“. . . angels which Thou hast created of snow and of fire”: Bahá’í Angelology and God’s Dialogic Relationship to Humanity*

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Abstract

Angelology is in a renaissance. Yet the angels of new religious movements in general, and the Bahá’í Faith in particular, remain less examined. In response, I offer a typology of Bahá’í angels as avatars of the Holy Spirit, distinct celestial beings, spiritually evolved people, manifestations of God, and carriers and personifications of divine virtue. These five types respectively function to emphasize the authority of divinity, accentuate the mystery of spiritual reality, reconcile spirituality and materialism through the duality of human nature, position prophets as “manifestations” of God in the context of “progressive revelation,” and attempt to make the unknowable God knowable through the transformation of axiology to ontology. Collectively, Bahá’í angels illumine an understanding of religion as a dialogic relationship. Religion is reconceived as an interactional balance of divine will and human agential choice.

Keywords

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, angelology, Bahá’í Faith, Bahá’u’lláh, cosmology, manifestations of God, progressive revelation, Shoghí Effendi

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Introduction

Bahá'í scripture possesses seemingly inconsistent depictions of angels. Commenting on a qur'anic verse,[1] the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh, wrote, "By 'angels' is meant those who, reinforced by the power of the spirit, have consumed, with the fire of the love of God, all human traits and limitations."[2] Bahá'u'lláh indicates that an angel is a virtuous person who has gained transcendence over the material. However, in another instance, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the eldest son of Bahá'u'lláh, confronted this demystification: "Whatsoever people is graciously favored therewith by God, its name shall surely be magnified and extolled by the Concourse from on high, by the company of angels, and the denizens of the Abhá Kingdom."[3] From this perspective, angels are more than virtuous people but exist as distinct creatures in heavenly realms.[4] And Shoghí Effendi, great-grandson of Bahá'u'lláh, posits that angels are incarnations of the Holy Spirit, "symbolized by the 'Sacred Fire,' the 'Burning Bush,' the 'Dove,' and the 'Angel Gabriel.'"[5] Such diverse pronouncements, made by three authoritative figures of the Bahá'í Faith within canonical scripture, afford us outwardly incongruous visions of the Bahá'í angel: they simultaneously signal spiritual preeminence, exist as otherworld figures residing in heavenly dimensions, and are the incarnation of a force, quality, or influence of the divine. Moreover, these assorted angels gesture toward contradictory hermeneutics, ranging from the literal and allegorical to the tropological and anagogical. Additional mentions of angels within Bahá'í scripture yield little assistance, as they reflect even more interpretations. One is easily lost among a host of seemingly haphazard and incongruous angels that litter the Bahá'í theological and cosmological landscape. What are the different forms of angels within Bahá'í holy writings and what functional labor do they perform?

While a niche subject, angelology is in the midst of a renaissance. Despite newfound interest, angels of "new religious movements" in general, and the Bahá'í Faith in particular, are less examined. There exists no systematic study of angels within Bahá'í discourse, and Bahá'í angelology is sparse at best. In this article, I first offer a succinct background on the extant scholarly discussion of Bahá'í angels. I then present a typology of the five dominant depictions of angels within

[1] "And He shall send His angels, with the inspiration of His command, upon whom He wills of His servants, [telling them], 'Warn that there is no deity except Me; so fear Me'" (*sūrah* 16:2). Following Bahá'í convention, I have employed reverential capitalization for the pronouns of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. See: Universal House of Justice, "Mirza Mihdi, 'Holy Family,' capitalization of pronouns, Guardian's use of English," 14 October 1998, https://bahai-library.com/uhj_mihdi_pronouns_english.

[2] Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1989) 78–79.

[3] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre Publishing Trust, 1982) 28.

[4] The terms "concourse on high" and "Abhá Kingdom" refer to the spiritual realm of Malakút (see n. 47 for their place in Bahá'í cosmology).

[5] Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1947) 90.

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Bahá'í scripture. Angels are repeatedly mentioned as: 1) avatars of the Holy Spirit; 2) distinct celestial beings; 3) spiritually evolved people; 4) "manifestations of God";[6] and 5) carriers and personifications of divine virtue. I next explain how these five types, respectively, possess distinct functions. Bahá'í angels serve to: 1) emphasize the power and authority of divinity and the prophets of God; 2) accentuate the mystery of spiritual reality through hyperbolic imagery; 3) reconcile spirituality and materialism by highlighting the duality of human nature; 4) position prophets—or "manifestations of God"—in the context of "progressive revelation" and assimilate the angelic imagery of prior religious traditions; and 5) attempt to make the unknowable God knowable through the transformation of axiology to ontology.

Together, these five functions comprise a distinct theological labor. Bahá'í angels neither work to settle God's immanence or transcendence nor do they emphasize either a cataphatic ("God is . . .") or apophatic ("God is not . . .") tradition. Rather, they illumine the Bahá'í understanding of religion as a dialogic relationship between God and humanity. Religion is reconceived as an interactional balance of divine will and human agential choice.[7] By appearing in varied forms, the Bahá'í angel helps bridge this paradoxical gap by providing a kaleidoscopic view of God's dialogic relationship to the world that is otherwise obscured.[8]

Angels of the Bahá'í Faith

The Bahá'í Faith was established in Persia in 1863 by Mírzá Ḥusayn-'Alí Núrí, known as "Bahá'u'lláh" (Glory of God). A monotheistic religion in the Abrahamic tradition, the Bahá'í Faith includes many scriptural injunctions on social and spiritual issues, from the abolition of racial prejudice and the equality of men and women to the independent investigation of truth and the harmony of science and religion. Especially in regard to the latter, as a religious faith wedded to scientific investigation, there exist both mystical and materialist exegeses that are generally viewed as commensurate. Given this background, Bahá'í theological understandings of the relationship between the spiritual and the material, particularly when these collide via the liminal figure of the angel, are polysemic.[9]

Scholarly discussions of angels in Bahá'í scripture are minimal. Most research on the Bahá'í Faith appears in two journals under the aegis of Bahá'í administrative

[6] See n. 40.

[7] Nader Saiedi, "The Reconstruction of the Concept of Religion in the Baha'i Writings," *JES* 56 (2021) 76–100.

[8] Gloria Schaab, "Feminist Theological Methodology: Toward a Kaleidoscopic Model," *TS* 62 (2001) 341–65.

[9] Translated from Persian (*fereshteh*) and Arabic (*almalak*) in Bahá'í holy writings, the word "angel" carries heterogenous denotations. Bahá'í theology is explicit on the polysemy of scripture: "We speak one word, and by it we intend one and seventy meanings; each one of these meanings we can explain"; Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 255.

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bodies—the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*[10] and *Bahá'í Studies Review*[11]—but their pages contain almost no angelology. Among that small extant corpus of angelic references, allegorical interpretations dominate. One of the earliest accounts of the primacy of allegory in Bahá'í Holy Writ comes from Edward G. Browne, a British "orientalist." Upon reading of the Bábí faith in Gobineau's *Religions et philosophies dans l'Asie Centrale*, Browne traveled to Persia in 1887, met Bahá'u'lláh,[12] and in 1893 wrote of an allegorical exegesis of angels attributed to the forerunner of the Bahá'í dispensation,[13] known as *the Báb* (the Gate). In speaking of the Báb's writings as "more or less obscure,"[14] Browne referenced the Báb's interpretation of the qur'anic angels Hárút and Márút (*sūrah* 2:96):

> *Hárút and Márút* [the names of two angels believed by the Muhammadans to be imprisoned in a well at Babylon] are two fixed habits, which, descending from the superior world, have become imprisoned in the well of the material nature, and teach men sorcery. And by these [two] habits are meant *Accidence* and *Syntax* from which, in the Beyánic Dispensation, all restrictions have been removed.[15]

Scholar of Bábí and Bahá'í theology Stephen Lambden expounds on the passage: "the Bāb interpreted the twin, probably 'fallen angels' Hárút and Márút allegorically. He related them with [sic] the possibly veiling nature of undue attention to grammatical rules which distract from the true senses of sacred scripture."[16]

Modern scholarly Bahá'í angelology reiterates the allegorical function of angels.[17] For example, Rick Johnson argues that the angel is a Bahá'í metaphor for the complexity of humanity: "A human being is the most complex integrated structure of order in the known universe, combining within itself an astounding

[10] Published by the Association for Bahá'í Studies—North America, an agency of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada.

[11] Published by Intellect Books on behalf of the Association for Bahá'í Studies—United Kingdom, an agency of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom.

[12] Edward Denison Ross, "Browne, Edward Granville (1862–1926)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[13] The "Bahá'í Dispensation" refers to Bahá'í eschatology: Bahá'u'lláh fulfills prior religious prophecy (e.g., the return of Jesus Christ or the Twelfth Imám/Mahdi/al-Qá'im) and establishes a new religious era to last from the date of Bahá'u'lláh's passing (1892) for one thousand years. See Shoghí Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991) 131–33.

[14] Edward G. Browne, *The Táríkh-i-Jadíd or New History of Mírzá 'Ali Muhammad, the Báb, by Mírzá Huseyn of Hamadán, Translated from the Persian* (Cambridge: Cambridge at the University Press, 1893) 422.

[15] Ibid., 422 n. 1 (italics and brackets in original). The "Beyānic Dispensation" refers to the six-year ministry of the Báb (April 1844 to July 1850) that ran prior to the Bahá'í Dispensation. See Peter Smith, *Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í History,* vol. 1 (ed. Moojan Momen; Los Angeles: Kalimát, 1982).

[16] Stephen Lambden, "Bābī and Bahā'ī Angelology: An Overview" (Hurqalya Publications: Center for Shaykhī and Bābī-Bahā'ī Studies, 2015 [1996]), https://hurqalya.ucmerced.edu/node/260.

[17] E.g., *The Apocalypse Unsealed: Based in Part Upon the Writings of the Báb, Bahá'ullah, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghí Effendi* (ed. Robert Riggs; New York: Philosophical Library, 1981).

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range of elements and forces—a diversity of states that Bahá'u'lláh likens to 'angels created of snow and of fire.'"[18] Similarly, Kluge addresses some of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's references to angels and concludes that they refer to the duality of human nature, in which one is "the animal 'captive to matter' and the angel free in the spiritual realms; between perfection and imperfection."[19] Outside of the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* and *Bahá'í Studies Review*, a handful of scholarly authors have examined angels as Bahá'í allegorical devices. For instance, Dominic Brookshaw finds that when 'Abdu'l-Bahá's addressed the Zoroastrians of Persia, He would often use "images and metaphors related to Zoroastrian religion, such as fire, the fire temple, *Sorosh* (the angel), and the names of different deities."[20] Valery Rees finds that the fallen angel Satan is most often used by Bahá'ís as a metaphor for one's carnal or egotistical desires: "Satan for them is not an evil demon but the promptings of our own lower nature, the evil within."[21]

A handful of scholars emphasize the mystical meanings of angels in Bahá'í scripture, thus centering anagogic interpretations. For instance, both Julio Savi and Sen McGlinn argue that Bahá'í depictions of angels are largely representative of attributes or confirmations of the reality of God,[22] while John Hatcher argues that one particular angel, the "'Hûríyyih,' . . . translated as 'the Maid of Heaven,' [is] a symbolic personification of the divine reality of Bahá'u'llah."[23] Historian Juan Cole has examined the work of Muslim theologian Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i and outlines how his messianic cosmologies influenced the formation of the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths.[24] Arguably the best treatment of the otherworldly meanings of Bahá'í angels comes from Lambden, who treats Bahá'í angels as "forces active in the natural world" and as indicating "supernatural spiritual bounties, forces or powers."[25]

[18] Rick Johnson, "The Active Force and That Which Is Its Recipient: A Bahai View of Creativity," *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 27.4 (2017) 45.

[19] Ian Kluge, "The Bahá'í Philosophy of Human Nature," *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 27.1–2 (2017) 31.

[20] Dominic Parviz Brookshaw, "The Conversion of Zoroastrians to the Baha'i Faith," in *The Baha'is of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies* (ed. Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazel; New York: Routledge, 2008) 40.

[21] Valery Rees, *From Gabriel to Lucifer: A Cultural History of Angels* (London: Tauris, 2013) 200.

[22] Julio Savi, "Destiny and Freedom in the Bahá'í Writings," *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 20.1–4 (2010) 16; Sen McGlinn, "A Theology of the State from the Baha'i Teachings," *Journal of Church and State* 41.4 (1999) 720.

[23] John Hatcher, "Bahá'u'lláh's Symbolic Use of the Veiled Ḥúríyyih," *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 29.3 (2019) 9.

[24] Juan Cole, "The World as Text: Cosmologies of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i," *SIs* 80 (1994) 145–63.

[25] Lambden, "Bābī and Bahā'ī Angelology." See also idem, "Kaleidoscope: Some Aspects of Angelology, Light, the Divine Throne and Color Mysticism in Bábí and Bahá'í "Scripture," in *Lights of Irfan* (ed. Iraj Ayman; Wilmette, IL: Irfan Colloquia, 2004) 5:163–82; idem, "Cherubim, Seraphim and Demythologization: Some Aspects of Babi-Bahá'i Angelology and the Mala' al-a'la (Supreme Concourse)" (paper presented at the Irfan Colloquia, session 36, London School of Economics, London, 13–15 July 2001).

A few others engage in tropological analyses, attempting to place Bahá'í references to angels within the larger dramatic context of the Bahá'í fulfillment of prior prophecies.[26] For example, Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl Gulpáygání's historical analysis of Bahá'u'lláh includes how the retelling of an account of an angel's meeting with Bahá'u'lláh, "served to fortify the doctrine of occultation . . . and freeze the tensions latent in Shi'i eschatology while mitigating their severity."[27] There also exist a few scattered chapters that make tropological reference to angels in *Studies in Modern Religions, Religious Movements and the Bābī-Bahā'ī Faiths*.[28] Relatedly, only a small handful of writers approach Bahá'í angelology in a literal sense. For example, both Terry Culhane and Gregg Lahood reference Bahá'u'lláh's meeting with the angel known as the "Maiden of Heaven" as a literal event wherein Bahá'u'lláh was notified of His divine commission.[29] While there are varied approaches to Bahá'í angelology, the literature is scattered and underdeveloped, leaving one without a holistic account of either the scriptural references to angels or their attending exegetical functions. This article provides a small step toward filling that gap.

The "Angel" of Bahá'í Scripture

The Bahá'í "canonical texts" are authored by four individuals and one institution: Siyyid Mirza ʻAlí Muḥammad Shírází (1819–1850), known as the Báb (The Gate); the prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Mírzá Ḥusayn-ʻAlí Núrí (1817–1892), known as Bahá'u'lláh (Glory of God); the eldest son of Bahá'u'lláh, ʻAbbás (1844–1921), known as ʻAbdu'l-Bahá (Servant of Glory); the grandson of ʻAbdu'l-Bahá, Shoghí Effendi (1897–1957); and the governing body of the Bahá'í Faith, the Universal House of Justice, established in 1963. Taken together, their output is voluminous.[30] Approximately 70,000 tablets, letters, prayers, and books from the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, ʻAbdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghí Effendi have been tentatively identified, but only a small fraction has been authenticated.[31] The Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and ʻAbdu'l-Bahá wrote and spoke in Persian and Arabic, while Shoghí Effendi and the Universal House of Justice frequently communicated in English.[32] When

[26] Bahá'í theology asserts that Bahá'u'lláh is the Sháh-Bahrám of Zoroastrianism, the tenth avatar of Hinduism, the fifth Buddha, the Jewish messiah, and the return of Christ. The best example of these claims is found in the *Kitáb'i-Íqán* (*The Book of Certitude*), written early in Bahá'u'lláh's ministry.

[27] Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl Gulpáygání, *Miracles and Metaphors* (trans. Juan Ricardo Cole; Los Angeles: Kalimát, 1981) 487.

[28] *Studies in Modern Religions, Religious Movements and the Bābī-Bahā'ī Faiths* (ed. Moshe Sharon; Leiden: Brill, 2004).

[29] Terry Culhane, *I Beheld a Maiden: The Baha'i Faith and the Life of the Spirit* (Los Angeles: Kalimát, 2001); Gregg A. Lahood, "In the Footsteps of the Prophets? A Two-Step Revelation from the Black Light to the Green Angel (with Transpersonal and Participatory Commentary)," *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 46.2 (2014) 208.

[30] William P. Collins, *Bibliography of English-language Works on the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths, 1844–1985* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1990).

[31] Peter Smith, *An Introduction to the Baha'i Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[32] Peter Smith, "Universal House of Justice," in *A Concise Encyclopedia of the Bahá'í Faith*

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scripture is authenticated by the Universal House of Justice, it is published via the Bahá'í Reference Library—relaunched in 2018 (www.bahai.org/library/). This study is thus a preliminary investigation of Bahá'í angelology available in English. The complete scriptural corpus should be revisited in their original Arabic and Persian.

As of November 2021, a search of "angel" in the Bahá'í Reference Library yields 177 results.[33] Searches of angels of the Abrahamic faiths, such as Gabriel (n=20), Isráfil (n=5), and Izrā'il (n=1), add 26 references; other terms, such as "seraph" (n=2) and "cherubim" (n=2), were also found, while the term "maiden" (Ḥúríyyih) (n=12), as a reference to the angel-driven founding moment of the Bahá'í Faith, adds a dozen more. Other names of and terms for angels (e.g., "Michael," "principalities," or "wheels") did not appear. In total, 219 references to angels exist in the authenticated and English-translated Bahá'í scripture (see Table 1 in appendix).

A. Avatars of the Holy Spirit

Perhaps the best-known angel of Bahá'í scripture is the Ḥúríyyih, or Maiden of Heaven.[34] This "noble angel,"[35] generally interpreted as a literal celestial being, was said to have appeared to Bahá'u'lláh in October 1852 while He was imprisoned in the Síyáh-Chál in Tehran. Bahá'u'lláh wrote of the visitation:

> Turning My face, I beheld a Maiden—the embodiment of the remembrance of the name of My Lord—suspended in the air before Me. So rejoiced was she in her very soul that her countenance shone with the ornament of the good-pleasure of God, and her cheeks glowed with the brightness of the All-Merciful. Betwixt Earth and Heaven she was raising a call which captivated the hearts and minds of men. She was imparting to both My inward and outer being tidings which rejoiced My soul, and the souls of God's honoured servants. Pointing with her finger unto My head, she addressed all who are in Heaven and all who are on Earth saying: "By God! This is the best beloved of the worlds, and yet ye comprehend not. This is the Beauty of God amongst you, and the power of His sovereignty within you, could ye but understand."[36]

(Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2000) 348–50.

[33] Of the 195 references returned, 18 are redundant (e.g., reprintings of the same text in both a primary text and a compilation).

[34] Hatcher, "Bahá'u'lláh's Symbolic Use of the Veiled Ḥúríyyih," 9.

[35] See *Tablet of the Maiden* (*Lawh-i-Húrí*), *Tablet of the Deathless Youth* (*Lawh-i-Ghulámu'l-Khuld*), *Tablet of the Wondrous Maiden* (*Húr-i-'Ujáb*), *Tablet of the Holy Mariner* (*Lawh-i-Mallāhu'l-Quds*), *Súrih of the Pen* (*Súriy-i-Qalam*), and *Tablet of the Vision* (*Lawh-i-Ru'yá*).

[36] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2002) 5. While mentioned only a dozen times, the "Maiden of Heaven" is well known due to her association with the revelatory moment of Bahá'u'lláh's recognition as a divinely ordained messenger of God. This is somewhat parallel to the only three references to the angel Jibríl in the Qur'an (*sūrah*s 2:97, 2:98, 66:4), two of which relate to Muhammad's first revelation during the Night of Power. See also Culhane, *I Beheld a Maiden*, 1–34; Christopher Buck, *Paradise and Paradigm: Key Symbols in Persian Christianity and the Baha'i Faith* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999) 251–54; *Feminism and Religion: How Faiths View Women and Their Rights* (ed. Michele A. Paludi

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This angelic meeting cannot be overemphasized in Bahá'í theology, as it is akin to the founding moments of other religious dispensations, as Shoghí Effendi makes clear:

> on that occasion that the "*Most Great Spirit,*" as designated by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, revealed itself to Him, in the form of a "*Maiden,*" and bade Him "*lift up*" His "*voice between earth and heaven*"—that same Spirit which, in the Zoroastrian, the Mosaic, the Christian, and Muḥammadan Dispensations, had been respectively symbolized by the "Sacred Fire," the "Burning Bush," the "Dove," and the "Angel Gabriel."[37]

Scholars note the presence of this "Maiden" in both pre-Islamic thought and nineteenth-century Sufism, which may have informed Bahá'u'lláh's vision: "That Bahāʾ Allāh [*sic*] remained under Sūfī influence . . . is implied by his continued association with two leading Sūfīs resident in Baghdad."[38] Moreover, Lambden wrote that the Ḥúríyyih was "'the Angel Gabriel' in the form, symbolically speaking, of the 'Most Great Spirit'—personified as a 'Maiden' ('houri')—which appeared to Bahāʾ-Allāh [*sic*] in 1852/3 at the time of his inaugural mystical experience."[39]

The import of this interaction is witnessed in Bahá'u'lláh's use of the plural pronoun ("before Our presence") that appeared in His writings after meeting the Ḥúríyyih. Similar to the pronoun usage in the Qur'an (-na), this convention underscores His station as a messenger or "manifestation of God," in which He is simultaneously the voice of God, the Holy Spirit, and individual. The Universal House of Justice explains:

> how can a human being claim to understand or to set forth the nature of the Manifestations of God, of the relationships between Them, or of Their relationship to God, let alone to grasp the nature of God Himself? . . . This is a realm of knowledge in which poetry, analogy, hyperbole and paradox are to be expected; a realm in which the Manifestations Themselves speak with many voices.[40]

Bahá'í scripture is unequivocal in stating that manifestations of God are chosen by God as divine mouthpieces, irrespective of their desire. Accordingly, Shoghí

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and J. Harold Ellens; Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2016) 168; Brian D. Lepard, *In the Glory of the Father: The Baha'i Faith and Christianity* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing, 2008) 32–34.

[37] Effendi, *Messages to America*, 90 (italics in original).

[38] Denis MacEoin, *The Messiah of Shiraz: Studies in Early and Middle Babism* (Leiden: Brill, 2009) 404. See also Lahood, "In the Footsteps of the Prophets?," 208–39.

[39] Lambden, "Bābī and Bahā'ī Angelology."

[40] Universal House of Justice, "Letter to an Individual," 15 October 1992, https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/19921015_001/1#724534654. Moreover, in "Baha'i terminology, the Manifestations of God—are the perfect realization of all divine attributes. . . . Since all prophets are embodiments of divine names and attributes, the truth of all prophets is one and the same reality. Therefore, all prophets are the same reality"; Saiedi, "The Reconstruction," 83–84.

Effendi, quoting Bahá'u'lláh, wrote that the angel Gabriel bade Bahá'u'lláh speak God's word:

> He [Bahá'u'lláh] asserts in another Tablet, "Not of Mine own volition have I revealed Myself, but God, of His own choosing, hath manifested Me." And again: "Whenever I chose to hold My peace and be still, lo, the Voice of the Holy Spirit, standing on My right hand, aroused Me, and the Most Great Spirit appeared before My face, and Gabriel overshadowed Me, and the Spirit of Glory stirred within My bosom, bidding Me arise and break My silence."[41]

This collapsing of angels in general, and Gabriel in particular, into the concept of the Holy Spirit is reiterated elsewhere by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who writes, "The Faithful Spirit, Gabriel, the Holy Spirit, and the One mighty in power are all designations of the same Reality."[42] The overlapping nature of the angel and Holy Spirit compel the reader to contemplate an essential unity to "Reality."

Bahá'u'lláh's use of angels to signify the Holy Spirit was especially pronounced in His communications with Sufi theologians. For example, composed in 1856, "The Seven Valleys" was addressed to Sufi mystics with whom Bahá'u'lláh had been in contact, especially Shaykh Muhyi'd-Din, a follower of the Qádiríyyih practice of Sufism.[43] Bahá'u'lláh describes the stages of the soul's journey toward God, traversing seven valleys—search, love, knowledge, unity, contentment, wonderment, and "true poverty and absolute nothingness."[44] As the traveler enters the valley of knowledge, a "watchman" begins to pursue him. Bahá'u'lláh continues:

> And that wretched one cried from his heart, and ran here and there, and moaned to himself, "Surely this watchman is 'Izrá'íl, my angel of death, following so fast upon me, or he is a tyrant of men, prompted by hatred and malice". . . . And there he beheld his beloved with a lamp in her hand, searching for a ring she had lost. When the heart-surrendered lover looked upon his ravishing love, he drew a great breath and lifted his hands in prayer, crying, "O God! Bestow honour upon the watchman, and riches and long life. For the watchman was Gabriel, guiding this poor one; or he was Isráfíl, bringing life to this wretched one!"[45]

Having now discerned the knowledge of how the seeming tyranny of the watchman was the Holy Spirit that led the traveler to his "beloved," Bahá'u'lláh ends the

[41] Shoghí Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979) 102.

[42] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Light of the World: Selected Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 2021).

[43] Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol. 1, *Baghdad 1853–63* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1976) 96–99. "The Seven Valleys" echoes many of the themes in the 12th-cent. poem *Maqāmāt-uṭ-Ṭuyūr* (*Conference of the Birds*) by the Sufi poet Farid al-Din Attar and also uses the classic star-crossed love story of "Layla and Majnun," also written in the 12th cent. by the gnostic poet Nizami Ganjavi.

[44] Bahá'u'lláh, "The Seven Valleys," in *The Call of the Divine Beloved: Selected Mystical Works of Bahá'u'lláh* (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 2019) 11–53.

[45] Ibid., 24.

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journey in the valley of knowledge. But before the traveler enters the valley of unity, Bahá'u'lláh underlines the import of "communion and prayer," and cites *sūrah* 2:156, that the traveler may continue to receive the assistance of the angels qua Holy Spirit: "If thou be a man of communion and prayer, soar upon the wings of assistance from the holy ones, that thou mayest behold the mysteries of the Friend and attain the lights of the Beloved: 'Verily, we are God's, and to Him shall we return.'"[46]

B. Celestial Beings in a Divine Hierarchy

Bahá'í cosmology indicates five distinct realms of existence. The highest realm is home to the essence of God (Háhút) and the lowest (Násút) is our scientifically known world.[47] While this hierarchy would seemingly align with a fixed, neoplatonic depiction, Bahá'u'lláh emphasized the relativity of this typology: "Know thou of a truth that the worlds of God are countless in their number, and infinite in their range. None can reckon or comprehend them except God."[48]

While this clarification tends toward anagogic understandings, there are also many scriptural references that invite literalism. For instance, the next-to-highest realm, Láhút, aligns with the aforementioned Ḥúríyyih as the incarnation of the Holy Spirit. The second-to-lowest realm, Malakút (sometimes conflated with *alam-al mithal*, or Hūrqalyā in Islamic cosmology), is where souls of the departed and angels are said to reside, which is reiterated in Bahá'í scripture and scholarship as a literal realm of the afterlife.[49]

Moreover, both departed souls and angels can "descend" to assist the people of Násút. This depiction is affirmed by the Báb in a letter to the seventeenth of His first eighteen followers, a woman named Fatimah Baraghani (to whom He gave the titles "Táhirih" [The Pure One] and "Qurratu'l-'Ayn" [Solace of the Eyes]):

> The angels and spirits, arrayed rank upon rank, descend, by the leave of God, upon this Gate and circle round this Focal Point in a far-stretching line. Greet them with salutations, O Qurratu'l-'Ayn, for the dawn hath indeed broken;

[46] Ibid., 27.

[47] Háhút is where God resides. Láhút is the realm of the names and attributes of God, as well as the abode of the Holy Spirit and its forms, such as the "Divine Dove," "Angel Gabriel," or "Maid of Heaven." Jabarút is where the souls of the manifestations of God reside, such as Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh. Malakút is the realm of departed human souls but is also referred to as the angelic realm. Násút is the physical world of the human, animal, vegetal, and mineral kingdoms. See Jean-Marc Lepain, "The Tablet of All Food: The Hierarchy of the Spiritual Worlds and the Metaphoric Nature of Physical Reality," *Baha'i Studies Review* 16 (2010) 43–60; Moojan Momen, "The God of Bahá'u'lláh," in *The Baha'i Faith and the World's Religions* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2003) 1–38.

[48] Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1994) 187.

[49] See John Hatcher, "Bahá'í Faith," in *How Different Religions View Death and Afterlife* (ed. Christopher J. Johnson and Marsha G. McGee; Philadelphia: Charles Press, 2009) 14–30.

> then proclaim unto the concourse of the faithful: "Is not the rising of the Morn, foreshadowed in the Mother Book, to be near at hand?"[50]

Bahá'u'lláh reiterates this celestial order of beings ("Unto this bear witness God, and His angels, and His Messengers . . .")[51] as well as the ability of angels and departed souls to intercede in humanity's affairs ("Verily, We behold you from Our realm of glory, and will aid whosoever will arise for the triumph of Our Cause with the hosts of the Concourse on high and a company of Our favored angels").[52]

Bahá'í scripture identifies three specific forms of angelic assistance. First, angels can provide aid to those in need or distress, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá states: "Help them, O my Lord, under all conditions, support them at all times with Thine angels of holiness, they who are Thine invisible hosts."[53] Second, angels come to aid human endeavors to spread the teachings of God as revealed by divine manifestations. For example, Bahá'u'lláh writes: "They that have forsaken their country for the purpose of teaching Our Cause—these shall the Faithful Spirit strengthen through its power. A company of Our chosen angels shall go forth with them, as bidden by Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Wise."[54] Third, angels ease the troubles of faithful people by bringing God's blessings, as also articulated by Bahá'u'lláh: "These, verily, are they whom the angels of Paradise will glorify in the garden of eternity and who will delight at every moment in a joy and gladness born of God."[55]

But angels not only assist, but torment. The Báb warns humanity to realize their spiritual potentialities, especially as pertains to their creative labors:

> It is forbidden that one bring any object into being in a state of imperfection, when one hath the power to manifest it in full perfection. For example, should one build an edifice, and fail to elevate it to the utmost state of perfection possible for it, there would be no moment in the life of that edifice when angels would not beseech God to torment him; nay, rather, all the atoms of that edifice would do the same.[56]

Bahá'í theology is clear that all things may manifest divine attributes. All of existence possesses a "moral right," and "humans are obligated to help everything, including the realm of nature, to achieve its paradise."[57] Rather than reify the angel, the Báb invokes angels to underline the ethical weight of pursuing one's

[50] The Báb, *Selections From the Writings of the Báb* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre Publishing Trust, 1982) 50–51.

[51] Bahá'u'lláh, *Days of Remembrance* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2016) 145.

[52] Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992) 246.

[53] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, 6.

[54] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (trans. Shoghi Effendi; Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976) 334–35.

[55] Bahá'u'lláh, *Days of Remembrance*, 176. These quotations are merely examples of three forms of assistance. There appears no temporal pattern in Bahá'í scripture in relation to angels. Rather, there exist several references to angels bringing blessings to people in both the present and future.

[56] The Báb, *The Báyan*, 4:11.

[57] Saiedi, "The Reconstruction," 90.

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best work, a reading supporting the Báb's incessant critique of qur'anic literalism within *The Báyan*.[58]

In this vein, a literal reading of souls and either helpful or vengeful angels swooping down from heaven is set in heavy relief against Bahá'u'lláh's *Tablet of the Holy Mariner*—an explicitly allegorical story about "guardian angels." In the tablet, Bahá'u'lláh is the "Holy Mariner" who pilots an "ark" (symbolizing the Abrahamic covenant) in which humanity dwells. The sixth line of the tablet reads, "And let the angelic spirits enter, in the Name of God, the Most High."[59] Later, Bahá'u'lláh calls upon angels to help humanity to be both faithful to the covenant and returned safely to the world: "O guardian angels! Return them to their abode in the world below, Glorified be my Lord, the All-Glorious!"[60]

C. Angels as Spiritually Evolved, Virtuous People

Bahá'í theology emphasizes the duality of human nature, as expressed plainly by ʻAbdu'l-Bahá: "notice that when the animal is trained it becomes domestic, and also that man, if he is left without education, becomes bestial, and, moreover, if left under the rule of nature, becomes lower than an animal, whereas if he is educated he becomes an angel."[61] ʻAbdu'l-Bahá further clarifies: "The reality underlying this question is that the evil spirit, Satan or whatever is interpreted as evil, refers to the lower nature in man."[62]

Suitably, exceptionally spiritual people (those reflecting the virtues or attributes of God) can rise to the station of angels. For example, specific Bábís and Bahá'ís were singled out as angelic. A note in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* refers to Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥaydar-ʻAlí, an outstanding Persian Bahá'í teacher and author, as "the Angel of Mount Carmel."[63] Nabil, an early historian of the Bábí Faith, was described by ʻAbdu'l-Bahá as: having thrown "shooting stars, he became as a missile to drive off satanic imaginings,"[64] which is a qur'anic reference to angels repelling evil (see *sūrah*s 15:18, 37:10, and 67:5). In a passage in *Memorials of the Faithful* by ʻAbdu'l-Bahá, a messenger of Bahá'u'lláh named Salmán is so virtuous that he

[58] Ibid., 89. The only validated and scripturally authoritative excerpts from *The Báyan* are available in *Selections from the Writings of the Báb* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre Publishing Trust, 1982).

[59] Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í Prayers* (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991) 221.

[60] Ibid., 224. This is the only reference to "guardian angels" in Bahá'í scripture, of which Shoghí Effendi remarked, "The Teachings do not contain any explanation of what is meant by Guardian Angel"; Shoghi Effendi, "Letter to an Individual," 26 January 1939," https://bahai-library.com/writings/shoghieffendi/uncompiled_letters/1930s/1939-01-26%20questions%20of%20Kaukab%20H.%20A.%20MacCutcheon.html.

[61] ʻAbdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984) 305.

[62] ʻAbdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982) 470.

[63] Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, 269.

[64] ʻAbdu'l-Bahá, *Memorials of the Faithful* (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971) 204 n. 3.

"earned from non-Bahá'ís the title of 'the Bábís' Angel Gabriel.'"[65] And Bahá'u'lláh declared that the philosophers Empedocles and Pythagoras "have attained the station of the angels."[66] But it is the first eighteen followers of the Báb (known as "The Letters of the Living") who are singled out as having attained an angelic station unlike others, regardless of virtue. Shoghí Effendi, quoting from The Báb's *Bayán* (portions in italics), described them thus:

> this "*company of angels arrayed before God on the Day of His coming,*" these "*Repositories of His Mystery,*" these "*Springs that have welled out from the Source of His Revelation,*" these first companions who, in the words of the Persian Bayán, "*enjoy nearest access to God,*" these "*Luminaries that have, from everlasting, bowed down, and will everlastingly continue to bow down, before the Celestial Throne.*"[67]

In *God Passes By*, Shoghí Effendi recounts how the first of these "Letters," Mullá Ḥusayn, was transformed by the Báb's 22 May 1844 declaration that he was the "Hidden Twelfth Imám" and latest manifestation of God. Quoting Mullá Ḥusayn, Effendi wrote: "'This Revelation,' Mullá Ḥusayn has further testified, 'so suddenly and impetuously thrust upon me, came as a thunderbolt. . . . I seemed to be the voice of Gabriel personified, calling unto all mankind: "Awake, for, lo! the morning Light has broken."'"[68] Similarly, Bahá'u'lláh recounts in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* how one can be raised to a status even more glorified than the angels. By recognizing the unity of the manifestations of God, Bahá'u'lláh proclaims, "Then will thine eyes no longer be obscured by these veils, these terms, and allusions. How ethereal and lofty is this station, unto which even Gabriel, unshepherded, can never attain, and the Bird of Heaven, unassisted, can never reach!"[69] Bahá'u'lláh underlines the divine reality and high grandeur of such a station, accentuating how neither an angel such as Gabriel nor the prophets and manifestations themselves (the "Bird of Heaven") could reach such a level alone ("unshepherded" and "unassisted"), but require God's commission.[70]

Bahá'í authoritative canon asks one to live a virtuous life and to spread God's teachings. The result will be that one will resemble an angel, be a companion to

[65] Ibid., 15.

[66] Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, 269.

[67] Effendi, *God Passes By*, 7–8 (emphases in original). Shoghí Effendi explained that 'Abdu'l-Bahá clarified that these eighteen, along with the Báb (and five others), were the twenty-four elders depicted in the book of Revelation: "Regarding the four and twenty elders: The Master, in a Tablet, stated that they were the Báb, the eighteen Letters of the Living, and five others who would be known in the future. So far we do not know who these five others are"; Shoghí Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian* (New Delhi: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1973) 87.

[68] Effendi, *God Passes By*, 6.

[69] Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 163–64.

[70] The prior reference to the "Bird of Heaven" (sometimes called the "dove of Heaven") is a frequent symbol used by Bahá'u'lláh to refer to the "manifestations of God." See Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 211, 254; idem, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh,* 261; idem, *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985) 26.

angels, or become an angel. This is not an uncommon claim within Abrahamic traditions, as seen, for example, in Jesus's response to the Sadducees (Luke 20:34–36 KJV): "they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage. Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels."[71] As theologian Jean Marc Lepain contends, "Baha'u'llah responds in a similar vein . . . one must have a detached heart and an understanding purified from common superstitions, and only in this case can one reach a true comprehension of what life is after death and resurrection."[72] Many Bahá'í scriptural references are connected to such millennialist claims, as Lambden argues: "References to the eschatological manifestation of 'angels' are often demythologized in Bahá'í scripture. . . . Bahā'-Allāh [*sic*] interprets these 'angels' (malá'ika) as human beings of exalted spirituality."[73] For example, in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, Bahá'u'lláh interpreted both biblical (Matt 24:31 and Mark 13:27) and qur'anic (*sūrah* 16:2) references to angels as human beings consumed by the "fire of the love of God," a passage which also served to incorporate ancient Mesopotamian religious depictions of angels' fiery corporality:

> And now, concerning His words: "And He shall send His angels. . . ." By "angels" is meant those who, reinforced by the power of the spirit, have consumed, with the fire of the love of God, all human traits and limitations, and have clothed themselves with the attributes of the most exalted Beings and of the Cherubim . . . inasmuch as these holy beings have sanctified themselves from every human limitation, have become endowed with the attributes of the spiritual, and have been adorned with the noble traits of the blessed, they therefore have been designated as "angels."[74]

Bahá'u'lláh later returned to this symbolism: "The hearts that yearn after Thee, O my God, are burnt up with the fire of their longing for Thee. . . . Methinks, they are like the angels which Thou hast created of snow and of fire."[75]

'Abdu'l-Bahá often interpreted the eschatological prophecies concerning angels as representing pure human souls. Moreover, 'Abdu'l-Bahá aligns such millennialist recognition with soteriological import, making plain the salvation afforded to those who would both recognize the newest manifestation of God (Bahá'u'lláh) and would thus arise to serve Him. For example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá collapses the horn-blowing archangel of the resurrection into the potential of any human soul:

[71] The KJV is used in this article, following Bahá'í convention, which is referenced in a letter from Shoghí Effendi: "Shoghi Effendi himself uses the King James version of the Bible, both because it is an authoritative one and in beautiful English"; Shoghí Effendi, letter to an individual believer, 28 October 1949, published in *Bahá'í News* 228 (February 1950) 4.

[72] Jean-Marc Lepain, "An Introduction to the Lawh-i Haqqu'n-Nas," *Online Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 1 (2007) 402.

[73] Lambden, "Bābī and Bahā'ī Angelology."

[74] Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 78.

[75] Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations* (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987) 339.

> Now is the time for you to divest yourselves of the garment of attachment to this world that perisheth, to be wholly severed from the physical world, become heavenly angels, and travel to these countries. I swear by Him, besides Whom there is none other God, that each one of you will become an Isráfil of Life, and will blow the Breath of Life into the souls of others. Upon you be greeting and praise![76]

Similarly, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá offers an anagogic interpretation of angels via his explanation of the vision of Saint John the Divine (the book of Revelation): “within these gates there stand twelve angels. By ‘angel’ is meant the power of the confirmations of God—that the candle of God’s confirming power shineth out from the lamp-niche of those souls—meaning that every one of those beings will be granted the most vehement confirming support.”[77] Yet, the definition of the “angel” is expanded again by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: “The meaning of ‘angels’ is the confirmations of God and His celestial powers. Likewise angels are blessed beings who have severed all ties with this nether world, have been released from the chains of self and the desires of the flesh, and anchored their hearts to the heavenly realms of the Lord.”[78] This Bahá’í view of angels resonates with pseudocanonical, pseudepigraphic, and canonical texts within the Abrahamic tradition, whereby, as Rees argues, “humans may become angels”[79] as witnessed in Enoch’s transformation into Metatron (1 Enoch) and the conversion of Elias (Elijah) to Sandalphon (3 Enoch).

D. Angels as Manifestations of God

Bahá’í scripture makes passing references to angels as the manifestations of God, such as Moses, Muhammad, the Báb, and Bahá’u’lláh. Such angelic theophany occurs infrequently in Bahá’í holy writings, but those sparse references are deeply symbolic. For instance, in the *Lawḥ-i-Ghulámu’l-Khuld* (*Tablet of the Immortal Youth*), Bahá’u’lláh writes of the appearance of the Báb both as an angel and as occupying the same divine station as Moses and Muhammad. He references Moses’s staff qua serpent and quotes the Qur’an: “Lo, the gates of Paradise were unlocked, and the hallowed Youth [the Báb] came forth bearing a serpent plain. . . . On His right hand was a ring adorned with a pure and blessed gem. . . . Upon it was graven, in a secret and ancient script: ‘By God! A most noble Angel is this’” [*sūrah* 12:31].[80] The Bahá’í merger of angel and manifestation emphasizes an exalted status. Manifestations of God are not human souls called upon to engage in a divine mission (such as prophets), but are understood as distinct beings whose souls found genesis at the beginning of all creation, akin to angels.[81] The angelic

[76] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan* (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1993) 107.

[77] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections,* 166.

[78] Ibid., 81.

[79] Rees, *From Gabriel to Lucifer,* 134.

[80] Bahá’u’lláh, *Days of Remembrance*, 131–32.

[81] Manifestations “unlike us, are pre-existent. The Soul of Christ existed in the spiritual world before His birth in this world”; Shoghí Effendi, “From a Letter Written on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi

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form of the manifestation accentuates their distinction as both originally created souls and as a unified chorus of messengers similar to the Judaic depictions of the seraphs who circle the throne of God singing "holy, holy, holy" (Isa 6:1–8). Bahá'í cosmology thus depicts the manifestation-angel as the incarnate form of the Godhead that perfectly reflects the attributes and names of God, akin to the Gospel of John's explication of the logos (John 1:1–18).

The Bahá'í concept of angels qua manifestations thus gestures toward the tradition of angelomorphic christologies. For example, there were repeated conflations of "son [and sons] of God" with angels in both Judaic traditions and early Christianity, lending toward Christ being understood by some as an angel.[82] Moreover, the repeated mention of the "Angel of the Lord" within the Hebrew Bible was often interpreted by early Christians as a reference to Jesus, while a gnostic text, Origin of the World, depicts the figure on the right hand of God as the angel Jesus.[83] Rees remarks that the "angel of the presence" (from Isa 63:9 KJV) became "known in the Christian tradition as the Messianic angel, with attributes attributed to Christ."[84] Also, one of the meanings for the angel Raphael was the "angel of the presence"—"an angel who, having stood in the divine presence, becomes a part of it and so becomes that divine presence on earth."[85] This reading resonates with the Bahá'í understanding of Christ, Muhammad, or Bahá'u'lláh, for example, as distinct entities and the same manifestation of God's presence in the world.[86] In this vein, given some depictions of the "angel of the presence" as the voice who spoke to Moses about creation, "having witnessed it from the very beginning since he was created on the first day,"[87] Bahá'í scripture describes Bahá'u'lláh, as God's manifestation in the world, as that same preexistent "angel of the presence," or even a pre-incarnate form of Christ, who spoke to Moses: "Bahá'u'lláh is the greatest Manifestation to yet appear, the One Who consummates the Revelation of Moses, He was the One Moses conversed with in the Burning Bush. In other words Bahá'u'lláh identifies the Glory of the Godhead on that occasion with Himself."[88]

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to an Individual Believer," 9 October 1947," in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File* (ed. Helen Hornby; Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983) 505.

[82] Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992) 4–9.

[83] Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christologies: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017) 73.

[84] Rees, *From Gabriel to Lucifer,* 139.

[85] Margaret Barker, "The Archangel Raphael in the Book of Tobit," in *Studies in the Book of Tobit: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (ed. Mark Bredin; London: T&T Clark, 2006) 120.

[86] The holy angels found in 1 Enoch "were clusters of divine powers, so all were one, even though perceived and named separately by people on earth" (Barker, 120). This simultaneous unity and division of angels perfectly reflects the Bahá'í concept of the "manifestation of God" (see n. 40).

[87] "The Angel of the Presence was reckoned to have been the one who appeared in the Old Testament. . . . 'He who addresses Moses with spoken words is that angel' "; Rees, *From Gabriel to Lucifer*, 138–39. See also Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christologies*, 72.

[88] Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny* (London: UK Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981) 448. This passage is found in a text not currently listed in the Bahá'í Reference Library.

Accordingly, some traditions identify the archangel Michael as having given the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai, which further propels the Bahá'í rendering of manifestations as angels.[89]

In various Bahá'í scriptural references, Bahá'u'lláh is yet another angel. Lambden writes that Bahá'u'lláh "seems to equate himself and his power of revelation with the outward, exterior personification of the angel Gabriel."[90] Yet, Bahá'u'lláh makes clear that the words of all the manifestations of God are revealed wisdom from God, to be proclaimed widely.[91] This is akin to the trumpets blown by the angels, and thus Bahá'u'lláh collapses the figures of Gabriel and Muhammad onto one another, while berating those who disbelieved in Muhammad's revelatory claims for want of a literal horn-wielding angel: "They refuse to recognize the trumpet-blast which so explicitly in this text was sounded through the revelation of Muḥammad. They deprive themselves of the regenerating Spirit of God that breathed into it, and foolishly expect to hear the trumpet-sound of the Seraph of God who is but one of His servants! Hath not the Seraph himself, the angel of the Judgment Day, and his like been ordained by Muḥammad's own utterance?"[92]

Additionally, given Bahá'í theological claims that the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh fulfill the Islamic and Christian eschatology of the coming of the Twelfth Imám and the return of Isa (Jesus), respectively—and the prophesied "Day of Judgement" foretold in the first and second blasts of the trumpet mentioned in the Qur'an[93]—it is both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh who are referred to as Isrá'ál in the *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, translated by Shoghí Effendi as the "angel of the Judgement Day."[94]

E. Angels as Bearers and Personifications of Divine Virtue

Angels are also referred to as both bearers of divine virtues and personifications of divine being. This rendering is somewhat akin to the Jewish notion of "Shekhinah," the glory of the divine presence in this world, sometimes described in Judaic traditions as winged.[95] For example, angels are both transmitters of joy and the embodiment of this divine quality: "for man can receive no greater gift than this, that he rejoice another's heart. I beg of God that ye will be bringers of joy, even

[89] Rees, *From Gabriel to Lucifer,* 145; Ileene Smith Sobel, *Moses and the Angels* (New York: Delacorte, 1999).

[90] Lambden, "Bābī and Bahā'ī Angelology."

[91] On the angel Raphael's claim to "reveal the works of God" (Tobit 12:11), Barker writes that "such wisdom sayings. . . *were the angelic revelation which taught the secrets of the creation, and the balance and harmony of all things*. Angels taught Wisdom"; Barker, "The Archangel Raphael," 122 (italics in original).

[92] Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 122.

[93] "(You will be resurrected) on the Day when the shocking event (i.e. the first blowing of the trumpet) will shock (everything), followed by the next one (i.e. the second blowing of the trumpet)" (*sūrah* 79:6–7).

[94] Lambden, "Bābī and Bahā'ī Angelology."

[95] Rees, *From Gabriel to Lucifer*, 138.

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as are the angels in Heaven."[96] So also, the angel Azráʾál is reframed in Bahá'í theology as a harbinger of joy for the living; people are instructed to rejoice in the departed soul's attainment of Malakút. "I have made death a messenger of joy to thee. Wherefore dost thou grieve?"[97] Here, joy becomes an attribute of the divine, both borne by an angel and personified as the angel. Likewise, consider the Bahá'í injunction for humanity to attain divine virtues, which is a level of divinity akin to the elevated station of the angels. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated, "Pray to God that He may strengthen you in divine virtue, so that you may be as angels in the world."[98] This being *as* an angel, that is, to embody angelic abilities, is elsewhere qualified by 'Abdu'l-Bahá: "Be ye daysprings of generosity, dawning-points of the mysteries of existence, sites where inspiration alighteth, rising-places of splendors, souls that are sustained by the Holy Spirit, enamored of the Lord, detached from all save Him, holy above the characteristics of humankind, clothed in the attributes of the angels of heaven."[99]

While one could certainly interpret virtuous behavior as angelic in a broad sense, Bahá'í scripture identifies the performance of particular virtues as evoking the divine presence. Virtues are thus singled out as angelic personifications. For example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated that truthfulness in word and deed is elevated in Bahá'í theology as the "foundation of all human virtues."[100] And as the following passage denotes, words must align with behavior—for honest behavior calls forward a reality behind which a divine presence ("the angels that are nigh unto God") resides: "Take heed, O people, lest ye be of them that give good counsel to others but forget to follow it themselves. The words of such as these, and beyond the words the realities of all things, and beyond these realities the angels that are nigh unto God, bring against them the accusation of falsehood."[101]

In a different expression of the angel within *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, Bahá'u'lláh wrote a pointed critique to Fu'ád Páshá, an enemy of both the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths. In that text, Bahá'u'lláh recounts an interaction between Páshá and four angels who take Páshá to hell for opposing God's will.[102] Similarly, Bahá'u'lláh penned a story about Hájí Muhammad-Karím Khán-i-Kirmání, an avid critic of both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh: "he turned away until, as an act of justice from God, angels of wrath laid hold upon him. Unto this We truly were a witness."[103]

In Bahá'í scripture, the divine presence is the reflection of an ultimate reality of which humans may gain glimpses. All human beings' alignment with that reality

[96] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections,* 204.

[97] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, 52.

[98] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* (1912; Wilmette, IL: Bahai Publishing, 2011) 61.

[99] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections,* 242.

[100] Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990 [1938]) 26.

[101] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings,* 346.

[102] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, 272–73.

[103] Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 254.

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will be adjudicated accordingly. Hence, angels symbolize the calling of souls for judgment and also embody that justice:

> ye shall, most certainly, be summoned by a company of His angels to appear at the spot where the limbs of the entire creation shall be made to tremble, and the flesh of every oppressor to creep. Ye shall be asked of the things your hands have wrought in this, your vain life, and shall be repaid for your doings.[104]

While the preceding is easily interpreted allegorically, there also exist Bahá'í scriptural depictions of angelic functions that evoke a deeply anagogic reading. For instance, Bahá'u'lláh once wrote that the private recitation of scripture evokes a sacred "fragrance" that is scattered by angels to other human beings:

> Whoso reciteth, in the privacy of his chamber, the verses revealed by God, the scattering angels of the Almighty shall scatter abroad the fragrance of the words uttered by his mouth, and shall cause the heart of every righteous man to throb. Though he may, at first, remain unaware of its effect, yet the virtue of the grace vouchsafed unto him must needs sooner or later exercise its influence upon his soul.[105]

This depiction of the effects of prayerful discourse as a "fragrance" is important. The implication of holy recitation is analogized via smell, which has long been associated with angels. In *The Color of Angels*, Constance Classen explores the pre-Enlightenment idea of a sanctified odor or "the notion that Christians who lived in a state of grace would be infused with the divine scent of the Holy Spirit—the breath of God."[106] Susan Harvey notes that, while scripture is recorded as written text, the bouquet of sacred words defies control as it cannot "be confined in space"[107] and functions as an effective religious signifier of angels, "for the perfume announced a presence that was tangibly perceived while remaining invisible, silent and incorporeal."[108] Angels spread this odor of sanctity that links the hearts, and even the unconscious minds, of people, thereby demonstrating the diffuse and formless, yet aromatic attraction within a hallowed diaspora. Spiritual community exists, or even is constituted by, angelically enabled divinity. Hence, the prior reference to "the scattering angels" brings our focus to a dialogic relationship between God and humanity as one formed and strengthened not only by God's word, but by the agentic choice to recite those words—bringing people not only closer to God but in unity with one another.

[104] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, 125.

[105] Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í Prayers*, 295.

[106] Constance Classen, *The Color of Angels: Cosmology, Gender, and the Aesthetic Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 1998) 36.

[107] Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) 32.

[108] Ibid., 74.

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The Utilitarianism of Bahá'í Angelology

Dylan Potter has written that "theology must harness the array of perspectives on angels without perpetuating the myth of an historically consistent angelology to which one must capitulate."[109] Accordingly, the functions of angels in Bahá'í scripture are disparate and offer varied hermeneutics, thereby reflecting renowned Bahá'í scholar Moojan Momen's observation that "the Baha'i approach to the reading of Scripture is a multi-faceted one."[110] Each of the aforementioned dimensions of Bahá'í angels reveals a utilitarian implication.

A. Avatars of the Holy Spirit

First, in depicting the Holy Spirit as either the iconic Ḥúríyyih or as a host of angels, Bahá'í holy writ underlines the authority of the divine and Bahá'u'lláh as God's latest manifestation. Giorgio Agamben argues that "angelology directly coincides with a theory of power."[111] In this vein, the presence of the angel-maiden in the messianic founding moment of the Bahá'í religion, and the continued scriptural references to that angel, accentuate a claim to divine power that resonates not only theologically but politically. Akin to how religious authorities confirm a new monarch, Bahá'u'lláh is crowned by the Holy Spirit qua angel. Bahá'u'lláh's anointment by the Ḥúríyyih functions as a rivalry to the political power of the state in the context of the repression of the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths by the shah of Iran and the subsequent string of state-sponsored exiles suffered by Bahá'u'lláh and His family.[112] Consider that this angel is not simply a heavenly messenger acting on divine command but instead personifies the Holy Spirit and provides a direct form of ministration to, and anointment of, the manifestation of God as Bahá'u'lláh, who then embodies the religious movement's own legitimacy. By describing how the "Maid of Heaven" spoke directly to Him, Bahá'u'llah indicates a divine commission; the Ḥúríyyih's appearance appeals to the restoration of the Abrahamic faith as a dominion on this earth. Moreover, the angel of the Holy Spirit supercharges the political dimension of Bahá'í prophecy, thus sanctifying Bahá'u'lláh's claim that there will be the establishment of a Bahá'í world commonwealth—a world government in which the Bahá'í Faith becomes state religion.[113]

The depiction of the Holy Spirit as a host of unnamed angels who descend to the material world through Bahá'í prayer and meditation serves as a ritual paradigm for

[109] Dylan David Potter, *Angelology: Recovering Higher-Order Beings as Emblems of Transcendence, Immanence, and Imagination* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016) 155.

[110] Moojan Momen, "The Reading of Scripture: A Baha'i Approach," in *Reading the Sacred Scriptures: From Oral Tradition to Written Documents and Their Reception* (ed. Fiachra Long and Siobhán Dowling Long; London: Routledge, 2017) 137.

[111] Giorgio Agamben, "Angelology and Bureaucracy," in idem, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government* (trans. Lorenzo Chiesa with Matteo Mandarini; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011) 165.

[112] Juan Cole, "Bahā'-Allāh," in *EIr* III/4 (1988) 422–29.

[113] See Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 203–5.

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giving the abstract power of the Holy Spirit a tangible foothold in everyday life; Bahá'í scripture provides a cosmological framework for the mystical intercession of the Holy Spirit in the world of humanity.[114] For the laity, the Holy Spirit qua angels represents neither a form of direct revelation nor a vague form of inspiration, but illuminates renewed divine presence, assistance, and instruction. This form of power is double-sided. It accentuates that divine declaration is necessary and affords agency to make requests of God. This form of guidance is esoteric and asserts itself only to those who have a material or spiritual desideratum. This establishes Bahá'í theology as promoting a dialogic relationship with an all-powerful, yet sympathetic, God. The angelic Holy Spirit, as helper and remover of difficulties, draws attention to the Bahá'í theological imperative that humanity requires divine remediation of material troubles, while affording legitimacy to human behavior, will power, and faculties to identify what material issues should be succored by the angels of the Holy Spirit.

B. Celestial Beings in a Divine Hierarchy

In the second dimension, angels appear not as the Holy Spirit but as distinct celestial beings. Whether read literally or allegorically, the hyperbolic language of such Bahá'í angelophony functions to accentuate the intangibles and mysteries of a holistic reality. Claims to angelic ontology express the mysterious exaltedness of numerous realms and of secret "treasure from on high!"[115] Here, the Bahá'í angel is similar to the angel of the Hekhalot tradition: "celestial beings possessing mythic characteristics . . . exalted figures who inspire awe and which can be seen and heard and can even become interlocutors."[116] The angel functions as a potent reminder of a mysterious cosmos, both beautiful and terrifying. As Lawrence Osborn noted: "To entertain angels is to allow the *horror vacui* to become once again the *mysterium tremendum* which sings to us not of itself but of the glory of its creator."[117]

Bahá'í angels thus collapse the distinction between spiritual and material realms, emphasizing an enigmatic yet unified "otherness" to existence. Theologian Walter Wink argued that angels "are not personifications. . . . They are real. But their reality cannot be grasped if it is projected onto the sky. They are not 'out there' or 'up there' but within. They are the invisible spirituality that animates, sustains, and guides."[118] Apropos such enigmas, outside of the Ḥúríyyih's appearance to Bahá'u'llah, Bahá'í references to angels are seldomly used in either theological arguments or apologetics. Akin to the Pauline epistles, the mention of angels in

[114] For a corollary in Judaic angelology, see Rachel Elior, "Mysticism, Magic, and Angelology: The Perception of Angels in Hekhalot Literature," *JSQ* 1 (1993/94) 3–53.

[115] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections,* 205.

[116] Elior, "Mysticism, Magic, and Angelology," 30.

[117] Lawrence Osborn, "Entertaining Angels: Their Place in Contemporary Theology," *TynBul* 45 (1994) 273–96.

[118] Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 93.

Bahá'í scripture serves as a stylized and extravagant warning to pursue good works and serves to encourage and remind that one is never outside the bounds of divine grace.[119] The concept of angels embodying the Holy Spirit necessitates appreciation for, and faith in, the mysteries of God. To lay claim to a belief that the angels may assert influence in one's life, one is provided with an active and dialogic relationship with the divine that is not just *mysterium tremendum* but is *mysterium fascinosum*. Comfort is offered by angels that "represent the silent flow of omnipresence and glimmers of eschatological potential."[120] Belief in celestial beings and their abode in Malakút safeguards Bahá'í teachings from full reduction to the knowable natural world and a normative morality. Rather, the celestial existence of angels foregrounds the mystical covenanted relationship of God to humanity, thereby highlighting the interactional and dialogic relationship in which humanity's changing social needs will always be visited upon by angels.

C. Angels as Spiritually Evolved, Virtuous People

By offering a radical redefinition and demystification of the angel as a human being with the potential for both angelic and demonic behavior, Bahá'í theology attempts to reconcile spirituality and materialism. In constructing angels as spiritually evolved people engaged in salvific labor, Bahá'í angelology accentuates Bahá'í theological claims to the duality of human nature. On the one hand, this perspective reiterates the ancient Zoroastrian view "found in the Pahlavi texts of the Sassanid period, which refer to a mysticism based upon angelic internalization being achieved in the inmost consciousness,"[121] as well as more recent Sufi notions of *rūḥ*, or human soul, which was often configured as an angel.

On the other hand, the demystification of angels as merely virtuous human beings gestures toward the dominant tensions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that made a Janus-faced theology of selfhood particularly attractive. Bahá'í angelology emerged in a period of both theological reformulation and scientific enlightenment. Literal angels, especially angelic visitations, were increasingly viewed as either improbable or illogical. The humanization of angels helped to balance and merge the supernatural and the rational, even blurring the two as Bahá'í scripture explicitly claimed the fundamental unity, rather than opposition, of science and religion. It is therefore no surprise that we witness the angel as human most explicitly in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's 1911–1913 talks delivered to North American and European communities, ranging from theosophical societies and Christian churches to lettered audiences on college campuses and groups like the NAACP and first-wave feminist suffragettes.[122]

[119] For a discussion of angels in Paul's writings, see, D. Francois Tolmie, "Angels as Arguments? The Rhetorical Function of References to Angels in the Main Letters of Paul," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 67.1 (2011) 1–8.

[120] Potter, *Angelology*, 180.

[121] Andrea Piras, "Angels," *ER* 2:343–49, at 344.

[122] Negar Mottahedeh, *'Abdu'l-Bahá's Journey West: The Course of Human Solidarity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

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'Abdu'l-Bahá's words, in consort with the Bahá'í scripture on the other central figures, acknowledge the rational and scientific abilities of humanity but also bring those faculties to bear in charting, knowing, and communing with a world beyond the veil—thereby appealing to the prophetic tradition of social change.

Most importantly, the construction of the angel as a virtuous human illumines the Bahá'í notion of humanity as both a product and producer of divine influence in the world. That is, attention to the angelic and demonic capacities of humanity is also a reflection of the dual nature of religion within Bahá'í theology. Religion possesses both a spiritual and a social aspect, whereby the former appeals to a transcendent or "Absolute" reality while the latter acknowledges that religion is formed from sociological dynamics subject to transitory beliefs, behaviors, and institutions.[123] This dichotomous notion of religion enables the Bahá'í conception of a dialogic relationship between God and humanity. The celestial virtues of angels, now within people, reveal humanity and the earthly realm as sites where God may reside, dependent on humanity's choices. Such an interpretation is bolstered in *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh* (a text Shoghí Effendi called "Bahá'u'lláh's pre-eminent ethical work"[124] and named after the "Hidden Book of Fatimih," believed by some to be the words of the angel Gabriel to Fatimih, a daughter of Muhammad[125]): "Thy heart is My home; sanctify it for My descent. Thy spirit is My place of revelation; cleanse it for My manifestation";[126] or "Love Me That I may Love thee, if thou Lovest Me Not my Love can in no wise reach thee. Know this, O Servant."[127] To become angelic, humanity must simultaneously rely on its imagination and agency, which then allows for the influence of divinity in this world, thereby accentuating human agency and capacity in dialogic form.

D. Angels as Manifestations of God

The next dimension of Bahá'í angelology unites the religious prophets, specifically the manifestations of God, with the angels. This functions to signify the divine status of Bahá'u'lláh but also places all manifestations on par with one another as a unified station of perfected and obedient conduits of God's word. Now understood as divinely anointed nonagentic messengers, akin to the angelic hosts, in the Bahá'í theory of the "manifestation," these conduits are placed in the context of "progressive revelation," which has a three-fold function: 1) the truth of prior manifestations is acknowledged; 2) the fundamental agreement of all religion is affirmed, and; 3) the prior concept of angels, along with their religio-cultural significance, becomes subsumed within Bahá'í theology.

[123] Saiedi, "The Reconstruction," 78
[124] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words,* 1.
[125] Effendi, *God Passes By,* 40.
[126] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words,* 17.
[127] Ibid., 4.

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Called the "single most striking and defining element of the Bahá'í Faith,"[128] the concept of progressive revelation is the theory that God sends messengers to the world to renew religion. That messenger, or the manifestation-as-angel, is a perfected entity that is distinct yet identical to the others. Here, Bahá'í scripture invites a dramaturgical exegesis: the angels/manifestations are understood as successive chapters in a larger religious narrative. Furthermore, if they are the same, bound via their utility and divinity, regardless of the specific names applied to them, then so are the religious faiths. Such a chronicle thus affirms the legitimacy of prior religious messengers as brothers of an angelic fraternity. Thus, the angel as manifestation serves to rearrange and supercharge each figure as a temporary vicar in an ageless ministry. Finally, by collapsing the figure of the angel and the manifestation in the context of progressive revelation, Bahá'í theology imbues scripture and angelic figures of prior faiths with a distinctive Bahá'í meaning and place within a new theological cosmology. This was also a sociological move; Bahá'í scriptural references to Islamic angels labored to normalize a new (and what was often seen as heretical) faith, emerging in the context of societies in which angels, jinn, and *shayāṭīn* were believed to circulate regularly. Through Bahá'í appeals to the Qur'an and hadith and mi'raj literature, Bahá'í theology came to be less a departure from Islamic orthodoxy than an augmentation via Islamic apologetics.

E. Angels as Bearers and Personifications of Divine Virtue

Last, by viewing angels as the bearers and personifications of divine virtue, Bahá'í theology reconfigures the angel to function as a transformational mechanism. That is, the Bahá'í notion of God is not an ontological category, but rather is understood through behavior; God is understandable less as a noun than as a verb. Divinity is comprehensible in the valence of processual behavior as an imperfect reflection of that divinity. Toward this end, 'Abdu'l-Bahá employs the analogy of the sun and its rays:

> The light of the sun emanates from the sun; it does not manifest it. Appearance through emanation is like the appearance of the rays from the sun: The sanctified Essence of the Sun of Truth cannot be divided or descend into the condition of the creation. In the same way, the sun does not divide itself or descend upon the earth, but its rays—the outpourings of its grace—emanate from it and illumine the dark bodies.[129]

People are images of God, or in the above analogy, reflections of the sun in the mirror of the soul. Knowledge of God requires virtuous faculties bestowed upon humanity by the divine but is irreducible to such virtues themselves. The essence of God is unknowable. Thus, this dimension of Bahá'í angelology represents the

[128] Todd Lawson, "Bahá'í Religious History," *JRHy* 36 (2012) 462–70, at 463.
[129] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 116–17.

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transformation of fluid, abstract axiologies into stable, knowable ontologies; the angel personifies the knowable God—divine virtues.

Conclusion

Bahá'í orthopraxy generally oscillates between literal and allegorical hermeneutics.[130] Angels are no exception. The Bahá'í angel is most often discussed as either the "Ḥúríyyih" or as an abstract metaphor for divine inspiration, but overall, the angel of Bahá'í scripture is ignored by scholars. I argue that angels, rather than remaining marginalized or esoteric figures, serve as important doctrinal touchstones. Illuminating the varied types and functions of Bahá'í angels helps chart Bahá'í theology in important ways that reflect an emphasis on God's dialogic relationship to humanity.

As seen through the figure of the angel, the Bahá'í dispensation represents a significant reinterpretation of both the meaning of religion and the relationship of the divine to humanity. Conventionally, religion is understood as monological, an unchanging reality that transcends society and history. Thus, religious adherents tend to treat their faith as absolute until the end of history itself—an eschatological finality. Yet, as humanity changes, with both scientific advances and new challenges, religion is frequently viewed as an antiquated obstacle unable to contend with society's unique problems. However, Bahá'í theologian Nadar Saiedi explains:

> the Baha'i concept of religion defines religion as a dialogue between God and humanity, a product of an interaction between divine knowledge/will and a specific stage of human development, needs, and conditions. Religion is not an absolute divine command. Instead, it is the reflection of the divine will in the mirror of human historical receptivity. Consequently, religion becomes historical and dynamic. The source of religion is absolute, but religion is the relative manifestation of this absolute in the mirror of human reality.[131]

All religions are reconceptualized as dialogical; the word of God is a living reality, a dialectical synthesis of eternity and historicity. The angel of the Bahá'í Faith points the way toward this ongoing, interactional dialogue.

While I have enumerated five types and functions of the Bahá'í angel, one cannot but recognize how the interrelation and complexity of sources, traditions, and styles within Bahá'í scripture confound efforts either to succinctly summarize angels or to commit to a singular hermeneutical view, whether literal, allegorical, tropological, dramaturgical, typological, or anagogical. Even when outlining how

[130] Khazeh Fananapazir, Seena Fazel, and Sen McGlinn, "Some Interpretive Principles in the Bahá'í Writings," *Bahá'í Studies Review* 2.1 (1992); Oliver Scharbrodt, *Reason and Revelation: New Directions in Bahá'í Thought* (Los Angeles: Kalimát, 2003) 529–31. Cf., "the most widespread approach in the American Baha'i community to scriptural exegesis is literalism. . . . [I]n practice most U.S. Baha'is put a literalist interpretation of scripture above science"; Juan Cole, "The Baha'i Faith in America as Panopticon, 1963–1997," *JSSR* 372 (1998) 234–48, at 244.

[131] Saiedi, "The Reconstruction," 81–82.

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angels appear as maiden, messenger, manifestation, man, or moral, these types fail to encapsulate either the complete denotations or full utility of angels. But by holistically approaching all simultaneously and as overlapping, angels immediately appear as more than the sum of their parts—as sui generis. The angel is thus less a thing to be catalogued than a unique lens through which we may gain new vistas on how the world relates to the divine. Valery Rees captured well the conundrum of angelology: "we are missing the point if we try to pin down too closely what each archangel is called, or even how many of them there may be. They are more like a kaleidoscope rather than a fixed band."[132] From the Greek, a kaleidoscope bares "beautiful forms to see." Accordingly, studying the angels of Bahá'í holy writ provides a brightened and multihued outlook on God's connection to humanity. If we engage these celestial figures as "shards and fragments of the revelatory sources,"[133] we may glimpse sparkles and refractions of divinity.

Angelic References in Bahá'í Authoritative Scripture

Author	Title	Angel	Gabriel	Isráfil	Izrá'il	Seraph	Cherubim	Maiden	Total
The Báb									
	Selections from the Writings of the Báb	9							
	(untitled prayer)	1							
		10							**10**
Bahá'u'lláh									
	Days of Remembrance	12		1				3	
	Epistle to the Son of the Wolf	4	1						
	Gems of Divine Mysteries	4							
	Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh	11	1						
	Kitáb-i-Aqdas	3							
	Kitáb-i-Íqán	7	5			1	1		
	Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh	3							
	The Call of the Divine Beloved	2	1	1	1				
	The Summons of the Lord of Hosts	8						1	
	Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas	6	1						
	Tablet of the Holy Mariner	2						1	
	(untitled prayer)	1							
		63	9	2	1	1	1	5	**82**

[132] Rees, *From Gabriel to Lucifer,* 142.
[133] Schaab, "Feminist Theological Methodology," 365.

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Author	Title	Angel	Gabriel	Isráfil	Izrā'il	Seraph	Cherubim	Maiden	Total
'Abdu'l-Bahá									
	Light of the World: Selected Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá		1			1			
	Memorials of the Faithful	6	1						
	The Promulgation of Universal Peace	13							
	The Secret of Divine Civilization	1							
	Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá	28		1					
	Some Answered Questions	5							
	Tablet to Dr. Auguste Forel	1							
	Tablets of the Divine Plan	5		1					
	Tablets to The Hague	1							
	A Traveler's Narrative	1							
	Twelve Table Talks given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 'Akká	1							
	Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá	1							
	Additional Tablets, Extracts, and Talks	1							
	Additional Prayers Revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá	1							
	(untitled prayers)	10							
		75	2	2		1			**80**
Shoghi Effendi									
	The Advent of Divine Justice	2							
	Bahá'í Administration	2							
	Citadel of Faith	1		1				1	
	God Passes By	8	6					4	
	The Promised Day Is Come	2					1		
	The Decisive Hour	1	1					1	
	The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh	4							
		20	7	1			1	6	**35**
The Universal House of Justice									
	Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice	8	2					1	
	Turning Point	1							
		9	2					1	**12**

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