bahá’u’lláh, *Gems of Divine Mysteries: Javáhiru’l-Asrár* (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 2002) ¶ 39 ff, 84.

eyes, fervently and repeatedly, implore Him to grant us the favour of that grace.”⁵⁸ Then he adds: “That city [the city of Certitude] is none other than the Word of God revealed in every age and dispensation. In the days of Moses it was the Pentateuch; in the days of Jesus the Gospel; in the days of Muḥammad the Messenger of God the Qur’án; in this day the Bayan”⁵⁹ Therefore it seems that “spiritual or inner knowledge” or “certitude” may be attained only through the words of the Manifestation of God. Indeed Bahá’u’lláh clearly writes in another context that “divine philosophy (*ḥikmatu’l-iláhiyat*)”⁶⁰ has been taught to human beings by the Manifestations of God and he considers Hermes Trismegistos, called Idris in the Koran, “the Father of Philosophy (*abú’l-ḥikmat*)”⁶¹ and numbered among the Prophets of God, and he explains that his books are the most important source of the ancient philosophy. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says that religion is “the truest philosophy,” because it “inculcates morality.”⁶²

As to the method to adopt while studying the objects of “divine philosophy,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá clearly explains that the criteria of human knowledge are four: “the senses (*ḥass*),” “reason (*‘aql*),” insight or inspiration and “tradition—that is, through the text of the Holy Scriptures (*naql, wa ‘án nuṣúṣ kutub-i-muqaddasih ast*).”⁶³ Examining these four criteria, He concludes that—each one of them being limited—any single one can lead to fallacious results. Thus any object of human investigation should be studied in the light of all these four criteria. But also studying a subject in the light of these four criteria does not guarantee the results of our efforts. A method is suggested in the Bahá’í Writings, whereby certain standards of inner integrity of thought and behaviour should be observed.⁶⁴ Only when those four criteria are used, that method is followed and those standards are observed,

⁵⁸ Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 199.

⁵⁹ Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 199.

⁶⁰ Bahá’u’lláh, “Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat,” in *Majmú‘iy-i-Alwáḥ-i-Mubárah* 45; English translation: Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets* 145.

⁶¹ Bahá’u’lláh, “Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat,” *Majmú‘iy-i-Alwáḥ-i-Mubárah* 48; English translation: *Tablets* 147.

⁶² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 31.

⁶³ See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Mufávaḍát* 207-8; English translation: *Some Answered Questions* 297-9; *Promulgation* 20-2, 253-5; *Divine Philosophy* 88-90.

⁶⁴ See Bahá’u’lláh, *Seven Valleys* 5-8; *Gems of Divine Mysteries* ¶ 36-7; *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 192-8; and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 38-9, 77.

then, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “[b]y the breaths and promptings of the Holy Spirit, which is light and knowledge itself . . . the human mind is quickened and fortified into true conclusions and perfect knowledge,”⁶⁵ because “the bounty of the Holy Spirit (*fayṣ-i-rúḥu ’l-quḍṣ*) gives the true method of comprehension which is infallible and indubitable . . . and this is the condition in which certainty (*yaqín*) can alone be attained.”⁶⁶ Man’s cognitive powers are like eyes and the Holy Spirit like light, in whose absence eyes cannot see.

And thus it seems that “divine philosophy” differs from the purely rational theology, sometimes elaborated by past and present scholars, because the latter arises from a human intellect convinced to be able to understand reality without the assistance of the Holy Spirit, whereas the former arises from a human intellect that is deeply conscious of its own limitations and thus bends all its efforts towards drawing upon itself the assistance of the Holy Spirit, whereby it may be enlightened.

As to the object of “divine philosophy,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that it studies “spiritual verities (*asrár-i-ḥaqíqat*, literally, “the secrets of reality”),”⁶⁷ “spiritual realities (*ḥaqá’iq-i-ma’naví*),”⁶⁸ “the mysteries of God (*asrár-i-iláhi*) . . . inner significances of the heavenly religions (*ḥaqíqat-i-adyán-i-raḥmaní*) and foundations of the law (*asás-i-ṣharí’atu’lláh*),”⁶⁹ that is the “phenomena of the spirit.”⁷⁰ He specifically mentions the following issues:

- 1 “The intellectual proofs of Divinity . . . based upon observation and evidence . . . logically proving the reality of Divinity, the effulgence of mercy, the certainty of inspiration and immortality of the spirit”;⁷¹
- 2 “the essential nature of Divinity, of the Divine revelation, of the manifestation of Deity in this world”;⁷²

⁶⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 22.

⁶⁶ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Mufávaḍát* 208; English translation: *Some Answered Questions* 299.

⁶⁷ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Majmú’iy-i-Khaṭábát* 386; English translation: *Promulgation* 138.

⁶⁸ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Majmú’iy-i-Khaṭábát* 387; English translation: *Promulgation* 138.

⁶⁹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Majmú’iy-i-Khaṭábát* 387; English translation: *Promulgation* 138.

⁷⁰ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 326.

⁷¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 326.

⁷² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 174.

- 3 “the intrinsic oneness of all phenomena (*vahdat-i-ká'inát*),”⁷³ which is the equivalent of the well known Arabic locution *wahdat-i-wujúd*, the oneness of being, theorized by ‘Ibn-‘Arabí and considered as a pantheistic statement, and which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains in a quite different way than pantheism, as it is usually intended, in his “Tablet on the Unity of Existence,”⁷⁴ as well as in one of his American talks;⁷⁵
- 4 the concept of existence being “composition” and non-existence “decomposition,”⁷⁶
- 5 the assertion that “the world of nature is incomplete . . . nature seems complete, it is, nevertheless, imperfect because it has need of intelligence and education”;⁷⁷
- 6 “the problem of the reality of the spirit of man; of the birth of the spirit; of its birth from this world into the world of God; the question of the inner life of the spirit and of its fate after its ascension from the body,”⁷⁸ which also includes the Plotinian concept of the circle of existence⁷⁹;
- 7 such ethical teachings of revealed religions as “faith in God, the acquirement of the virtues which characterize perfect manhood, praiseworthy moralities”⁸⁰ the issue of good and evil and of its dependence on law and reason⁸¹ etc.;
- 8 last but not least there is “the Bahá’í philosophy of progressive Revelation,”⁸² mentioned by Shoghi Effendi.

These subjects include all the issues that are traditionally ascribed in the West to theology in its wider meaning: “man, the world, salvation, and eschatology (or the

⁷³ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Majmú‘iy-i-Khaṭábát* 387; English translation: *Promulgation* 349.

⁷⁴ Cf. Keven Brown, “‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s response to the doctrine of the unity of existence,” *The Journal of Bahá’í Studies* 11.3/4 (September-December 2001): 1-29).

⁷⁵ Cf. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 284-89, see note 77.

⁷⁶ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 87.

⁷⁷ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 329.

⁷⁸ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 174.

⁷⁹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 285-6.

⁸⁰ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 403.

⁸¹ Cf. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 266-7.

⁸² Shoghi Effendi, to an individual believer, 12 November 1933, *Unfolding Destiny* 432.

study of last times).”⁸³ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mentions moreover a number of fundamental principles of “divine philosophy.” He lists among those principles the well known eleven (or twelve) principles of the Bahá’í Faith, that is independent investigation of truth, balance between religions and science, equality between men and women, etc. And he says that among them “the unity of mankind . . . the tie of love which blends human hearts” is the “the most important.”⁸⁴

Therefore, on the ground of these quotations, theology may be defined as “a systematic study of spiritual phenomena, or of spiritual or metaphysical reality,” whereas science may be defined as “a systematic study of material or physical reality.” The Bahá’í writings describe a spiritual, metaphysical, subjective, transcendent, inner, invisible, celestial, heavenly or ideal reality and a physical, material, objective, contingent, outer, visible, earthly, sensible or phenomenal reality. This distinction should not, however, suggest a dualistic vision of reality. Indeed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá clearly states that “reality is one and cannot admit of multiplicity (*ḥaqíqat yikí ast ta‘addud qabúl nimíkunad*).”⁸⁵ A corollary of this statement is that we should use the scientific method to investigate not only material reality but also spiritual reality.

The importance of theology in the Bahá’í Faith

‘Abdu’l-Bahá says that “the purpose of divine philosophy” is “the training of the human realities so that they may become clear and pure as mirrors and reflect the light and love of the Sun of Reality.”⁸⁶ In fact, if theology is “a systematic study of spiritual reality,” its fruit is a conscious knowledge of spiritual reality. But “conscious knowledge”⁸⁷ also is one of the definitions of faith given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Therefore theology, far from being banished from the Bahá’í Faith, is its essential part. Each Bahá’í is expected to achieve a deeper and deeper conscious knowledge

⁸³ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, s.v. “theology.”

⁸⁴ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 31.

⁸⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Muntakhabátí az Makátib-i-Haḍrat-i-‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1979) 287; English translation: *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, trans. Marzieh Gail (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978) 298.

⁸⁶ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 59.

⁸⁷ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas* (New York, NY: Bahá’í Publishing Society, 1909) 549.

of spiritual reality, so that he may more and more effectively contribute to the “achievement of a dynamic coherence between spiritual and practical requirements of life on earth”⁸⁸ through the practical expression of his faith, that is “the practice of good deeds.”⁸⁹ This concept is seemingly confirmed in one of the American talks by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. In that talk, after having extolled the great development of material civilization in America, he augurs a corresponding development of spiritual civilization and states that its achievement requires a “readjustment” of human morals, through an improvement of “the world of intellectuality.” Then he adds:

We must . . . render service to the world of intellectuality in order that the minds of men may increase in power and become keener in perception, assisting the intellect of man to attain its supremacy so that the ideal virtues may appear. Before a step is taken in this direction [1] we must be able to prove Divinity from the standpoint of reason so that no doubt or objection may remain for the rationalist. Afterward, [2] we must be able to prove the existence of the bounty of God — that the divine bounty encompasses humanity and that it is transcendental. Furthermore, [3] we must demonstrate that the spirit of man is immortal, that it is not subject to disintegration and that it comprises the virtues of humanity.⁹⁰

And finally he says: “This is, in reality, the science of Divinity.”⁹¹

Therefore the Bahá’í Faith requires that each individual should achieve a conscious knowledge of spiritual reality so that the final goal of humankind may be attained: the realization of the oneness of humankind. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said in this regard: “Just as human intellects have revealed the secrets of matter and have brought forth from the realm of the invisible the mysteries of nature, may minds

⁸⁸ The Universal House of Justice, to the Bahá’ís of the World, 20 October 1983, in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-1986: The Third Epoch of the Formative Age*, ed. Geoffrey W. Marks (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1996) 602.

⁸⁹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas* 549.

⁹⁰ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 325-6 [numbers added].

⁹¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 326.

and spirits, likewise, come into the knowledge of the verities of God, and the realities of the Kingdom be made manifest in human hearts.”⁹²

Achieving a conscious knowledge of spiritual reality

The conscious knowledge of spiritual reality can be achieved only “in the spirit of search (*taḥqīq*), not in blind imitation (*taqlīd*).”⁹³ *Taqlīd* and *taḥqīq* (or *ijtihād*) are a well known binomial in Islamic theological disputations. In the Sufi world *taqlīd*, from the root *qld*, “to copy, to counterfeit, to imitate (in a pedestrian way),”⁹⁴ denotes “a blind submission to the *magister dixit*,”⁹⁵ which is very common among Christians as well. *Taḥqīq*, which derives from the Arabic word *ḥaqq*, truth, means not only “philosophical search,”⁹⁶ but also “realization (of Truth) . . . metaphysical, initiatory, spiritual realization . . . verification.”⁹⁷ In other words, *taḥqīq* means the achievement of spiritual or inner knowledge or certitude, as the result of one’s independent investigation of truth. This binomial is the foundation of two Bahá’í principles: the independent investigation of truth and the abolition of prejudice, prejudice which often arises from a blind submission to tradition. Bahá’u’lláh describes search in the Valley of Search in the *Seven Valleys*,⁹⁸ in the Garden of Search in *Javáhiru’l-Asrár*,⁹⁹ as well as in a passage of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* which the Bahá’ís sometimes call “Tablet of the True Seeker,”¹⁰⁰ and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains it in a passage of *Some Answered Questions*.¹⁰¹ It is “the Path of Positive Knowledge (*manáhij-i-‘ilmu’l-yaqín*),”¹⁰² “the snow-white path (*manhaju’l-*

⁹² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 39.

⁹³ Bahá’u’lláh, *Seven Valleys* 24.

⁹⁴ Antonio Campisi, *Lessico della teologia islamica* (Soveria Mannelli, Catanzaro: Rubbettino, 1994), s.v. “qld” 106.

⁹⁵ Marcello Perego, *Le parole del sufismo. Dizionario della spiritualità islamica* (Milan: Mimesis, 1998), s.v. “taqlīd” 239.

⁹⁶ Corbin, *Historie de la Philosophie Islamique* 14.

⁹⁷ Perego, *Parole del sufismo*, s.v. “taḥqīq” 233.

⁹⁸ Bahá’u’lláh, *Seven Valleys* 5-8.

⁹⁹ Bahá’u’lláh, *Gems of Divine Mysteries* ¶ 36-7.

¹⁰⁰ Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 193-9.

¹⁰¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 38-9.

¹⁰² Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 195.

baydā)” that leads “unto the Crimson Pillar (*ruknu’l-ḥamrá*),”¹⁰³ the “school of Divine Unity (*miṣṭabiy-i-tawḥíd*),”¹⁰⁴ the school where “the science of the love of God [is taught] [lit.: the School of the Merciful (*dabíristánu’r-rahmán*).”¹⁰⁵

The “independent investigation” implies a sound reading of the Books which God has given to humankind for its upliftment: the Book *par excellence*, that is, Scriptures; the “book of existence (*daftar-i-dunyá*),”¹⁰⁶ or of Creation,¹⁰⁷ or “of Life (*kitábu’l-wujúd*);”¹⁰⁸ the “book of . . . [one’s] own self (*kitáb-i-nafs*),”¹⁰⁹ or of man, defined as “the Book of Creation (*kitáb-i-takvín*).”¹¹⁰

- 1 A first fruit of the “independent quest” is a form of knowledge, which, inasmuch as it is an experiential knowledge of the spiritual reality of things, could be defined as spiritual or inner knowledge or gnosis (*‘irfán*). Bahá’u’lláh describes it in his “Tablet of the True Seeker,” in the Valleys of Knowledge and of Unity, in the second and in the fourth of the *Four Valleys* and in several passages of *Javáhiru’l-Asrár*. This spiritual or inner knowledge implies three fundamental achievements.

¹⁰³ Bahá’u’lláh, *Seven Valleys* 58.

¹⁰⁴ Bahá’u’lláh, *Seven Valleys* 34.

¹⁰⁵ Bahá’u’lláh, *Seven Valleys* 52.

¹⁰⁶ Bahá’u’lláh, “*Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih*,” in *Alwá’ih Mubarakíy-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-Bahá’u’lláh, Jalla Dhikrihu’l-A’lá* (*Shamilih: Ishraqát wa Ḥand Lawḥ-i-Dígar*, n.d.) 60; English translation: “*Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih* (Words of Paradise),” in *Tablets* 56, cf. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets* 1: 170.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Makatib-i-‘Abdu’l-Bahá* [Collected Letters] 1 (Cairo: Kurdistán-i-‘Ilmiyyih, 1912): 436.

¹⁰⁸ Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 69. Cf. “*daftar-i-‘álam* (lit.: the book of the world)” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Muntakhabátí az Áthár-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-Bahá’u’lláh* [Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá’í-Verlag, 1984] 91); English translation: “the book of life (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, rev. ed. [Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1952] 133), “*kitáb-i-ijád* (lit.: book of creation)” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Muntakhabátí* 225); English translation: “Book of Life” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections* 232).

¹⁰⁹ Bahá’u’lláh, *Seven Valleys* 48.

¹¹⁰ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Mufávaḍát* 166; English translation: *Some Answered Questions* 236. Cf. “the book of Thy creation (*kitábu’l-ibdá’i*)” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Munáját, Majmú‘at Adhkárin wa Ad’yati Min Áthár Ḥaḍrat-i-Bahá’u’lláh* [Rio de Janeiro: Editora Baha i – Brazil, 1981] 38; English translation: *Prayers and Meditations*, comp. and trans. Shoghi Effendi [London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1957] 36).

- a. First, it implies a deeper and deeper awareness of “the intrinsic oneness of all phenomena (*vahdat-i-ká'inát*),” a “subtle principle appertaining to divine philosophy and requiring close analysis and attention.”¹¹¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá confirms the statement by the Arabic philosophers that “all things are involved in all things (*kulli shay dar kulli shay ast*)”¹¹² and says that “the phenomena of the universe find realization through the one power animating and dominating all things, and all things are but manifestations of its energy and bounty.”¹¹³ The expansion of the awareness of “the intrinsic oneness of all phenomena” is an essential part of the spiritual journey of each individual, since Bahá’u’lláh himself describes it as a fundamental element of the spiritual journey which he describes in the *Seven Valleys*.¹¹⁴ It is a goal to be pursued both in the inner level (search, studies, prayer, meditation), and in the outer level (work, community life, administrative service).
- b. Second, experiential knowledge creates a deeper awareness of the ephemerality of the self in front of God, a condition which Bahá’u’lláh describes in the Valley of True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness.
- c. Third, this knowledge also implies the awareness that
all the Prophets and the Messengers of God . . . [are] as one soul and one body, as one light and one spirit ,” that “they have all arisen to proclaim His Cause and have established the laws of divine wisdom. They are, one and all, the Manifestations of His

¹¹¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 284, cf. *Majmú‘iy-i-Khaṭábát* 267; English translation: *Promulgation* 349.

¹¹² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Khaṭábát-i-Mubárakih Ḥaḍrat-i-‘Abdu’l-Bahá dar Urúpá va Imríká* [no other indication] 208); English translation: *Promulgation* 349.

¹¹³ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 286.

¹¹⁴ According to John S. Hatcher, professor of English Literature at the University of South Florida, the Valley of Unity is a transitional stage “between the two sets of three valleys, the first three pertaining to the acquisition of fundamental belief of faith, and the last three relating to the ineffable delights of certitude, confirmation and detachment which result from direct experience of spiritual realities” (John S. Hatcher, *The Arc of Ascent. The Purpose of Physical Reality II* [Oxford: George Ronald, 1994] 71).

Self, the Repositories of His might, the Treasuries of His Revelation, the Dawning-Places of His splendour, and the Day-springs of His light. Through them are manifested the signs of sanctity in the realities of all things and the tokens of oneness in the essences of all beings. Through them are revealed the elements of glorification in the heavenly realities and the exponents of praise in the eternal essences. From them hath all creation proceeded and unto them shall return all that hath been mentioned.¹¹⁵

The awareness of this concept is very important, because it is the necessary prerequisite for the abolition of the existing conflicts among religions, which are the reason why most Western people do not rely on religions as remedies for the present problems of humankind.

d. Fourth, this knowledge finally implies an inner urge to act according to the principles of “divine philosophy,” which are the kernel of morality.

- 2 A second fruit of the “independent investigation,” strictly connected with the first one, is a progressive inner transformation that implies a deeper and deeper knowledge of reality and a greater capacity to create fruits of harmony, love, unity and peace. It is “spiritual progress,” of which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says: “Spiritual progress is through the breaths of the Holy Spirit and is the awakening of the conscious soul of man to perceive the reality of Divinity.”¹¹⁶
- 3 A third fruit is the capacity of manifesting spiritual love towards all creation, a capacity which is so important that spirituality also is defined as “love in action.”¹¹⁷

Therefore the principles of Bahá’í theology, that is, divine philosophy or conscious knowledge of spiritual reality and thus also of the intrinsic oneness of all phenomena and of the ephemerality of the self, are the kernel of Bahá’í life. They are in

¹¹⁵ Bahá’u’lláh, *Gems of Divine Mysteries* ¶ 44.

¹¹⁶ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 142.

¹¹⁷ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in “Join the Army of Peace,” *Star of the West* 13.5 (August 1922): 112.

the writings. The Bahá'ís should but study them and try to understand their real meaning, in such a way that they may be in harmony with their fellow believers. While exerting this effort, they should rely on the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, “the supreme organ of the Bahá'í Commonwealth,”¹¹⁸ which is empowered to enable the Bahá'í Faith “even as a living organism, to expand and adapt itself to the needs and requirements of an ever-changing society”¹¹⁹ and thus to infallibly guide the Bahá'í community towards its promised spiritual achievements.

The protection of the Faith

The Bahá'ís should feel free to devote themselves to their theological studies with full confidence. Indeed Bahá'u'lláh has created in his writings the premises so that they may avoid the pitfalls in which most past theologians have fallen, elaborating those fruitless sciences from which Bahá'u'lláh enjoins human beings to keep away.

Bahá'u'lláh has clearly stated that God, the central subject of each theology, is absolutely unknowable. He wrote: “Whoso claimeth to have known Thee hath, by virtue of such a claim, testified to his own ignorance; and whoso believeth himself to have attained unto Thee, all the atoms of the earth would attest his powerlessness and proclaim his failure.”¹²⁰ Bahá'u'lláh has moreover explicitly stated that most of the issues cherished by the ancient theologians, issues from which in the past have risen fruitless disquisitions, are beyond human understanding and thus it is useless trying to completely explain them. Therefore, they will not be a fundamental part of Bahá'í theology. With these statements he has forever shut up any self styled theologian who may claim a role of spiritual leadership among his fellow-beings.

Bahá'u'lláh has explicitly and in details dealt in his writings with most theological issues which have been an object of contention in the past. These issues have been explained by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. All these explanations given by the three Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith¹²¹ are the kernel of Bahá'í theology.

¹¹⁸ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters* (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1955) 7.

¹¹⁹ Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 23.

¹²⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations* 123.

¹²¹ The Bahá'í International Archives have up to now collected about seven thousand of the fifteen thousand Tablets supposedly revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, more than fifteen thousand of the

The Bahá'ís should but systematize them and the Bahá'í theology will be in their hands. The Bahá'í Canadian writer Jack McLean defines this kind of theology

*Source theology or revelation theology . . . the authoritative, objective, and normative truths of the Bahá'í sacred writings or those elucidated by its duly appointed interpreters. Authoritative means that the teachings are binding on believers; objective means that the truths of source theology are commonly perceived as true by the community of believers; normative means that the teaching is recognized by believers as the standard of truth.*¹²²

In this vast literature the writings by 'Abdu'l-Bahá occupy a vital position. In the first place, they clarify a number of concepts revealed by Bahá'u'lláh from which may have risen misunderstandings. In the second place, although those writings are considered infallible, they come from the pen of a human being, and not of a Manifestation of God. Therefore they are a perfect example of a Bahá'í theological study.

Bahá'u'lláh has very clearly established that no one has the right to release an authoritative interpretation of the writings, unless he has an explicit authorization in the writings themselves. And this authorization has been granted only to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi.¹²³ Therefore although the Bahá'ís may express personal interpretations of the theological issues dealt with in the writings, while they are systematizing them, no one will ever be expected to give a normative value to those interpretations. And the body of personal opinions of the Bahá'ís on the theological issues dealt with in the writings, which McLean defines "*derivative theology*," will be but "the subjective, relative, and nonbinding elucidation of Bahá'í teachings by competent scholars. Subjective here means that the commentary is particular to the viewpoint of the writer."¹²⁴

thirty thousand Tablets supposedly written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sixteen thousand of the more than thirty thousand letters sent by Shoghi Effendi.

¹²² Jack McLean, "Prolegomena to a Bahá'í Theology," in *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 5.1 (March-June 1992), 36.

¹²³ Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 82; "Kitáb-i-'Aḥd," in *Tablets* 221; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1944) 11.

¹²⁴ McLean, "Prolegomena to a Bahá'í Theology," in *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 5.1 (March-June 1992), 36.

Bahá'u'lláh has clearly forbidden any dispute whatever, and especially on religious issues. Therefore any Bahá'í who raises a theological dispute will automatically lose any credibility.

Bahá'u'lláh condemned those sciences “which begin with words and end with words.”¹²⁵ Therefore Bahá'í theology should certainly have important practical aspects. These are, first of all, the “rewards of excellence” which, in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words, come from any “true philosophy (*hikmat-i-ḥaqíqí*).”¹²⁶

Therefore it is likely that in the future there will be as many theologies as there are individuals who will more or less systematically study theological issues. However, there will also be a Bahá'í theology developed by the Bahá'í community at large, and which will reflect the level of understanding of the Writings achieved by the community as a whole. Of course, such a publically expressed theology will be both indirectly, and sometimes directly, guided by the infallible guidance of the Universal House of Justice.

Features of Bahá'í theology

Thus we may think that some of the features of the future Bahá'í theology will be as follows.

- 1 Theologians will never lose sight of the three fruits of divine philosophy—inner knowledge, spiritual progress, and an enhanced capacity of loving—that may be obtained only through the help of the Holy Spirit;
- 2 evolution, in the sense that Bahá'í theology will reflect the growing awareness of reality achieved by the community under the protection of the Universal House of Justice;
- 3 theologians will gradually pass from individual interpretations of Scripture, to a deeper understanding of Scripture “in its pure form,” free from “all sorts of ideas that are their own”;¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, “Tajalliyát,” *Tablets* 52.

¹²⁶ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tadhkiratu’l-Vafá* 143; English translation: *Memorials* 92.

¹²⁷ On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, to an individual believer, 25 August 1926, in “The Importance of Deepening Our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith,” *The Compilation of Compilations* Prepared by The Universal House of Justice 1963-1990 1 (Maryborough, Victoria, Australia: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991): 212.

- 4 a relatively simple language, fit to express the non definitive and relative character of the concepts;
- 5 the absence of conflicts;
- 6 the presence of different schools of thought, in the sense of general tendencies. These schools of thought will not be authoritative and therefore they will not be conflicting, because the authority will remain in the writings and in their authoritative interpretations.

The fruit of the development of this theology will be that “divine civilization (*madínat-i-iláhi*)”¹²⁸ which will characterize the future world civilization. Nay, its development will be one of the three signs of the maturity of the human race, which are listed as follows:

- 1 “the emergence of a science which is described as that ‘divine philosophy’ which will include the discovery of a radical approach to the transmutation of elements”;
- 2 “the selection of a single language and the adoption of a common script for all on earth to use”;
- 3 “no one will accept to bear the weight of kingship.””¹²⁹

After these thoughts, we may suggest calling theology only the “derivative theology,” which will develop in the course of time, and to continue calling “revealed theology” “divine philosophy” according to the terminology used by both Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. It will be thus more clearly recognized that, far from being dangerous, useless or unimportant, theology or “divine philosophy” is a central aspect of Bahá’í life.

¹²⁸ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Muntakhabátí az Makatib* 129; English translation: *Selections* 132.

¹²⁹ Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 250-1, note 194.