

1 *Houses of Worship in every land*

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Preamble

An observer of the Bahai community in Baghdad, in the period around 1860, would have found a community whose distinguishing characteristics were that it centred on the person of Bahā'u'llāh, and had forms of worship that resembled Sufi practices more than those of the mosque. Adib Taherzadeh translates one eye-witness report of such a meeting, held one evening in the house of Bahā'u'llāh in Baghdad:

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That night a wonderful feast had been arranged and ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, then eighteen years of age, was acting as host. ...after partaking of food they began to chant the Tablets of Bahā’u’llāh, and soon the atmosphere became deeply spiritual. Hearts were filled with divine love and souls were illumined by the light of the New Day ... Every sincere soul in that company experienced ecstasy and joy, and the atmosphere became alive with excitement and rapture. ... Then without warning the door opened and Bahā’u’llāh entered majestically, holding in His hand a small glass vessel of rose-water. He greeted them with the salutation *Allāh’u’Akbār*, and bade them not to arise or disrupt their meeting. He had felt the spirituality of that gathering, He said, and so had come to anoint them with rose-water. This He graciously did, going to every person in the room, after which He left. It was a mighty climax and the highlight of the evening. No one was able to sleep that night, so intoxicated were they with the wine of His presence.¹

If we compare this with a Bahai community today, we can see precursors of some familiar features: the gathering of Bahā’u’llāh’s devotees with hospitality food and devotions points to what became the 19th-day Feast; the use of Bahā’u’llāh’s texts as liturgy prefigures their elevation to scriptural status; and ‘Abdu’l-Bahā already has pre-eminence in the community. The theme of the ‘new day’ is already present. What we don’t see, in this and similar accounts, is any particular concern with theology and doctrines, the Covenant,² the House of Justice, and distinctive Bahai laws. The community begins with worship, indeed, with adoration. The founders³ of the Bahai community – Bahā’u’llāh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā and

¹ Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahā’u’llāh*, vol. 1, 219, giving the source as an unpublished work of Nabil [-e Zarandi].

² The Covenant will be central to this study at a later stage. For present purposes, in relation to the lifetime of Bahā’u’llāh, its root is the right of the ‘Manifestation of God’ to deliver a new religious law and teaching and modify past laws and teachings, and its first branch is the centrality of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, who was later to be designated by Bahā’u’llāh as the next leader of the community and its doctrinal authority (interpreter).

³ Shoghi Effendi would be unhappy with any term that appeared to place him in the same category as Bahā’u’llāh or ‘Abdu’l-Bahā. He regarded the death of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā as marking the end of an era. However Shoghi Effendi was not only the appoin-

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Shoghi Effendi – envision the identity and unity of the community centring not on a shared programme, world-view or ideology, but rather on a person and on shared worship. They envision a community that aims at closeness to God and at the virtues and values inculcated by a particular pattern of religious life.

The ‘house’ of worship, which like the term ‘church’ does not refer primarily to a building, not only comes first in Bahai history, it has a logical priority, for the purpose of the institution, as we will see, is not only to worship God but also, in doing so, to create a community and motivate altruistic activities, while the Covenant and the ‘house of justice’ are about the administration of the community and its activities, once it exists. So while it might seem natural, from today’s perspective, to begin a study of the structures of the Bahai community in the thinking of the community’s founders by explaining the Covenant and the House of Justice, I have chosen to begin with the community at worship.

Strictly speaking, one should begin at the very beginning, with the person of Bahā’u’llāh – which would lead us into a biography and a theology of revelation – and follow this with individual discipleship and the life of faith, since one can be a Bahai without the presence of a community, but a community would not be a Bahai community unless the members were committed to the person of Bahā’u’llāh and practising the life of faith. Logically, the individual, the Person of the believer and of Bahā’u’llāh, comes first. But this is an ecclesiology, and I begin with the community of worship, and the forms and institutions of worship.

For present purposes, I will use the term ‘the house of worship’ with no capital letter to refer to the entire sphere of activities of worship and mindfulness in the life of a community, and House of Worship or Mashreq el-adhkār¹ to refer to a specific instance of the institutionalization of these activities. There are some passages in the Bahai writings

ted Guardian of the Bahai Faith and the authorized interpreter of its scriptures, he was closely associated with ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, who in turn was closely associated with Bahā’u’llāh, and must in my view be considered the recipient of an oral tradition that illuminates the thinking of Bahā’u’llāh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahā. Therefore I need some short term for these three figures if I am not to refer to “Bahā’u’llāh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā and Shoghi Effendi” on virtually every page of this study. Since “central figures” is already in use to refer to the Bāb, Bahā’u’llāh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, I will refer to Bahā’u’llāh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā and Shoghi Effendi as the Bahai Faith’s “founders.”

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which distinguish the term 'House of Worship', which is the central building used exclusively for worship, from Mashreq el-adhkār, which includes both the House of Worship and its surrounding institutions of learning and social service, known as 'dependencies.'¹ But in many other passages the term Mashreq el-adhkār refers only to a building dedicated to worship (or a meeting for worship). Precision in using the two terms is unimportant at this point since the Mashreq el-adhkār in the wider sense, including the surrounding institutions, is the actualization of the same idea of service and worship which is inherent in the Mashreq el-adhkār in the narrower sense, and because the related institutions of learning and social service will be treated in another chapter.

The Mashreq el-adhkār, the "Rising-place of Remembrance (of God)," or House of Worship, is a recurrent theme in the writings of Bahā'u'llāh and 'Abdu'l-Bahā. It has a prominent place in Bahā'u'llāh's 'Most Great Book', the *Ketāb-e Aqdas*,² which commands the people of the world to build Houses of Worship "throughout the lands." It has a central place in 'Abdu'l-Bahā's writings, particularly his correspondence, where it is called "the greatest divine institute,"³ and is named by Shoghi Effendi as one of the "two primary agencies" of the Bahai Faith and "the crowning institution in every Bahai community." Yet a sociological study of a local Bahai community today might overlook it entirely. My approach is not sociological: this chapter explores the Bahai Writings for a picture of what the Mashreq el-adhkār is as a concept, its centrality in the thinking of the Bahai founders, and the diverse forms it can take, and how it is to be administered.

The most visible form the Mashreq el-adhkār can take is as a building dedicated to worship, such as the well-known 'continental' Houses of

¹ Using the Bahai standard transliteration system, this is written *Mashriqu'l-Adhkār*. The word *ma'bad* (معبد) is sometimes used in the Bahai writings to refer to the physical fabric of the Mashreq el-adhkār (مشرق لالذكار). A *ma'bad* may also be the place of worship of another religion, or a shrine, whereas the term Mashreq el-adhkār is particular to the Bahai Faith (and has a different meaning in the Bāb's writings, as we will see).

¹ منضّمات و ملحقات و توابع

² Composed in stages, circa 1866-1871, published 1890.

³ *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahā Abbās*, vol. 3, 633.

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Worship in Wilmette, Illinois and New Delhi. But this is not all that is meant by the term Mashreq el-adhkār, which is termed an 'institute' and 'agency.' As we will see, the term Mashreq el-adhkār is used in the Bahai Writings to refer to various commitments, activities and institutions associated with worship. In some cases it refers to a building, in others to a gathering to glorify God and to recite the Sacred Writings, to an institution, a worshipping community, and to the mystic mainspring in the believer's life. To understand how one term can have so many meanings but remain a coherent concept, it will be necessary to make a brief digression into Bahai cosmology.

The architecture of the kingdom of names

In the cosmology and cosmogony that we find in the Bahai Writings, the universe is ordered by the emanation of attributes or names of God, which are also called the 'realities' or 'essences' of things. The concept of attributes or realities which are manifest in a variety of forms lends itself to a rich metaphorical language describing diverse 'realities' that take on a variety of forms as they are manifest at various levels and in various materials. It is this poetic and theological language that is needed to answer a simple question like "What is meant by the Mashreq el-adhkār?"

According to this cosmology, the attributes or names of God emanate from the Godhead through successive levels of realization in much the same way as ideas, in platonic philosophy, exist first in the world of forms and are realized, to a greater or lesser degree, in the material world. While the concept of the emanation of the names or attributes of God closely resembles the platonic or neo-platonic concept of ideas or forms that are realized in matter, there are at least four important differences. In the first place, the emanation of ideas in the platonic scheme is an automatic process, rather than the act of a God who desires to be known. In the second place, platonic thought has tended to consider the unique qualities of things, such as a particular individual's personality, as unimportant in comparison to the universal 'idea' of a human being. Popper has drawn a link between this aspect of platonism and authoritarian politics.¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahā, however, writes: "When ... thou dost contemplate the in-

¹ *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Volume 1.

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nermost essence of all things, and the individuality of each,² thou wilt behold the signs of thy Lord's mercy in every created thing, and see the spreading rays of His Names and Attributes throughout all the realm of being ..."² As regards historical particularities and human individuality, Bahā'u'llāh writes, "Every age has its own problem, and every soul its particular aspiration."³ Thirdly, Platonism and the classical world-view in general is imbued with a pattern of decline over time from an original golden age to the present lamentable day, such that any change tends *a priori* to be interpreted as a further deviation from the original ideal. In the Bahai cosmology, since God is always 'the Creator' and 'the Father,' these names of God must always be expressed in creation and fathering.⁴ If one supposes that this 'creation' involves not just the coming-into-being of more and more examples of existing things, but also the generation of new ideas, then the universe can be conceived not as a machine running down but rather as something like an eco-system evolving an increasing variety of life-forms so as to expand. The movement is upwards, in progress towards perfection and increasing diversity – although separately, in works such as the *Four Valleys*, Baha'u'llah also uses the picture of the arc of descent and ascent that characterises the soul's individualisation from God, turning to God, and rising to reunion with God. Finally, Neoplatonic philosophers are free to propose anything as an 'idea,' which can be ridiculous: is there one idea of the automobile from which all models are generated, or distinct ideas for a Rover and a Mini? It can also be very dangerous, because it can be theorized that there are distinct essences or ideas animating one race, one culture or differentiating men from women. The model in Bahai cosmology is less flexible, for we cannot suppose that just any concept reflects a spiritual reality. Our knowledge about God and the words which we are licensed to use in relation to

¹ اذلا نظرت الى حقائق الأشياء و هوية الكائنات see *Montakhabāti az Hazrat-e 'Abdu'l-Bahā*, Vol. 1, 39.

² *Selections* 41. Emphasis added.

³ *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahā'u'llāh*, S CVI. هر روز را رازياست و هر . سر آواز درد . In less literary language, he says "every mind dances to its own tune."

⁴ I am not at all endorsing creationism here. Just as I have a literal father and yet God is "the Father," the origin of the cosmos and of human beings can be found in material processes, and yet God is "the Creator" in a metaphorical sense.

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God are derived from revelation, which gives us a stock of names and attributes of God that can be applied as spiritual realities in creation. Bahā'u'llāh writes: "Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes."¹ Since there is no warrant in scripture for 'God the American' or 'God the male' there are no grounds for building theories of manifest destiny, for any group. These four differences between Bahai and Platonic or Neoplatonic thought are so important that it is not possible to consider Bahai theology as an extension of Platonic thought, even though the language used in the Bahai Writings shows considerable continuities with Platonic terminology.

An example is the attribute of 'sovereignty,' found in names of God such as 'the sovereign Lord'² and connoting both independence and authority. The attribute of sovereignty is expressed in the archangelic and angelic realms in the form of beings whom Bahā'u'llāh refers to as the "monarchs of the realms of the Kingdom."³ At another level, the Manifestations of God in human history embody this attribute. In another sense, human government, and archetypically monarchs, embody sovereignty. The sharp distinction between temporal sovereignty and the sovereignty of the Manifestations of God is the theme of part 2 of one of Bahā'u'llāh's pre-eminent theological treatises, the *Ketāb-e Iqān*. Sovereignty is reflected in another way in the Bahai administrative institutions, as we will see, because their authority is based on mandates in the writings of Bahā'u'llāh and 'Abdu'l-Bahā, and in yet another way in the sovereignty of any individual who has attained the station at which his or her faith is conditioned by no one else, one who sees with justice⁴ and is unaffected by the approval or disapproval of anyone but God. Bahā'u'llāh

¹ *Gleanings*, XXVII; کینونت و حقیقت دهر شیء را با اسمی از اسماء تجلی نمود (Montakhabāti, section 27). و بصفتی از صفات اشراق فرمود

² الماک

³ Translated by Shoghi Effendi in *The Promised Day is Come*, 34; *Athar-e Qalam-e A'la* Vol. 1 55: ملوک ممالک الملائکوت.

⁴ "The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice (انصاف, fair-mindedness) ... By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbour." (Bahā'u'llāh, *Arabic Hidden Words*, II, tr. Shoghi Effendi.).

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writes: “Where is the man of insight who will behold the Words of God with his own eyes and rid himself of the opinions and notions of the peoples of the earth?”¹

Thus a single attribute, shining as it were from the Godhead through the worlds of God, is refracted from the diverse realities in forms and colours which differ, but in which we can recognize a certain family resemblance. Conversely, human beings can respond to the sovereignty of God in all these forms in appropriate ways: by adoring the Godhead, by recognizing and following the Manifestation of God, by obeying their governments and fulfilling the duties of good citizenship, such as participating in elections. This process of emanation is conceived not as a question of successive dilution as one moves ‘further’ from the Godhead, but rather as differing manifestation of the attributes of God in differing materials. The responses required of us therefore differ in kind, rather than merely in degree.

The model of emanating realities applies equally to the reality of the Mashreq el-adhkār, which ‘Abdu’l-Bahā describes as being present in, and coming into existence through, various levels of being:

In reality, the radiant, pure hearts are the Mashrak-el-Azcar and from them the voice of supplication and invocation continually reacheth the Supreme Concourse.

I ask God to make the heart of every one of you a temple of the Divine Temples and to let the lamp of the great guidance be lighted therein; and when the hearts find such an attainment, they will certainly exert the utmost endeavor and energy in the building of the Mashrak-el-Azcar; thus may the outward express the inward, and the form (or letter) indicate the meaning (or reality).²

‘Abdu’l-Bahā speaks here of one reality, realized first in the form of the radiant, pure hearts which turn to God,³ and then and because of that, in the building of the Mashreq el-adhkār. Inner realities are driven to find

¹ Tablet of Vafā, as translated in *Tablets of Bahā’u’llāh* 188.

² *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā Abbās*, 678; I have not located the original, which is likely to be available only in the national Bahai archives in Wilmette, USA.

³ Here drawing on the *Persian Bayān* 4:16, where the Bāb says that the House of God is the hearts of those who believe in He Whom God shall manifest.

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outward expression. In this sense, 'manifestation' can be understood not just as the exceptional breaking-in of God, acting in history through a chosen person, but also as a universal dynamic. As 'Abdu'l-Bahā says, "No atom is bereft or deprived of this opportunity or right of expression."¹

From the above, it should not be surprising to find the term Mashreq el-adhkār being used in a variety of ways by the Bahai founders to refer to the remembrance of God as it is manifest in individual, institutional, material and communal forms. Two forms, the Mashreq el-adhkār as a building and as personal and community devotions, will be dealt with below, before we turn to the Mashreq el-adhkār as a worshipping community and its unifying and motivating function. But first we will have to consider what the ubiquitous term "community" means in relation to the Mashreq el-adhkār.

¹ Reported in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 285. The text cannot be authenticated from Persian notes, and must therefore be categorized as a 'pilgrim's note,' yet it is so apposite and striking that I will quote it more fully. "Therefore, each atom of the innumerable elemental atoms, during its ceaseless motion through the kingdoms of existence as a constituent of organic composition, not only becomes imbued with the powers and virtues of the kingdoms it traverses but also reflects the attributes and qualities of the forms and organisms of those kingdoms. As each of these forms has its individual and particular virtue, therefore, each elemental atom of the universe has the opportunity of expressing an infinite variety of those individual virtues. No atom is bereft or deprived of this opportunity or right of expression. Nor can it be said of any given atom that it is denied equal opportunities with other atoms; nay, all are privileged to possess the virtues existent in these kingdoms and to reflect the attributes of their organisms. In the various transformations or passages from kingdom to kingdom the virtues expressed by the atoms in each degree are peculiar to that degree. For example, in the world of the mineral the atom does not express the vegetable form and organism, and when through the process of transmutation it assumes the virtues of the vegetable degree, it does not reflect the attributes of animal organisms, and so on."

The impulse which drives realities to be manifest in every possible form may be considered as the fundamental force in Bahai cosmology, since it seems to be a reflection of the motivation of creation itself, according to the Islamic tradition "I [God] was a hidden treasure, and desired to be known."

The universal house of worship

Because Shoghi Effendi, in the first years of his ministry, often called the Mashreq el-adhkār “the universal house of worship,”¹ and because Bahā’u’llāh writes, in the *Ketab-e Aqdas*, “O people of the world! [Not, “people of Baha”] Build ye houses of worship throughout the lands in the name of Him Who is the Lord of all religions,”² some have thought that the Mashreq el-adhkār was conceived as a common place of prayer where people of all faiths could worship according to their own rites.³ This is linked to another idea – outside the scope of this study – that Bahā’u’llāh did not intend to create one more religious community that would exist alongside others, but rather a meta-religion that would be common ground for people holding to many different traditions.⁴ These specula-

¹ Five times in the early letters published in his *Bahā’i Administration*.

² Paragraph 31. ياملاً الانشاء عمروا بيوتاً باكمل ما يمكن في الامكان باسممالك
الاديان في البلدان

³ See for example Eshraq-Khavari, *Taqrirāt* 260. The idea that the Mashreq el-adhkār would be a common place of worship for peoples of diverse religions can be found throughout the early Western Bahai literatures, but this is outside the scope of this study. In the writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā I have studied there is a consistent assumption that the Mashreq el-adhkār is a meeting or building, however modest, where Bahais gather in larger or smaller numbers to worship, and particularly to say the obligatory prayers and recite *dhekr*. I have not found anything in the Persian writings of Shoghi Effendi that differs from this assumption. What then did he mean by the “universal house of worship?” I speculate that he was applying a distinction that ‘Abdu’l-Bahā makes, between a public House of Worship maintained by the community, and places of worship initiated inconspicuously by individual Bahais in houses, for limited groups. This will be clearer later in this chapter.

⁴ An undated pamphlet titled *Principles of the Bahai Faith* (New York, Bahai Publishing Committee), attributes to ‘Abdu’l-Bahā the words: “The Baha’i message is a call to religious unity and not an invitation to a new religion, not a new path to immortality...” A pamphlet known as “booklet number nine” – which may well be the same – also quotes these words, and the existence of this pamphlet is first recorded in January 1924 (Thanks to Reed Curry for assistance). The same text was published repeatedly in *Reality Magazine*, an increasingly unorthodox independent Bahai publication, also from New York, from about 1922 (see Peter Smith, ‘Reality Magazine’). It was also published several times in *Star of the West* from May 1924 onward (Thanks to John Taylor). The idea has had a surprising revival in the anonymous *One Common Faith* (2005), which claims “Bahā’u’llāh has not brought into existence a new religion ...” The idea appears to have been promulgated primarily by Ahmad Sohrab,

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tions are groundless: Bahā'u'llāh and 'Abdu'l-Bahā did intend to found a separate religious community, many of whose institutions would be exclusive to their followers, and they intended the Mashreq el-adhkār to be the central institution in each Bahai community, a place where the rites of Bahai worship would be performed.¹ Shoghi Effendi states:

...the central Edifice of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkār ... should be regarded ... as a House solely designed and entirely dedicated to the worship of God in accordance with the few yet definitely prescribed principles established by Bahā'u'llāh in the *Kitāb-i-Aqdas*. It should not be inferred ... that the interior of the central Edifice itself will be converted into a conglomeration of religious services conducted along lines associated with the traditional procedure obtaining in churches, mosques, synagogues, and other temples of worship. Its various avenues of approach, ... will not serve as admittance to those sectarian adherents of rigid formulae and man-made creeds, each bent, according to his way, to observe his rites, ... within separately defined sections of Bahā'u'llāh's Universal House of Worship. ... [T]he central House of Baha'i worship, enshrined within the Mashriqu'l-Adhkār,² will gather within its chastened walls, ... *only* those who, discarding forever the trappings of elaborate and ostentatious ceremony, are willing worshipers of the one true God, as manifested in this age in the Person of Bahā'u'llāh.³

who briefly assisted with *Reality Magazine* from October 1922 to April 1923 (Peter Smith, *op cit.*), although Hippolyte Dreyfus wrote along these lines at an earlier date.

¹ A separate question, outside the scope of this study, is whether Bahā'u'llāh and 'Abdu'l-Bahā envisioned the Bahai Faith *replacing* all other religions, to the extent that all who worshipped, did so in a Bahai way. The idea is too foolish to attribute to the central figures of the BF, and there are texts to indicate that 'Abdu'l-Bahā and Shoghi Effendi in particular looked forward to the revival of religions, in the plural. See my 2009 article 'The future of Religions' at <http://wp.me/pcgF5-9B>.

² This is an example of the term 'Mashreq el-adhkār' applying to a complex of service institutions, while 'House of Worship' refers to the hall used exclusively for worship.

³ Letter to the Bahais of the United States and Canada, October 25, 1929, in *Baha'i Administration* 184-5.

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The community of a Mashreq el-adhkār, therefore, is envisioned as a community of those who, turning to the Person of Bahā'u'llāh, worship there in a particular way (without “elaborate and ostentatious ceremony”). It is not equivalent to the body of declared Bahais, because attendance at a Mashreq el-adhkār is not a religious duty, because there may be multiple Mashreq el-adhkārs in one locality, and because the definition above is more inclusive than declared Bahais. The overlapping circles of the Mashreq el-adhkār community and the community of recognized Bahais reflects the differentiation between administration, doctrine and worship in Bahai ecclesiology; a theme I will return to often in the course of this study.¹

Shoghi Effendi continues in the same text:

To them will the Mashreq el-adhkār symbolize the fundamental verity underlying the Bahā'i Faith, that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is not final but progressive.

How does Shoghi Effendi expect the Mashreq el-adhkār to symbolize, for the worshippers, the relativity of religious truth and the progressive and continual nature of revelation? It could be that he is thinking merely of the external ornamentation of the Wilmette (Illinois) Mashreq el-adhkār, which features symbols such as the cross and Star of David, but given that this follows his refutation of the concept of the Mashreq el-adhkār as a common home for the worship of diverse rites, it seems more likely that he meant that the Mashreq el-adhkār would symbolize the progressive nature of Revelation because it would be distinctively Bahai building with a distinctively Bahai worship. It would publicly announce that the next in a succession of religions had established itself.²

¹ The Mashreq el-adhkār is a Bahai institution, but not in the sense of exercising authority (which is the sphere of the House of Justice) or defining doctrines, which is the sphere of Baha'u'llāh, 'Abdu'l-Baha and the Guardianship. Its functions are to unite and to attract, and above all to 'remember' (worship) God.

² The concepts of the Bahai Faith as a meta-religion (see for example Momen, 'Beyond Pluralism'), and of the Mashreq el-adhkār as a home for diverse rites, both imply that the revelation of new religions has ended: there is an existing stock of 'religions' and one container for them, the Bahai Faith, which is not a religion. In contrast, the concept of the Bahai Faith as a new religion, with new rites of worship in a distinctive Bahai institution, implies that there is now a new link in the chain of religions, alongside and following on the other links, and therefore that yet further links

The Mashreq el-adhkār as a building

In contrast to the New Testament, which speaks of 'the church' and 'churches' as communities of worship without referring to the building in which the church meets, the Bahai Writings do refer to the building for worship, giving it a high station and in some cases setting quite specific requirements for it.

The Bāb's teachings regarding the place of worship closely resemble those of Bahā'u'llāh. While the plural of the term Mashreq el-adhkār is found in the Bāb's writings, he uses it to refer to the Manifestations of God, not to a meeting or building.¹ The Bāb recommends that the faithful should gather for obligatory prayers, which is preferable to praying alone, yet he forbids obligatory prayer in congregation and specifies that the faithful should dedicate a room in their own home to serve as a place of prayer.² This points to a local institution for worship, without a prayer leader. It also has a national equivalent, since the Bāb enjoins any monarch who joins the Babi religion to erect a House of Worship with 95 doors, and another facing it having 90 doors, in honour of He Whom God will make manifest.³

The Bāb, like Bahā'u'llāh, prohibits the use of any elevated pulpit (*menbar*), a feature of the mosque that might be called the throne of the divines. The Bāb's writings limit the number of shrines (using the term *masjid*, mosque) to those at the birthplace of the Bāb, and one shrine at the birth places of each of the 18 'letters of the living.'⁴ These shrines are

can be expected. Revelation, and religion, is a work in progress, and its truths are relative in the sense of historically conditioned.

¹ I am grateful to Nader Saiedi for this observation.

² See the Arabic *Bayān*, Bāb 9 of the 9th Vāhed, and the same section in the Persian *Bayān*. For the latter see page 584 in the UCLA ms. This practice continued in the early Bahai community in Iran, see Mottahedin-Mavaddat and Momen, 'Alaviyyih Khānum and Mullā 'Alī Jān.'

³ See the Arabic *Bayān*, Bāb 9 of the 7th Vāhed, and the same section in the Persian *Bayān*. For the latter see page 453 in the UCLA ms. The 'house' is simply a *bayt*, the term for a House of Worship that Bahā'u'llāh uses in the *Ketāb-e Aqdas*.

⁴ See the Arabic *Bayān*, Bāb 1 and 2 of Vāhed 5. For the Persian *Bayān* see p. 296 of the UCLA ms.. There is also an undefined 'my House' in Bab 16 of Vāhed 4, which is said to be identical to the House of He Whom God will make Manifest. As it

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also places of pilgrimage.¹ However the Bāb's writings do not contain anything comparable to Bahā'u'llāh's endorsement of dawn worship in the Mashreq el-adhkār.² In the Persian Bayān, for example, the Bāb specifies a verse to recite on Friday morning, but this is apparently to be performed in the home or a place where the sun is visible.³

In Bahā'u'llāh's writings, paragraph 31 of the *Ketāb-e Aqdas* is the key text that commends the building of Mashreq el-adhkārs "throughout the lands." It speaks of buildings which are "as perfect as is possible in the world of being."⁴ Other texts require that both the building and, if possible, the grounds should be circular or nine-sided.⁵ I will not consider the other physical requirements, since they have no apparent bearing on the shape of religious community that the founders envisioned.⁶

Despite these specific requirements, the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahā in particular suggest that the institution's importance to him lay not in its

turns out, the shrines of the Bāb and Bahā'u'llāh are located a few kilometers apart.

¹ See the Arabic Bayān, Bāb 16 of Vāhed 6.

² *Ketāb-e Aqdas*, paragraph 115. In the Questions and Answers, paragraph 15, 'dawn' is clarified as before two hours after sunrise.

³ Bāb 17 of Vāhed 7: in the UCLA ms. at p. 478. My translation is online at <https://senmcglinn.wordpress.com/2009/04/11/its-friday-thank-god>.

⁴ A possible reflection of the Bāb's dictum that "No created thing shall ever attain its paradise unless it appeareth in its highest prescribed degree of perfection." *Selections from the Writings of the Bāb* 88.

⁵ This pattern is in fact applied in the 'public' ('*omumi*) Mashreq el-adhkār buildings which have been erected in or near to Chicago (Wilmette), Frankfurt, Sydney, Apia, Panama City, New Delhi, Kampala and Santiago, and it appears it will be followed in the seven others presently planned or under construction.

For a brief history and bibliography of the existing Mashreq el-adhkārs see Momen, Moojan, 'Mašreq al-adkār,' in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. The most recent survey of the practice of past and present Mashreq el-adhkārs that I am aware of is Graham Hassall's article 'The Baha'i House of Worship,' which also has a good English-language biography. The older article, V. Rafati and F. Sahba, 'Bahaism ix: Bahai Temples' in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* contains numerous errors in the section beginning 'Bahai laws prescribe...'

⁶ See Momen, *Elr*. 'Mašreq al-adkār' for a summary.

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material fabric, but in what it would achieve: its act rather than its fact. This will be discussed further below.

There are also verses that restrict the possible uses of a Mashreq el-adhkār, such as in Question 94 of the *Ketāb-e Aqdas* where Bahā'u'llāh says:

Whatever hath been constructed for the worship of the one true God, such as mosques, chapels and temples, must not be used for any purpose other than the commemoration of His Name.

This has been understood to mean that not other activities should take place in the main hall of the Mashreq el-adhkār.¹ The response to Question 94 cited above may be an endorsement of the Shiah teaching that a property once dedicated as a mosque can never be used for another purpose. In a letter to Aqā Ne'mato'llāh Narāqi, 'Abdu'l-Bahā has said that the Universal House of Justice will have to rule on this question.²

However other texts from the founders are more relaxed about both the physical requirements for a Mashreq el-adhkār and the possibility of other uses. The *Ketāb-e Aqdas* (paragraph 115) defines Mashreq el-adhkār buildings without reference to their shape, as "each and every building which hath been erected in cities and villages for the celebration of My praise." 'Abdu'l-Baha uses the name Mashreq el-adhkār in this broader sense to refer to buildings dedicated to worship, which could hardly satisfy the physical requirements:

This is a most important point: if the erection of the House of Worship in full view would arouse the hostility of the wicked, then it should be established in every locality in a hidden way. Even in every hamlet, there should be a place set aside as the Mashreq el-adhkār, even if it must be underground.³

¹ Shoghi Effendi, *Baha'i Administration* 77, quoted above at page 11.

² Quoted by Eshraq-Khavari, *Ganjineh-ye Hodud wa Ahkām*, 234.

³ My translation from *Montakhabāt-i az Makātib* Vol. 1 92. There is an English translation in *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahā* 95, but this obscures one point that is relevant here, that it is the Mashreq el-adhkār building, and not only a meeting, that may be underground. A similar tablet, saying that a Mashreq el-adhkār must be established, even underground, wherever two Bahais are living, is published in *Amr wa Khalq* 4 151.

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As to the Mashreq el-adhkār, it is of the utmost importance. The purpose is this: a spot should be designated, even if it is a small place beneath layers of earth and stone, and it should, out of prudence, be kept hidden and concealed lest it arouse the hostility of the mischief-makers. At least once a week, it should become the gathering place of the chosen friends who have discovered the secrets and become the intimates of divine mysteries. It may assume any form, for even if it be an underground pit, that pit shall become a sheltering paradise, an exalted bower, and a garden of delight. It shall become a centre wherein the spirits are gladdened and the hearts attracted to the Abhā Kingdom.¹

He does not apparently consider it essential that the dedication to worship be permanent and exclusive, since He wrote to one of the early North American believers who had prepared her home as a temporary Mashreq el-adhkār that "this service was accepted in the Kingdom of Abhā."² As for the practice in the East during ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’s lifetime, Momen writes:

... during ‘Abd-al-Bahā’s leadership, many Bahai communities in Iran, Central Asia, India, Burma, and North America designated ordinary houses or specially-built halls in their localities as Mashreq al-Adhkārs, many of which were donated by wealthy local Bahais. Sometimes, as in the cities of Qom and Kermānshāh, these were houses that had already been considered holy: in the two mentioned cases, the remains of the Bāb had rested there for a time during their journey to ‘Akkā.³

One way of understanding these apparently contradictory statements, that there are certain requirements for a Mashreq el-adhkār building and that diverse homes and halls and even cellars were Mashreq el-adhkārs, is to see the more exacting formulations of Bahā’u’llāh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahā as an ideal form for a public Mashreq el-adhkār, to be built when wisdom permits. The ideal form does not prevent the designation and use of mod-

¹ Translated in *The Institution of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkār* (compilation), selection 35. I have not found this source in the published collections of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’s letters.

² *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā* vol. 1 149.

³ In ‘Mašreq al-adkār’, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

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est and, where necessary, anonymous, buildings as Mashreq el-adhkārs, as an interim measure.¹ This thesis of two levels of Mashreq el-adhkar is supported in two letters from ‘Abdu’l-Bahā:

The edifice of the House of Worship has a powerful influence at all levels. This has been experienced in the East, it has become obvious. Even if, in some small village, a house was designated as the Mashreq el-adhkār, this produced a marked effect; how much greater would be the impact of one especially raised up!²

God willing, in all the states of America in the future there will be erected Temples with infinite architectural beauty, art, with pleasing proportion and handsome and attractive appearances ... But for the present, be ye satisfied with a rented place.³

In another instance, reported by Adib Taherzadeh, Bahā’u’llāh approved the use of a house in Qazvin as a Mashreq el-adhkār: “Khatun Jan and her two sisters ... donated [a house]. ... In a letter to Bahā’u’llāh they expressed the desire that it might be used as a Mashreq el-adhkār. Bahā’u’llāh accepted their gift and approved of their intention.”⁴

An eastern Bahai writing around 1908 describes homes being purchased in the name of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā for use as Mashreq el-adhkārs, with other homes being dedicated for use as travellers’ hospices, Bahai schools and teaching centres, and says that such Mashreq el-adhkārs existed "in most of the cities in Persia."⁵ Clearly the rented buildings, houses and un-

¹ In Eshqābād, a tree was used as a site for daily dawn prayers, pending the construction of the Mashreq el-adhkār on the same site (Māzandarāni, *Zohur al-Haqq*, vol. 5, 346-349). My thanks to Ahang Rabbani for this reference.

² My translation, from *Montakhabāt-i az Makātib* Vol. 1 93. There is an English translation in *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā* 95-6, which refers to ‘every phase of life,’ while the original and the context suggest the meaning is that Mashreq el-adhkārs exist at various levels, from the designation of a house to an especially designed building.

³ *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā Abbās* 437.

⁴ *The Revelation of Bahā’u’llāh* Vol. 2, 180.

⁵ Cited in Armstrong-Ingram, *Music, Devotions, and Mashriq’l-Adhkār* 10, giving as source the Goodall Papers (i.e, the papers of Ella Goodall Cooper, in the Bahai Archives at Wilmette): [Taqi] Menshādi to Unidentified, n.d.

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derground spaces mentioned in such texts would not normally be circular or nine-sided. Since these are nevertheless approved by Bahā'u'llāh and 'Abdu'l-Bahā as Mashreq el-adhkār, it seems reasonable to conclude that the rules of design and use that they prescribe for a perfected Mashreq el-adhkār do not necessarily apply to lesser forms. The inner reality of the Mashreq el-adhkār strives not only to be manifest in every level of reality, but also to attain "its highest prescribed degree of perfection" within each level,¹ in a process of growth over time.

For a period beginning in 1925, the terminology was clarified by Shoghi Effendi's in a message to the Bahais of Iran, saying:

... in every locality a suitable place [should] be acquired and dedicated exclusively to use as the focal centre of the Cause of God.... it is recommended that all Baha'i gatherings such as the communal meetings for reciting prayers and the Holy Writings, the sessions of the Spiritual Assembly, firesides, conferences, memorial meetings, festivities and banquets be held in this place, ... if the prospects prove favourable and the lofty edifice of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar could also be reared in the same consecrated spot in the future, then there would be light upon light.

This focal Centre should be called *Haziratu'l-Quds* (Sacred Fold)

....²

I think it most likely that the Mashreq el-adhkār buildings in Iran that had initially been intended for prayers, and particularly dawn prayers, reciting *dhekr* and obligatory prayers, had in practice come to be used for meetings in general, and that Shoghi Effendi ordered the renaming because of the principle that "Whatever hath been constructed for the worship of the one true God ... must not be used for any purpose other than the commemoration of His Name." I do not read this 1925 instruction as a ban on using the term Mashreq el-adhkār for any lesser building not de-

¹ *Selections from the Writings of the Bāb* 88.

² Translated in a memorandum from the Research Department of the Bahai World Centre, 'The Haziratu'l-Quds (حظيرةالقدس): Uses and Functions,' October 1997; original in Shoghi Effendi, *Towqī'āt 1922-26*, 247-248. The phrase "reciting prayers and the Holy Writings" translates *munājāt* and *ahwāh*, with no reference to obligatory prayers.

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signed for the purpose, but rather as an accommodation to the communities' needs for an all-purpose building.

As the Bahai communities in the West developed, with the benefit of freedom of religion, the term *Hazerat al-Qods* (Haziratu'l-Quds) was used there for the complex of buildings housing the “[National Spiritual Assembly’s] Secretariat, the Treasury, the Archives, the Library, the Publishing Office, the Assembly Hall, the Council Chamber [and] the Pilgrims’ Hostel...”¹ The emphasis at that time was on the Hazerat al-Qods as the seat and secretariat of the National Spiritual Assembly, whereas in Eshqābād, it was the name of a large meeting hall adjoining the Mashreq el-adhkār.² The creation of local analogues, and the inclusion of the teaching and social functions (social meetings, weddings and funerals), was made dependent on resources and needs. The “Assembly Hall” in this list could be used for both general meetings and worship, it is not a Mashreq el-adhkār, in Shoghi Effendi’s terminology, and is not a common feature of Hazerat al-Qods complexes today.

The importance of the Mashreq el-adhkār building in the thinking of the Faith’s founders no doubt relates to the fact that mosques, khaneqahs or zawiyahs, churches and synagogues were central to the religious communities of their time, but it also has a direct relationship to the Bahai teachings concerning the station of physical reality itself. Although the physical and metaphysical worlds are referred to as levels, the physical creation in the Bahai teachings is not a lesser order of creation. There is an order of priority, in which the names of God emanate through the worlds of God. The physical world is the last level in this ordering, and the first in the reverse ordering through which human realities ascend towards God, but it is not morally below other worlds. Physical reality is the capstone of the ordered universe, rather than God’s afterthought. The process by which the names of God emanate and are manifest remains incomplete until these names also have physical and worldly analogues. In contrast to most Christian theologies, the fundamental distinction is not between the spiritual world and this world, but between God and all of creation, both spiritual and physical. This is why physical church build-

¹ Shoghi Effendi, cited in an undated (1997-98?) memorandum from the Research Department at the Bahai World Centre.

² Lee, ‘The Rise of the Bahā’i Community of ’Ishqābād,’ 12.

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ings have at most a small place in Christian treatments of ecclesiology, perhaps under the headings of ‘consecration’ and ‘deconsecration’, whereas a theological treatment of the Mashreq el-adhkār may well begin with the physical manifestation of this reality. Neither the physical form, nor the individual, collective or institutional forms of the Mashreq el-adhkār can be called the ‘true’ Mashreq el-adhkār, but just as the last station on a railway line gives its name to the whole route, the physical and public Mashreq el-adhkār, which is the perfection of the process of emanation, can serve to identify the whole process.

It may also be useful to touch on the Bahai teachings on the diversity of things at this point. If there is a single reality which is manifested by degrees in all of the physical forms of the Mashreq el-adhkār, from the rented, underground and domestic Mashreq el-adhkārs referred to above to an ultimate perfected form, it might appear that the physical architecture of the Mashreq el-adhkārs should tend to converge as they approach their consummation. Would all Mashreq el-adhkārs, ideally, look the same? There is one physical design which might in fact be taken as approximating to the ideal form: the design for the Mashreq el-adhkār in Eshqābād (now Ashgabat, capital of Turkmenistan), which was conceived by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā,¹ and which was used as a model for at least one smaller replica near Tehran.²

However the material in which the divine ideas are manifest is not simply an infinitely plastic potential: the material itself has its own nature and limitations, and the material available is everywhere different. Thus there are variations between individuals of one species which are at different stages of growth (for example between seed, seedling and mature tree), but there are also differences between mature trees of the same species. Each has its individuality and, as discussed above (page 6), in the Bahai writings the individuality of things is valued for itself. In the case of Mashreq el-adhkār buildings, the material matrix in which the idea of the Mashreq el-adhkār must be realized includes not only particular ma-

¹ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 268.

² According to a letter from Susan Moody to the Chicago Bahai community around 1914, cited in Armstrong-Ingram, *Music, Devotions and Mashriqu’l-Adhkār* 10-11. Moody says this Mashreq el-adhkār was under construction in a village with a fairly small Bahai community.

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terials and a site, but also cultural materials, such as architectural motifs and building techniques, which must contribute to the individuality of each Mashreq el-adhkār and are to be valued for that reason. There is therefore no reason to think that the founders expected that Mashreq el-adhkār buildings that are more perfect expressions of the concept should come to look alike.¹

I pass over two illuminating histories here. One is the establishment of numerous Mashreq el-adhkārs of varying stages in Persia and Russia. This history has not been written in English, but one can deduce from ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’s letters and talks, only a few of which are quoted here, that many local communities in Persia must have had Mashreq el-adhkārs. For instance, at a time when the Mashreq el-adhkār of Eshqābād was approaching completion, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā is reported to have said:

In Persia there are some Mashrak-el-Azgars. Some are houses which have been rented for that purpose. Others have given their homes entirely for that purpose, and in some places temporary and small places have been built therefor. In all parts of Persia there are Mashrak-el-Azgars; but the great Mashrak el-Azkar was founded in Eskabad, because it is the first one. Hence it possesses the superlative degree of importance.”²

¹ See for example Shoghi Effendi, *Light of Divine Guidance* Vol.1 245-246; *Unfolding Destiny* 356. If Abdu’l-Baha had intended his design to be a model, he, and Shoghi Effendi after him, had the opportunity to steer the design for Wilmette in that direction, but they did not do so, and Shoghi Effendi called for diverse draft designs for the Mashreq el-adhkārs whose construction he supervised. Thanks to Peter Terry for this observation.

² Address of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā at the dedication of the Mashrak El Azkar grounds, Chicago, May 1, 1912. Extempore translation by Ameen Fareed, notes taken by Joseph Hannen (no Persian notes have been found). It is published in *Star of the West*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 28, but the text quoted is taken from an apparently earlier copy of Hannen’s notes which I have in my collection. There is a notable inflation in the two earliest versions of this report: the one I believe to be the oldest says “In Persia there are *some* Mashrak-el-Azgars ... In all *parts* of Persia there are Mashrak-el-Azgars.” In *Star of the West* this becomes “In Persia there are *many* Mashrak-el-Azgars. ... In all the *cities* of Persia there are Mashrak-el’Azgars.” A polished version of the latter is published in *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 71-72.

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The fact that ‘Abdu’l-Bahā says in the same breath that there are some Mashreq el-adhkār in Persia, and that the still uncompleted ‘great’ Mashreq el-adhkār in Eshqābād is the first,¹ supports my suggestion above that there was a distinction in his mind between the perfected form, the specially-designed Mashreq el-adhkār, and lesser forms which may have other shapes. Unfortunately, because there are no Persian notes for this talk, it is not possible to see what term was translated as the ‘great’ Mashreq el-adhkār.

The second history is the development of a devotional and liturgical tradition in the Bahai communities of the West, and the building of the Mashreq el-adhkār in Wilmette. It has been described by R.J. Armstrong-Ingram in *Music, Devotions and Mashreq el-adhkār*. The construction in Eshqābād, and the first steps towards construction in Chicago, took place in the lifetime of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā. The Mashreq el-adhkār in Chicago was completed, dedicated and used in the time of Shoghi Effendi. If this volume was to be entirely devoted to the Mashreq el-adhkār, these histories would have to be explored for the light they might throw on the thinking of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā and Shoghi Effendi, but we still have to outline all the other institutions of the Bahai community in the thinking of the founders: the Covenant, the House of Justice, elections, membership rolls and the forms of membership, the supervision of marriages and divorces and compliance with religious law, the national and international Conventions, the Guardianship, the 19th-day Feast, the scholars and schools, hostels and charitable funds, the ‘right of God,’ Bahai courts, the Bahai Commonwealth and more – all of it explicitly part of Bahā’u’llāh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’s plan to create a new religious community.

The Mashreq el-adhkār as the Manifestation of God

In Christianity, but not in Judaism and Islam, the place of worship is identified with the founder of the religion (as well as being the ‘House of God’ in all three religions). Paul writes “[I] rejoice in my sufferings for you, ... for his body’s sake, which is the church.”² As I noted above, the

¹ He also says that Eshqābād is the first in tablets published by Eshraq-Khavari in *Ganjineh-ye Hodud wa Ahkām* 235 and 237.

² Colossians 1:24, and similarly Ephesians 1:23-24. At that time, ‘church’ referred to the believers rather than a building.

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term Mashreq el-adhkār is used by the Bāb to refer to Manifestation of God, rather than to the House of Worship. "The Remembrance of God" is one of the most frequently used titles which the Bāb and Bahā'u'llāh apply to themselves,¹ and Bahā'u'llāh chose the same name for his house of worship (the rising-place of remembrance). Does this indicate a symbolic parallel in his mind, between that institution and himself, between places of worship and the Manifestations of God in general?

There is undoubtedly an analogy in Bahā'u'llāh's thinking between the human form, including the human form of the Manifestation of God, and the temple. In Persian and Arabic this is a dead metaphor, inherent in the ambiguity of the word *haykal* meaning both 'human form,' and 'temple' or edifice. In a key passage arguing the Babi-Bahai concept of revelation as theophany, Bahā'u'llāh writes that because humans have no direct way of attaining to the mystic knowledge (*irfān*) of God's self, God "... caused those luminous Gems of Holiness to appear ... in the noble form of the human temple." he summons all to "adorn your temples with the adornment of trustworthiness and piety." The Prophets are the "temples of the Cause of God." The human temples proceed from the temples of the prophets, as Bahā'u'llāh writes: "Raise up, then, from this Temple, the temples of the Oneness of God, that they may tell out ... the tidings"² – but the context shows that the dependent temples in this passage are souls, presumably of believers, and not houses of worship or the Bahai community.

That the prophets are called temples is not at all the same as "the Church is the body of Christ." The Christian formulation sacralizes the community or its institution: it becomes a sacrament, a visible sign of an invisible reality. Can this be said of the Mashreq el-adhkār, in any of the multiple senses of the term?

¹ *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahā'u'llāh* 296, 303; *Proclamation of Bahā'u'llāh* 7-8; *Prayers and Meditations*, pages 7, 131, 141, 336; *Tablets of Bahā'u'llāh* 115, 181, 190. The references in the Bāb's writings are too numerous to mention. In the Persian *Bayān* (4:18) he also equates the Manifestation with the House to which pilgrimage is made.

² The first quote is from the *Ketāb-e Iqān* 99: original عَدَّانَسَانِي بِه هِيَاكَل عَدَّانَسَانِي; the second from *Epistle* 135, cf. *Lawh-e Shaykh M Taqi* 99 (زِينُوا هِيَاكَلِكُمْ بِطَرَاذِ الْأَمَانَةِ وَ) (الدِّيَانَةِ); the third is from the *Iqān* 162, the third from the *Suriy-ye Haykal* / Surih of the Temple, tr. published in *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, section 1.12.

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I have found only a single source that suggests the Mashreq el-adhkār is sacramental, a sermon given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā at the Church of the Ascension, New York, as reported in *Star of the West*:

... within a temple every race and people is seen and represented... Therefore it is evident that the church is a collective center for mankind. For this reason there have been churches and temples in all the Divine religions. But the real Collective Centers are the Manifestations of God, of whom *the church or temple is a symbol and expression*. That is to say, the Manifestation of God is the real Divine Temple and Collective Center of which the outer church is but a symbol.¹

For lack of any strong reference to the Mashreq el-adhkār as the symbol or expression of the Manifestation of God, in the writings of the founders, it would appear that the idea was not present, or not important, in their thinking. The one example cited above is from a sermon given in a church, and even if it is reasonably accurate it might simply be an example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā adopting the terminology of his audience. One factor militating against the sacralization of the community and its houses of worship, in the BF, is that the Bahais have a scriptural theory of the *qebleh*, the direction to turn in prayer: it is the Manifestation of God during his lifetime, and after his death it is his grave.² Bahais who say their obligatory prayers – in the Mashreq el-adhkār or elsewhere – turn in the direction of the *qebleh*, near Akka in what is now Israel. That turning is symbolically turning to God, and seeking nearness to Bahā’u’llāh, through the *qebleh*, and this hardly leaves room for the Mashreq el-ad-

¹ The sermon is dated June 2, 1912, and is reported in *Star of the West*, Vol. III, No. 10, p. 25. The church meeting is reported in Mahmud Zarqani’s *Diary*. Zarqani reports the opening words verbatim, in Persian, and they agree with the English in the *Star of the West* report, but he does not give us a Persian text for the italicized phrase, and I have not found any Persian notes, so the words above come to us via an interpreter, English note-taker and editor. An independent but weaker allusion to the sacralization of the Mashreq el-adhkār – vaguely attributed to ‘Abdu’l-Bahā -- is recorded in *Star of the West*, Vol. 2, No. 4, p. 11: “The Mashrak el Azkar is the symbol of the real church, which church is the Reality of the Christ.” (see also Vol.2 No. 10 pp. 6-7.)

² This passage from the Bāb’s writings is quoted by Bahā’u’llāh in the *Ketāb-e Aqdas* paragraph 137.

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hkār building or the community of worship to have a similar signification.³ In one letter, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā instructs that one should turn to Bahā’u’llāh in prayer – and promises to send a likeness to assist with this – but he warns “...in the Temple ... the blessed picture must never be placed on the wall.”²

Just as the Mashreq el-adhkār is not referred to as the embodiment or symbol of Bahā’u’llāh, or the House of Bahā’u’llāh, it is also not called the house of God. In Bahai terminology that title is reserved for the places of pilgrimage: the House of the Bāb in Shiraz and the House of Bahā’u’llāh in Baghdad. This is analogous to the Islamic usage, where the title is reserved for the Ka‘bah in Mecca.

‘Abdu’l-Bahā does however describe the Mashreq el-adhkārs as extensions of the shrines of the Bāb and Bahā’u’llāh. This was initially recorded in a pilgrim’s note from Annie T. Boylan. This note was taken to ‘Abdu’l-Bahā for confirmation, translated into Persian and corrected by him, and then translated back into English. It can therefore be considered his authentic voice. The corrected report says:

‘Abdu’l-Bahā replied that he had fulfilled that prophecy [that the Lord would come to rebuild the Temple] by building the Tomb of the Bāb. He said, “The blessed and holy tomb (of Bahā’u’llāh, may my soul be a sacrifice to its dust!) and the tomb of the Bāb on Mount Carmel was the first Mashreq el-adhkār, and that Temple is already built. The one in Eshqābād is a radiation from the first one. The one in Chicago will be another radiation. In future there will be many all over the world, all radiating from the central Mashreq el-adhkār, that is, the Holy Tomb and the Tomb of the Bāb.”³

This is not necessarily sacralizing the Mashreq el-adhkārs by association with the Manifestation: it fits more naturally with the principle that the Mashreq el-adhkār is “each and every building... erected ... for the celebration of My praise.” The two shrines are also buildings for remembrance, and thus pre-eminent among the Mashreq el-adhkārs.

¹ My thanks to Peter Terry for this insight.

² *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā* Vol. 2, p. 337.

³ Cited in Jasion, *‘Abdu’l-Bahā in France* 18.

The Mashreq el-adhkār as devotion and as a devotional meeting

I mentioned above that the importance of the Mashreq el-adhkār for ‘Abdu’l-Bahā evidently lay in what it does, rather than the fabric of the building. The Mashreq el-adhkār as a building "especially raised up" ... "with infinite architectural beauty, art, with pleasing proportion and handsome and attractive appearances"¹ is envisioned by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā as the goal of a process in which our hearts are first transformed into temples, and then this inward reality is translated, with “the utmost endeavor and energy,” into an outward form.² The idea that the heart is the house of worship parallels the idea, in Islamic mysticism and Persian poetry, that the true Ka‘bah, known as the House of God, is the heart of the believer. The Bāb refers to this idea in the Persian Bayān, Vāhed 4 Bāb 6, but with reference to the hearts of those who believe in “He whom God shall manifest.”³

The Mashreq el-adhkār as an aid to individual devotion, comparable to the ‘spiritual exercises’ of the Christian mystical tradition, will be passed over here. Not only are the spiritual exercises that center on the Mashreq el-adhkār rather far from my theme of the intended structures of the Bahai community, they are something that has been worked out in practice rather than being specified in the writings of the founders.⁴

‘Abdu’l-Bahā considered devotional meetings as a form of the Mashreq el-adhkār, and a stage in its development, since he writes:

The friends should hold a gathering, a meeting, where they will acquire the habits of reciting *dhekr* and fixing their hearts on God, and reciting and chanting the verses and writings of the Blessed Beauty ... These meetings are the Mashreq el-adhkārs that, accord-

¹ *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā* 96; *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā Ab-bās* 437.

² The text, from *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā* Vol. 3 678, was quoted above at page 8.

³ Here, “He whom God shall manifest” appears to refer to Muhammad, corresponding to ‘the Manifestation of God’ in Bahai terminology.

⁴ Bahais have found it beneficial in their devotions, for example, to visualize themselves worshipping under the dome, to imagine their heart as an illuminated house of worship, or to visualize their chants as building the fabric of the temple.

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ing to the decree of the most exalted Pen, must be established in every city and village.

When they are established, the private meetings will be abrogated.¹ But for now, when public gatherings have not been established in the land [Iran?] because that would cause the wicked and ungodly to raise a storm of opposition, it would do no harm if private gatherings were to be established, in which no more than nine souls are present. The point is that no large group – which could readily give rise to alarm and confusion among the ignorant – should be present ... Bahā'u'llāh instructed us to observe wisdom.² In the lands today, no more than nine of the friends should gather in one place, which is in accordance with wisdom.

The point is, in the revealed laws of religion, the place for worship and the public reading of scripture is the Mashreq el-adhkār, alone, which supplants all gatherings and meetings for worship. But philanthropic gatherings, deepenings, meetings for consultation and profitable discussions are also permitted, indeed they are necessary and incumbent. But today, in accordance with wisdom, none of these are possible. Therefore for now, meetings devoted to spirituality must suffice, and at present the first fruits of all meetings must be service to others. You must support one another and be the beloved of the Lord. So far as possible, the meeting should improve the conditions of humanity until, God willing, the Mashreq el-adhkār is established in all its majesty and glory. Then this restriction will be abolished.³

¹ The meaning of this phrase is discussed below.

² One of the tablets in which Bahā'u'llāh limits the creation of Mashreq el-adhkārs (in this case in Yazd, Shiraz and 'other places') is published in Bahā'u'llāh, AQA new series Vol. 3, selection 455. Another tablet is preserved in INBA Vol. 27 page 354 (and less legibly in Vol. 7, at page 123 of the Afnan Library pdf). It was addressed to Hand of the Cause Ibn Asdaq in response to the creation of a Mashreq el-adhkār in a home in Tehran. It begins with the well-known lines "Blessed is the spot, and the House and the place ..." I have translated and commented on it at : <https://senmcglinn.wordpress.com/2018/08/23/blessed-is-the-spot/> (2018-08-23).

³ My translation, from *Amr wa Khalq* Vol. 3 143-4 and Vol. 4 148-9. There is a partial translation in *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahā* 93-94.

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The reference to *dhekr* (repeated recitation of *Allāh'u'Abhā* or a similar phrase) will be explained below. The term ‘fixing their hearts on God’ appears to refer to silent meditation, an aspect of Bahai devotional life I have not commented on because it appears to have little relevance to the institutions of the community.

Another letter that refers to the centrality of the Mashreq el-adhkār, and incidentally suggests that it is not primarily a building, says:

The Mashrak-el-Azcar is the most important matter and the greatest divine institute. Consider how the first institute of His Holiness Moses, after His exodus from Egypt, was the "Tent of Martyrdom" which He raised and which was the travelling Temple. It was a tent which they pitched in the desert, wherever they abode, and worshipped in it.¹ Likewise, after His Holiness Christ – may the spirit of the world be a sacrifice to Him! – the first institute by the disciples was a Temple. They planned a church in every country. Consider the Gospel (read it) and the importance of the Mashrak-el-Azcar will become evident.²

The church is indeed of central importance in the Gospel. To be Christian is by definition to participate in the church, and the church is the defining and almost all-engrossing feature of the Christian religion. But the ‘church’ of the Gospel is one which is defined as a worshipping Christian community, or more precisely as a worshipping community to the extent that it is the embodiment of Christ. The disciples may well have ‘planned a church in every country’,³ but we have no indication in the Gospel that they planned a church building anywhere. So while ‘Abdu’l-Bahā is on the surface directing us to Hebrew and Christian sources which can demonstrate the importance of a building, he may also be understood as directing us to early Christian ecclesiology as a model of the importance of the Mashreq el-adhkār in defining Bahai identity and its central place in the Bahai community.

¹ The “tent of meeting” [i.e., Moses meeting with God] and later the Tabernacle, neither of which was for the worship of the whole people. See Ex. 33:7; Ex. 25-27; Ex. 40 1-2; etc to I Chronicles 17:1-5.

² *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā Abbās* 633-634. The expansion “(read it)” is typical of the translation style of Ahmad Sohrab.

³ See the quote and source on page 28 above.

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The forms of individual and collective worship that Bahā'u'llāh and 'Abdu'l-Bahā have related to the Mashreq el-adhkār will be discussed under various headings below. I will not attempt to describe or prescribe their forms, but will highlight a few features that suggest the shape of the religious community that its founders envisioned.

Dhekr (recitation)

As regards *dhekr*, pronounced approximately *zeker*, Bahā'u'llāh has given a rather direct indication of the kind of community he envisioned by naming his house of worship the Mashreq el-adhkār, the place where the *adhkar* (plural of *dhekr*) rise. *Dhekr*, which takes the form of repeating and concentrating on a ritual formula analogous to the mantras of Hindu and Buddhist practice, is a central individual and collective practice in Sufi Islam. It is not part of the Islam of the mosque, which focuses rather on the obligatory and other prayers, and the recitation and study of the Qu'ran. The words recited in Sufi *dhekr* are most often the names of God, such as *Allāh 'u' Akbār*, or the first part of the Islamic testimony of Faith: "No god is there but God," or "In the Name of God, The Gracious, The Merciful." Most of the various Sufi orders are characterised by their use of different formula and different practices in their individual and collective recitation. Group *dhekr* is often preceded by a teaching session and followed by a Quranic reading. It is thought to promote the continuous awareness of the divine. Worship in the Islam of the mosque – a term I use to avoid the valorizing term 'orthodox Islam' – focuses rather on the obligatory prayers (*salāt*) which are familiar to westerners from images of the believers in rows, genuflecting more or less in unison behind an imam (*emām*), and on the sermon and Quran reading.

There has been considerable mutual critique between proponents of Sufi Islam and the Islam of the mosque, the first questioning the authenticity of rituals in the mosque, the latter questioning the Quranic legitimacy of the Sufi rituals of *dhekr*, reciting remembrance, and of *samā'* or listening (ie listening to *dhekr*), the particular form of *dhekr* involving poetry, music and dance that is used in the Mevlevi, Alevi, and Bektashi orders.

By naming his house of worship the Mashreq el-adhkār, and making it the home of both *dhekr* and obligatory prayers, Bahā'u'llāh seems to be attempting to unify the formal and mystical aspects of religion. However his term *dhekr* includes both passive listening to recitation, and the recita-

tion of *dhekr* by the worshipper, as we can see in the verse of the *Ketāb-e Aqdas* (115) that links the name of the institution to the practice:

Blessed is he who, at the hour of dawn, centring his thoughts on God, occupied with His remembrance, and supplicating His forgiveness,¹ directs his steps to the Mashreq el-adhkār and, entering therein, seats himself in silence to listen to the verses of God, the Sovereign, the Mighty, the All-Praised. Say: The Mashreq el-adhkār is each and every building that has been erected in cities and villages for the celebration of My praise (literally, for *dhekr* of me). Such is the name by which it has been designated before the throne of glory, if you are of those who understand.²

Bahā'u'llāh has prescribed only one form of *dhekr*, to be recited daily:

It hath been ordained that every believer in God ... shall, each day, having washed his hands and then his face, seat himself and, turning unto God, repeat "Allāh-u-Abhā" ninety-five times.³

I have found no evidence that this is preferable to other *dhekr* formulae in other settings, such as the Mashreq el-adhkār 'dawn' service.

For convenience I will include here some references in the Bahai writings to other Sufi practices, although they are not specifically intended for the Mashreq el-adhkār. In *Memorials of the Faithful*, 'Abdu'l-Bahā recalls "While in the barracks, Bahā'u'llāh set apart a special night which he dedicated to Dervish Sidq-'Ali [A disciple from a Sufi background]. He wrote that every year on that night the dervishes should bedeck a meeting place, which should be like a garden of roses, and devote themselves to reciting *dhekr*."⁴ This text must date from around 1915, at which

¹ The translation here obscures that reciting *dhekr* is a practice. A better translation would be 'reciting *dhekr*, being mindful, supplicating forgiveness (ذاکراً متذکراً) (مستغفراً).

² ان انتم من العارفين . If you are one of those with mystic insight.

³ The *Kitāb-e Aqdas*, paragraph 18.

⁴ My translation, compare to *Memorials of the Faithful* 37; *Tadhekhratu'l-wafā'* در قشله شبی از قلم اعلیٰ بنام او تخصیص یافت که هر سال درویشان در آن 65: شب انجمنی بیارایند.

time ‘Abdu’l-Bahā did not say that the practice was no longer part of his vision of the Bahai community.¹

Dervish Sidq Ali was also the recipient of a number of tablets written by Bahā’u’llāh, known as the Tablets of the Sacred Night. Some confusion has been caused by the supposition that the Night of Sidq Ali and the Sacred Night are the same, but the Sacred Night refers to the night of the Bāb’s declaration of his mission. These tablets anticipate that Sufi practices, not necessarily in the Mashreq el-adhkār, would be part of the Bahai community.²

Obligatory prayers

As regards daily obligatory prayers (*salāt*), the practice enjoined by Bahā’u’llāh differs from the Islamic model in significant ways. The prayers were never intended to be said in unison. In the first place, there are three different texts for the obligatory prayers, each with its own times and methods of recitation. Each person is free each day to choose any of these three forms, known as the short, medium and long obligatory prayers. That means that the form and time of the prayer is an individual choice. Although there would be nothing to stop a group deciding to say a particular obligatory prayer together in a particular way at a particular time, this is not part of the design: if it were, there would be one prayer for all. There can be no summons of the community to prayer in the Islamic sense, because it is not possible to say that the correct time for prayer is now, rather than later. The time specified for the short prayer is between midday and sunset, while the times specified for the medium

¹ Some have claimed that such practices were abrogated by Bahā’u’llāh’s silence on them in the *Ketāb-e Aqdas*, but there is no indication that the designation of this meeting for *dhekr* and this night preceded the composition of the *Aqdas*, or that the founders regarded all decisions of Bahā’u’llāh preceding the *Aqdas* as void. *Memorials of the Faithful*, like *Some Answered Questions*, appears to be a collection of talks given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, whose text he later corrected, but the style suggests that in this case he wrote his text rather than speaking extemporaneously. The date of composition is given in the introduction to the 1924 Persian edition.

² A letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi says: “As for the Sacred Night and the recitation of prayers and the blessed Tablets that are designated for that night every year, and the inclusion of that night in the Bahai calendar, he said: “Write that it is permitted, but including it in the Bahai calendar is not necessary or obligatory at the present time” (My translation, from *Mā’edeh-ye āsemāni* Vol. 3 1).

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prayer, which is recited three times per day, are between sunrise and noon, between noon and sunset, and in the two hours after sunset. By these choices, Bahā'u'llāh has rendered the Islamic ideal of the entire (male) community praying at a specified time, around noon on Friday, or wherever is convenient when the call to prayer is heard, quite impractical.¹

‘Abdu’l-Bahā also allowed multiple Mashreq el-adhkārs in a single locality.² That has two important implications, in addition to being incompatible with the idea of all-embracing Friday prayers: first, it encourages liturgical differences between the Mashreq el-adhkār meetings in a locality, one with silent meditation, another with Persian or Gregorian chanting, singing vigorous hymns or chanting *dhekr* together, and any other forms the people may discover. Second, it indicates that he did not intend obligatory prayer meetings to function also as the interface between the governor and the governed. Throughout much of Islamic history, announcements from the ruler or governor have been made at Friday noon prayers and displayed in the ‘Friday mosque,’ while the prayers for the ruler have given religious legitimacy to his rule. This was linked to a largely theoretical ideal, in early Islam, that there should be no more than one mosque in a locality – which is why somebody thought to ask ‘Abdu’l-Bahā about multiple Mashreq el-adhkārs, at a time when having even one was a great achievement for any local community. The main Sunday service in much of European Christian history, especially in smaller centres, had similar characteristics: attendance was more or less obligatory, the priest or minister had a second role as the local representative of the ruling bureaucracy, and announcements from the ruler and prayers for the ruler were part of or appended to the service.

The other reason why the obligatory prayers cannot be said in unison in the Mashreq el-adhkār meetings, is that Bahā'u'llāh prohibited the Islamic practice of praying behind a prayer leader, except for the obligatory

¹ Friday is a day for prayer, in the Bahai teachings, but not a day of rest analogous to the Sabbath. I have discussed this in a blog posting : <https://senmcglinn.wordpress.com/2009/04/11/its-friday-thank-god/>.

² Quoted by Eshraq-Khavari in *Ganjineh-ye Hodud wa Ahkām*, 234. تبدیل محلّ مشرق الاذکار بمحلی احسن و اعلى جائز

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‘prayer for the dead’ at funeral services. In paragraph 12 of the *Ketab-e Aqdas* he writes:

It has been ordained that obligatory prayer is to be performed by each of you individually. Save in the Prayer for the Dead, the practice of congregational prayer (*jumu‘ah*) has been annulled.¹

The Bāb made the same ruling and exception, in the Arabic Bayān, Bāb nine of the ninth Vāhed, but with the additional recommendation² that the faithful should go to the place of prayer (to say the obligatory prayers) and meet one another, but should each say the prayer independently. This is one of a dozen or so instances I have found where it appears that the Bayanic laws were understood by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā to be the full text of a law, for which the Bahai texts give only an abstract.³ There are several tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā which set out a programme for a devotional meeting, and which specifically include the obligatory prayers. One, addressed to the Chicago community in 1903, reads:

Thy proposal that the friends should assemble on Sundays for the purpose of joining together in worship is most commendable. As for the manner in which such a devotional gathering should be conducted: first, the Friends should read prayers and turn themselves to God, invoking his aid and assistance; then, when all are assembled, there should be a period of silent prayer; lastly, prayers and readings should be recited aloud, before the whole company of the Friends, in the sweetest and most melodious of accents. As this is the commencement of holding meetings, this is sufficient.⁴

¹ كتب عليكم الصلوة فرادى قد رفع حكم الجماعة الا في صلوة الميت

² It is not obligatory, see 11:14.

³ On example of this intra-textuality is the specification of Friday as a day on which specific devotions are to be performed (see below, page 38). Another example is the law limiting the number of wives to two, which is unintelligibly brief in the *Ketāb-e Aqdas* but fully explained with its conditions in the *Bayān*, and was later explained by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā on that basis. I hope to write a study of Babi-Bahai family and liturgical law, with an emphasis on inter-textuality, in this series.

⁴ I have not located the Persian original for this tablet. This translation was made at the Bahai World Centre in 1987, as published in Robert Stockman’s *The Baha’i Faith in America: Early Expansion 1900-1912*, (vol. 2), p. 105. An earlier translation (1903) can be found in Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā Abbās, pp. 15-16 and in Armstrong-

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The word which the Bahai World Centre has translated as 'silent prayer' here, and which was translated as communion in an earlier translation, is *namāz*, which, according to a contemporary dictionary, meant "prayers, those especially prescribed by law (which are repeated five times a day)" – that is, it is the Persian equivalent of the Arabic *salāt*, obligatory prayer.¹ Neither 'communion' nor 'silent prayer' are, strictly speaking, translations of this term. However it is a reasonable assumption, given the difficulties involved in saying the obligatory prayers in unison that I noted above, that 'Abdu'l-Bahā would have envisioned a time of silence in which those who wished could recite the short obligatory prayer.

In another tablet very similar in content, 'Abdu'l-Bahā writes:

The Mashreq el-adhkār is the dawning-place of the lights, and the meeting place of the righteous. When precious souls gather in those heavenly meetings and begin the obligatory prayer (*namāz*), and are reciting the verses of God and chanting prayers (*munājāt*) with glorious voices, the Concourse on High will hear, and exclaim, "Blessed are you," and "Glad tidings, for praise be to God, in the world below some of the angelic souls of the Abhā kingdom have arisen in prayer (*munājāt*) and supplication (*du'ā*) and are reciting the verses of God in a sanctified meeting."²

In a tablet written in 1919 to the Mashreq el-adhkār committee in Eshqābād, 'Abdu'l-Bahā expresses the hope that he may himself perform

Ingram, *Music Devotions and Mashriq'u'l-Adhkar* (Kalimat Press, 1987), p. 318. Part of this translation, with minor differences, was previously printed in *Star of the West* vol. 13, nr 10, 276, January 1923. The more recent translation omits the last sentence, which I have taken from the text in *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahā Abbās*. The significance of the word *namāz* is noted by Armstrong-Ingram.

¹ It would be useful to find a text where *namāz* and *salāt* are used as synonyms, or *namāz* is specified as obligatory, by one of the Bahai central figures, but the only case I have found is a tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahā quoted in Chapter 6 (p. 108) of the Persian translation of *Bahā'u'llāh and the New Era*, which the translator tells us he has taken from the original text – but without citing his source! The translation, *Bahā'u'llāh wa 'asr-e jadid* by B.R. Suleymani (Editora Bahai, Brazil, 1988), quotes the tablet as saying: بهیچ عذري انسان معاف از صلاة نشود بدان که نماز فرض است:

² My translation. To the Spiritual Assembly of Boshruyeh, published in Ishraq Khavari, *Ganjineh-ye Hodud wa Ahkām*, 231.

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the obligatory prayer in the Mashreq el-adhkār,¹ and in a tablet to an unidentified community he tells them to perform the obligatory prayers, turning towards the court of Oneness, in the Mashreq el-adhkār.² There is a letter from ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, which I have entitled the “hymn to the Mashreq el-adhkār” because it begins with ten formulae of praise, the first being “the Mashreq el-adhkār is a magnet for the confirmations of God ...” After this introduction, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā says that while the establishment of the Mashreq el-adhkār is the most important service possible, it must be done with wisdom, given current conditions in that land (which is not identified). If necessary, a place with another form and name should be used, just so long as the Bahais are able to devote themselves to the obligatory prayers and worshipping God.³ This letter is typical of a large number of letters to individuals and communities in which ‘Abdu’l-Bahā urges the establishment of the local Mashreq el-adhkār wherever two or three Bahais live, but with wisdom, and concealed if necessary. The local Mashreq el-adhkār is central to ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’s vision of the Bahai community and Bahai life. This letter suggests that one reason is that obligatory prayers are central to Bahai life, and are said – in his understanding – in the Mashreq el-adhkār, as well as elsewhere.⁴

The tablet to the Chicago community, with its reference to the obligatory prayer in the devotional meetings, seems to have given rise to some questions, because in a later tablet to a North American Bahai, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā wrote:

As regards obligatory prayer, this should be recited by each believer individually, albeit its performance is not dependent upon the availability of a private place. In other words, obligatory prayer

¹ *Makātib-e Hazrat-e ‘Abdu’l-Bahā*, volume 3, 304.

² *Makātib-e Hazrat-e ‘Abdu’l-Bahā*, volume 1, 264. The letter appears to be written soon after the death of Bahā’u’llāh (May 1892), yet speaks of saying obligatory prayers in a Mashreq el-adhkār, an indication that Mashreq el-adhkārs were in use in Iran well before 1900.

³ The ‘hymn’ is translated in full on page 52.

⁴ I have previously quoted a tablet that refers to gatherings in the Mashreq el-adhkār “at least once a week,” which indicates that ‘Abdu’l-Bahā did not expect the daily obligatory prayers to be said every day in the Mashreq el-adhkār if one was available. See the discussion of Friday prayers below.

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may be performed alike at home or in the Temple, which latter is a public place, but on condition that each believer recite it individually. As for devotions other than obligatory prayer, if these be chanted jointly and with a pleasant and affecting melody, this would be most acceptable.¹

Dawn prayers

In the Ketāb-e Aqdas, paragraph 115, Bahā'u'llāh writes:

Blessed is he² who turns to the Mashreq el-adhkār at dawn in remembrance of God, centering his thoughts on God and asking for-

¹ Translation from the original quoted in a letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual, undated (1998?), online at http://bahai-library.com/uhj_obligatory_prayer_temple, retrieved August 2017. An earlier translation is available in *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahā* Vol. 2, 464. I have not located the original.

From where does 'Abdu'l-Bahā derive the idea that obligatory prayers can be said in a meeting, if each person prays for him or herself? In the case of 'Abdu'l-Bahā, one can never rule out an explanation that he received orally from Bahā'u'llāh, or that he deduced this solution himself. However the phrasing in this letter is reminiscent of the 13th Bāb of the 8th Vāhed of the Arabic *Bayān*, which provides a verse to be recited 95 times on the anniversaries of the birth and death of the Bāb, and specifies "pray together, but pray each one for himself." So one possibility is that 'Abdu'l-Bahā supposes that the mention of prayer in paragraph 12 of the Kitāb-e Aqdas, "... *obligatory prayer is to be performed by each of you individually. Save in the Prayer for the Dead, the practice of congregational prayer hath been annulled,*" is an endorsement of the annulment of congregational obligatory prayers in Bayān 9.9, and that the expansion of this law in Arabic Bayān 8.13, permitting a specific prayer to be said together if all the worshippers pray for themselves, therefore applies.

Although my topic is religious community in the thinking of the Bahai founders, I cannot resist pointing out that the practice and theory in Bahai communities in the West has, until recently, been to say the obligatory prayers only in private. A 1983 letter from the House of Justice is illustrative: "the daily obligatory prayers are ordained to be said in the privacy of one's chamber, and meditation on the Teachings is, likewise, a private individual activity" (Published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice*, 1963 to 1986, 589. This was corrected, as regards the obligatory prayers, in the 1998 (?) letter on behalf of the House of Justice just quoted. It is a case in point that the Universal House of Justice's understanding of Bahai teachings reflects, rather than leading, the understanding in the Bahai community. As for "meditation on the teachings." I know of nothing from the founders that would suggest that it should be exclusively a private activity, and in recent years it has been promoted as a group activity.

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giveness, and who on entering seats himself in silence to hear the verses of God...¹

In the Questions and Answers appended to the *Aqdas*, Bahā'u'llāh clarifies that “dawn” in this case covers “first light, from first light to sunrise, and even up to two hours after sunrise.”²

The *Aqdas* verse appears to prescribe a very simple form of worship, for the dawn prayers if not for all worship in the Mashreq el-adhkār. The two verbal phrases “in remembrance of God [and] centering his thoughts on God” translate two variants of *dhekr*, the first (form I) implying vocalisation, the second (form V) implying a state of mindfulness. The stipulation “seats himself in silence” would be incompatible with the more usual Sufi practices in reciting *dhekr*, but might envision something like Mevlevi or Bektashi *samā'*. Sitting in silence is also incompatible with saying obligatory prayers, even though the first recitation of the medium obligatory prayer, which is recited three times in a single day, must be performed at dawn or sunrise.³ The *Aqdas* verse on dawn prayers does imply a cantor: one or more person reading the verses of God while others listen, but it does not mean silent listening exclusively, since paragraph 150 of the *Ketāb-e Aqdas* says that the children should be able to recite “the Tablets of the All-Merciful” in the Mashreq el-adhkārs.

Turning to God at dawn is particularly recommended by the founders:

He should treasure the companionship of those that have renounced the world ... At the dawn of every day he should commune with

² The Arabic is inclusive: “he or she.”

¹ My translation. The Bahai World Centre translation reads “Blessed is he who, at the hour of dawn, centring his thoughts on God, occupied with His remembrance, and supplicating His forgiveness, directeth his steps to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkār and, entering therein, seateth himself in silence to listen to the verses of God..”

² My translation, from Q&A 15.

³ On the timing of this prayer see page 167 n. 5 of the Bahai World Centre’s English translation of the *Ketāb-e Aqdas*. It might be objected that, at the time the *Aqdas* and its blessing for those who go to the Mashreq el-adhkār at dawn was written, the medium obligatory prayer and its instructions had not been composed. But another obligatory prayer, a *salāt* of 9 *rak'ahs* whose text has since been lost, had been composed, and it too was to be said three times each day.

God, and with all his soul persevere in the quest of his Beloved.
(Bahā'u'llāh)¹

Now, praised be God, you have been able to achieve the establishment [of the Mashreq el-adhkār]. At the dawn of every day devote yourselves to *dhekr*, and rise up in praising God... blessings and joy are yours for having established the Mashreq el-adhkār.
(‘Abdu’l-Bahā)²

From the Mashreq el-adhkār, ... the representatives of Baha’i communities, ... will, as they gather daily within its walls at the hour of dawn, derive the necessary inspiration that will enable them to discharge, in the course of their day-to-day exertions in the Haziratu’l-Quds -- the scene of their administrative activities -- their duties and responsibilities as befits the chosen stewards of His Faith.
(Shoghi Effendi)³

However there are probably almost as many verses that refer to reciting prayers or turning to God “at eventide and at dawn”⁴ including one mention in the *Aqdas* itself (paragraph 33), and not a few that refer also to worship or remembrance at noon, or day and night.⁵ The tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā which calls the devotional meetings a form of Mashreq el-adhkār (cited above at page 26), does not mention dawn. So there is no apparent reason, except for the coincidence that ‘*mashreq*’ also means ‘dawn’ and ‘east,’ for thinking that it was only dawn devotional meetings that the founders regarded as Mashreq el-adhkārs: any heart, meeting or place from which the remembrance of God rises is a Mashreq el-adhkār.

Dawn prayers on Friday, however, are a special case. The Bayān (7:17) makes Friday a day of rest, and specifies a verse to be recited while facing the rising sun on that day, and also (8:19) gives a form of *dhekr* to be repeated 202 times each Friday. In one of his tablets, Bahā'u'llāh en-

¹ Bahā'u'llāh, *Kitab-i-Iqān* (Shoghi Effendi’s translation), 193.

² This paragraph is a continuation of the tablet I translated above at page 15, and is from the same source.

³ *God Passes By* 339

⁴ e.g., *Tablets of Bahā'u'llāh* 119.

⁵ e.g., *Proclamation of Bahā'u'llāh* 53.

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dorses these Friday devotions as a Bahai practice. His topic in this section is not Friday as such, but rather the wisdom of turning to the ‘sun,’ and what it symbolises. Bahā’u’llāh quotes the Arabic verse in the Persian Bayān 7.17, which is to be addressed to the rising sun, and another similar Arabic citation whose source I cannot trace, and follows with an exegesis:

Since in those days the sun had risen, but was still enfolded in clouds until the time appointed by God, therefore that Essence of Being [the Bāb] faced the rising sun, which was the greatest symbol of the sun of reality, to demonstrate his submission to God, the One, the Peerless, the Incomparable. The people were to invoke this Most Great name [Bahā], so that on the day of the Manifestation, they might bear witness to that to which they had been bearing witness. This verse is one of the root principles (*‘osul*) of the divine commandments, revealed in the Bayān, and is incumbent on every soul today, in whatever country he may live: on Friday he is to turn towards God, uttering these words, and remember the beloved of the worlds.¹

The phrase “the sun had risen, but was still enfolded in clouds” refers to the fact that Bahā’u’llāh was alive, but had not begun his public ministry. “Turn towards God” (to the Bahai *qebleh*) replaces turning towards the rising sun, and the reference to dawn has been dropped, although it may be implied. There is no mention of group performance.

One other role of dawn prayers should be mentioned, even if it is not so far as I know, explicitly envisioned as a religious institution by the founders: the Bahai practice of fasting from sunrise to sunset, for 19 days before *Naw Ruz*, encourages dawn prayers or morning prayers in a family or small group setting, which become part of the experience of fasting.

Other prayers, readings and music

Prayers and liturgical composition intended to be chanted make up a substantial portion of the Bahai scripture, including the Persian and Arabic

¹ *Mā’edeh-ye āsemāni*, vol. 8 105. The text is available online at http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/Mashreq_el-adhkārS8/ (August, 2017). Although Bahā’u’llāh says that this is incumbent on all, it is not, so far as I know, part of Bahai practice anywhere today.

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writings of Shoghi Effendi.¹ This does not tell us anything about the shape of religious community the Bahai founders envisioned, since the same text could be used in various settings, but it speaks volumes about the quality of community they worked to create, and the quality of disciples they sought. Religious institutions cannot exist without the dimensions of persons and devotional practice: by focussing here on the institutional superstructures I understate the devotional foundations. Let me then repeat myself for emphasis: the volume of devotional compositions in the writings of the founders almost certainly exceeds the sum of all they have written about the Bahai community and its structures.² The life of the spirit is primary, and all else is added to it.

Scriptural devotional material in practice dominates the Mashreq el-adhkār meetings, as the authors must have anticipated. In the *Ketāb-e Aqdas*, Bahā'u'llāh writes:

Teach your children what has been sent down from the heaven of majesty and power, so that, in most melodious tones, they may recite the Tablets of the All-Merciful in the alcoves built within the Mashreq el-adhkārs. One who has been sized by the joy of the adoration of My Name, the Most Compassionate, will recite the verses of God in such a way that the hearts of those who are fast asleep will be attracted to it.³

The implication is that the devotions are held in a Mashreq el-adhkār building, and at dawn, and that revealed prayers and other scriptures are central. It implies that training in melodious recitation is one of the practices of the religious life.⁴ It does not mean that either the building or the dawn are necessary to the institution. The previous verse enjoins all the

¹ Few have been translated: for Bahā'u'llāh see *Prayers and Meditations* tr. Shoghi Effendi; *Supplications*, tr. by Joshua Hall; for both Bahā'u'llāh and 'Abdu'l-Bahā see numerous prayer books and other compilations, and individual prayers translated by scholars, on web sites and publications such as MacEoin's *Rituals in Babism and Bahaism*. For the few prayers of Shoghi Effendi available in English translations, see: <https://senmcglinn.wordpress.com/2010/05/18/shoghi-effendis-prayers/>

² This is doubly true of the Bāb, whose works show a remarkable artistry: many can be described as performative pieces. See for example Momen, 'Perfection and Refinement.'

³ *Ketāb-e Aqdas*, paragraph 150, my translation.

faithful to “Recite the verses of God every morn and eventide,” but it does not mention the Mashreq el-adhkār. In ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’s symbolic language, private or family worship too is a Mashreq el-adhkār, and in sociological terms, a habitual practice or relationship endowed with meaning that governs behaviours in a particular social setting is an institution. From either perspective, we can treat both morning and evening prayers, and Friday dawn prayers, as religious institutions envisioned by the Bahai founders, and centring on revealed scriptures.

This does not mean that they envisioned a devotional practice for the Mashreq el-adhkār meetings consisting exclusively of revealed scripture. From the fact that ‘Abdu’l-Bahā wrote to one of the American Bahai friends who had sent him a poem ...

... these verses shall be sung in the divine meetings ... in the course of ages and centuries to come ... thy poem shall be chanted with melody and best voices in the Center of Worship (or Mashrak-el-Azcar) forevermore.¹

... it would appear that his idea of worship in the Mashreq el-adhkār meetings had room for diversity of materials and creativity of expression. The more mystical and poetic writings of Bahā’u’llāh, most of which have not yet appeared in a translation authorized for community use, include poems in the form of dialogues and visions which lend themselves to dramatic or sung presentations. When we recall the meeting in Baghdad with which this chapter began, it seems quite plausible that Bahā’u’llāh chose their literary form precisely so that they could be chanted as liturgy.

The use of hymns, music and singing in worship is mentioned in many passages, many of them gathered together in the ‘Compilation on Music.’ ‘Abdu’l-Bahā writes to one Bahai:

Music is regarded as a praiseworthy branch of learning at the Threshold of the Almighty. Chant (or sing) the verses of God in the

⁴ In paragraph 116 of the Aqdas, Bahā’u’llāh writes “They who recite the verses ... in the most melodious of tones will perceive in them that with which the sovereignty of earth and heaven can never be compared.”

¹ *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā*, 57-58. I have not located the original Persian text.

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great congregations and grand oratories,¹ in the most wondrous accents, and raise such a melody in the Mashreq el-adhkār that the Concourse on High will resonate.²

This is remarkable, given the lack of music and chanting in mosque practice: it appears more Sufi-like, or even Christian. An interesting account of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’s encouragement for the hymn-writing of Louise Waite can be found in Jackson Armstrong-Ingram, *Music Devotions and Mashriq al-Adhkār* pages 34-37.

While Shoghi Effendi said that it was desirable to dissociate the Faith "in the eyes of the public, from the rituals, the ceremonials ... identified with the religious systems of the past," he also approved the use of Christian settings of the Psalms of David in two particular Mashreq el-adhkār services "as an evidence of the universality of the Faith"³ and favoured the use of hymns based on either Bahai or other Sacred Writings.

Sermons in the Mashreq el-adhkār meetings and buildings

The Bāb encouraged his followers to listen to sermons on Fridays. Denis MacEoin summarizes:

The formal sermon (*khutba*) is to be followed by impassioned preaching (*maw‘eza*) and by mention of him whom God shall manifest. These Friday gatherings are to be held in the mosques which the Bāb ordered constructed. The use of a pulpit is prohibited, this being replaced by a chair or, in a large gathering, a chair placed on a platform to enable all present to hear.⁴

¹ The word translated ‘oratories’ here is صوامع, singular صومعه. I have not found it used elsewhere in the Bahai writings that are searchable in electronic format. It is used in Persian and Arabic almost exclusively for Christian institutions such as monasteries, or cells in monasteries, and has the connotation of a high pointed roof or ceiling.

² *Amr wa Khalq* Vol. 3, 364; *Ganjineh Hadud wa Ahkām* 196. A complete translation of this tablet is included in the compilation *Lights of Guidance*, 1994 edition 410.

³ Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, March 28 1943, cited in Armstrong-Ingram, *Music Devotions and Mashriq al-Adhkār* 277.

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Bahā'u'llāh seems to have been silent on the topic. The same can be said of 'Abdu'l-Bahā, except that he is quoted as saying:

Within the Mashreq el-adhkār there will be a musical instrument¹ and galleries,² and a preaching-chair (*kursi khatābeh*)³ especially for prayers and the service of worship,⁴ but sermons (*khatābeh*) may also be given there.⁵

A *khatābeh* is “the act of preaching a sermon; eloquence, rhetoric” (Steingass). It is the word used in historical accounts for the ‘talks’ ‘Abdu'l-Bahā gave during his travels: a sermon is simply a talk on a reli-

⁴ *Rituals in Babism and Bahaism* 34. The reference to “impassioned preaching” is from a ms. copy of the Bāb’s *Haykal al-Din*, the other items have already been noted in the Persian and Arabic Bayāns.

¹ **عرغنون** : the word is used for pan pipes, which were among the ancient instruments of Iran. It has been suggested that this might refer to a choir, but I have found no example to support that. Note that **ارغون**, a modern Persian transliteration of the English word ‘organ,’ is not the same word, although both ultimately come from the Greek *organon*. While the modern word means “an organ,” the older word is better translated “an instrument.”

² **غرفات**, alcoves, chambers or halls. Based on 'Abdu'l-Bahā’s own design for the Mashreq el-adhkār in Eshqābād, he is probably thinking of recessed internal balconies analogous to the second floor choir lofts in Gothic architecture, but deep enough to provide substantial seating. In Eshqābād, the balconies were for the women and children, while men used the ground floor.

³ **كرسى خطابه** Ironically, in the Persian translations of Bahai sources in English, such as Shoghi Effendi’s *God Passes By*, **كرسى خطابه** is the Persian term chosen to translate ‘pulpit,’ which in turn is Shoghi Effendi’s equivalent for *menbar*. But as we have seen **كرسى خطابه** appears first in the Bahai writings as a permissible alternative for the outlawed *menbar*.

⁴ “The service of worship” translates one word: **عبادت**. Literally, that is ‘worship,’ but is difficult to see what the preaching-chair could be used for, additional to reciting prayers, unless it is for the use of a person providing or coordinating a series of prayers and readings: a ‘service’ in other words.

⁵

My translation, Mahmud Zarqani, *Ketab-e Badayi'u'l-Athar* Vol. 1 352. The translation by Mohi Sobhani in Mahmud’s *Diary* reads (p. 371): “In the building there will be an organ, balconies and a rostrum especially for prayers and devotional programs but addresses may be given there as well.”

gious topic, especially in the context of a meeting or building for worship.¹ A *kursi* is a seat, chair or throne, but also a pedestal or pulpit. A *kursi khatābeh* then must be a preaching-chair, and in ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’s vision (echoing that of the Bāb, in the Arabic Bayān 9:9) it is used in the Mashreq el-adhkār for giving sermons. This is apparently the intention of a verse in the Ketāb-e Aqdas (paragraph 154), which in the World Centre translation reads:

Ye have been prohibited from making use of pulpits. Whoso wisheth to recite unto you the verses of his Lord, let him sit on a chair placed upon a dais.²

So far as I know, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’s words during his stay in Chicago, November 3, 1912, as reported by Mahmud Zarqani and translated above, are the only definite statement that “sermons may also be given” in the Mashreq el-adhkār building. A single oral source must be counted as weak evidence. The problem in finding evidence is not lack of mentions of sermons in a devotional context, but rather that it is not clear whether the meeting or building was a Mashreq el-adhkār, in the mind of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā. For example, he writes:

Likewise the public meeting in which, one day during the week, the believers gather, to be engaged in the commemoration of God, to

¹ For example in ‘Mahmud’s diary,’ (Mahmud Zarqani, *Ketab-e Badayi’u’l-Athar*). In the English reports of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’s travels, he is often described as delivering a sermon, when he speaks in a church.

‘Sermon’ also appears in the Bābi and Bahai writings as one of the modes of scripture. Bahā’u’llāh for example wrote a **خطبه** for the marriage service, which is in various circumstances an optional or obligatory prelude to the marriage vows. But this is not a sermon in the usual sense of the word: it is a reading from scripture. Bahā’u’llāh writes “the sermon should be read [but] is not obligatory (**باید خطبه**) **خواند ... خطبه فرض نیست**” (quoted by Ishraq Khavari, *Ganjineh-ye Hodud wa Ahkām*, 172). Another frequent use of the term is in the writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, where he urges the Bahais to present proofs (*burhan*), explanations (*Bayān*) and talks (*khutbat*). But this in the context of ‘teaching’ (mission) not in the devotional meeting.

² من اراد ان يتلو عليكم آيات ربّه فليقعده على الكرسيّ الموضوع على السرير

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read communes and deliver effective speeches, is acceptable and beloved.¹

That commemoration (the Persian is probably *dhikr*), prayers and speeches go together in the mind of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā is clear: the problem is that in the tablet (quoted above at page 26) in which he says that such “meetings are the Mashreq el-adhkār,” no speeches are mentioned. I have not yet found evidence for or against the argument that including ‘speeches’ made the meeting not a Mashreq el-adhkār, in ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’s conception. The argument would not be an arbitrary one: in these tablets ‘Abdu’l-Bahā might have been leading the early western Bahais in the direction of establishing the Feast meetings,² which are not public but do include speeches and argumentation. For example, one letter says:

This Feast was established by His Highness the Bāb ... The believers [must] ... chant divine verses, peruse instructive articles ... and deliver eloquent speeches.³

Were it not for the mention of the Feast at the beginning of the letter, one might easily think that the remainder of this letter was about a devotional meeting.

As for Shoghi Effendi, and in relation to the specially designed Mashreq el-adhkār in Wilmette, two letters on his behalf say that “he feels that [meetings in the Auditorium of the Temple] should be purely devotional in character, Baha’i addresses and lectures should be strictly excluded,” and “No speeches may be made.”⁴ Shoghi Effendi also writes that the Mashreq el-adhkār “is consecrated exclusively to worship, devoid

¹ To Louise Waite, Chicago, translated by Ahmad Sohrab April 20, 1910. Published in *Star of the West* (then titled, *Bahai News*), Vol. 1 Nr. 5, June 5, 1910, p. 11.

² The Feast is a distinct institution of the Bahai community, which will be considered separately. Teachings meetings, which are naturally public and include ‘speeches’ are another institution.

³ *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā* Vol. 2, 468.

⁴ (A) on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, April 2, 1931 (or in one report, April 11); (B) on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, April 11, 1947.

of all ceremony and ritual,”¹ but since the question is whether the founders thought that a sermon was or could be part of Bahai worship, this takes us no further as to his thinking on sermons in the Mashreq el-adhkār.

Given the limited references I have found, I cannot exclude the possibility that Shoghi Effendi (assuming his secretaries accurately reflect his thinking) differed from ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, but it is equally possible that when Bahā’u’llāh said, in response to a question, “Whatever hath been constructed for the worship of the one true God ... must not be used for any purpose other than the commemoration of His Name,” he was already excluding sermons, and thus changing the teachings of the Bayān.² In that case, Mahmud Zarqani’s memories of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’s words would be discarded as a misunderstanding, and the occasions when Shoghi Effendi’s programmes for the worship services included an address, or the reading aloud of an address originally delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, are exceptions for the occasion.³

¹ *God Passes By* 350.

² This is by no means obvious from the Persian text: آنچه از مساجد و صوامع و هیاکل که مخصوص ذکر حق بنا شده ذکر غیر دون او در آنها جایز نه

³ Armstrong-Ingram, *Music, Devotions and Mashriq’l-Adhkar* 286-88. Shoghi Effendi’s programme for services to be held in the Auditorium of the Mashreq el-adhkār on May 22, 1944, included selections from public talks of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, yet another letter on his behalf is reported to have excluded “Public Talks and Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Baha” from “the devotional services in the Temple.” The latter letter is referred to but not cited by the Universal House of Justice in a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of Uganda and Central Africa, August 19, 1965. It is possible that we have two secretaries at different times conveying contradictory versions of Shoghi Effendi’s thinking, or that the House of Justice has misunderstood the letter it refers to. Another letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi (April 2, 1931, cited *op. cit.* 256) specifically includes prayers revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā in the programme for the Mashreq el-adhkār auditorium, and his programme for the 1953 dedication of the Mashreq el-adhkār, again in the auditorium, includes a reported talk of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā (*op. cit.* 288). Armstrong-Ingram suggests that this latitude of including addresses (which are sermons by another name) may be because at that moment the Auditorium was not yet dedicated to worship alone (*op. cit.* 290). On the whole, I am inclined to think that none of the founders intended to ban sermons in the Mashreq el-adhkār as a general principle, and the letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi were not intended to convey authoritative interpretations.

Another factor, in relation to Shoghi Effendi's thinking, is that he did not intend all of his words to be taken as statements of Bahai principle. He was not only the authorised interpreter of the Bahai teachings, he was head and chief administrator of the Bahai community, since the International House of Justice and its administrative support did not yet exist.¹ Another chapter will address the question of how he signalled in his own writings that he expected his words to be taken as authoritative interpretations: for now I will just say that the two letters written on his behalf, and cited briefly above, do not appear to be intended as interpretations of scripture. The situation in Wilmette was unusual, in that Albert Vail had a paid position, effectively as pastor to the Bahai community, and a significant part of his role was to deliver sermons for Bahais and public presentations of the Bahai teachings. Vail was a former Unitarian Minister who supported the Bahai Movement, as it was then called, and was forced to resign as a result. In 1918 he moved to Chicago, and from there worked as a paid Bahai teacher until 1932. He was largely responsible for leading the Sunday meetings before the first services were held in the Foundation Hall of the partially-built Mashreq el-adhkār, and his talks and views dominated.² But if the letter is specific to Wilmette, as it appears, one could argue in two ways: either Shoghi Effendi made a temporary and local administrative decision in the case of Wilmette, because a single person and a single style of sermonizing was dominating there, or Shoghi Effendi had no need to say that sermons were banned in the Mashreq el-adhkār building (or meeting?) in general, because in Eshqābād and Iran this was already understood. But then, how was it understood, given that the Bayān includes sermons in worship?

A sermon implies a speaker, and a place and time of meeting that is widely known, and the expectation that many in the community will at-

¹ The distinction between his interpretations *ex cathedra* and his other rulings is evident, for example in a letter written on his behalf: "He feels that there must have been some misapprehension on your part of his statements regarding future Guardians: they cannot "abrogate" the interpretations of former Guardians ... however they can elaborate and elucidate former interpretations, and can certainly abrogate some former ruling laid down as a temporary necessity by a former Guardian. (*Messages to Canada* 89)

² On Vail see Armstrong-Ingram, *Music, Devotions and Mashriqu'l-Adhkar* 250-1, 271.

tend at that time. The “ceremony and ritual” excluded by Shoghi Effendi would also imply collective attendance by at least a portion of the community at a particular time. The obligatory prayers, if they are recited each one for himself, do not imply such a general devotional meeting. There are a few letters from ‘Abdu’l-Bahā which point to a devotional meeting for the whole community – one is translated below – but without specifying, for example, Friday morning as the time. If we could get clarity as to whether Bahā’u’llāh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahā envisioned sermons as part of the devotional meetings and as taking place in the Mashreq el-adhkār building, it would be another indication that he anticipated the general devotional meetings to be central to community life, and not simply a place for individual devotions. But alas, research does not always lead to answers!

The Mashreq el-adhkār as the House of Unity

It is a commonplace of the sociology of religion that religions, and particularly shared religious practices and rites, provide not only a sphere in which people relate to the sacred, but also a means of binding a society more closely together, strengthening the identification of individuals with the group, and reinforcing observance of the rules and social institutions which are needed for people to live together. This binding effect is not necessarily conservative in outcome: religious movements have also served to mobilise social forces for change, and even revolution. The same effects are anticipated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā:

You asked what wisdom there is in places of worship. The wisdom is that at a certain time the people should know it is time to come together. [When] all are gathered together and, all united, are engaged in prayer; then from this coming together, unity and affection will increase in the hearts.¹

The terms used here are general: ‘people’ (*nofus*, souls) come to a generalized place of worship (*mo‘abed*) and engage in prayers (*monājāt*) that are not necessarily spoken aloud.² Another letter is more specific to

¹ My translation, *Montakhabāt-i az Makātib-e Hazrat-e ‘Abd-al-Bahā* section 58, see another translation in *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā*, section 58.

² *Monājāt* derives from the 3rd form of *najā* (نجو), meaning to whisper or take someone into one’s confidence. It is used a general term to cover both private and col-

the Bahai community, and reflects a broader conception of the functions of the Mashreq el-adhkār:

Although to outward seeming the Mashreq el-adhkār is a material structure, it has a spiritual effect, making the hearts harmonious and bringing the people together. In previous dispensations,¹ in whatever city in which a place of worship was established, it led to advancement [for that religious community]² and the strengthening of hearts and assurance of souls, because in those places the remembrance of God (or the recitation of *dhekr*) is uninterrupted and unending, and there is no confidence and peace of heart except in the remembrance of God, the unconstrained. God be praised! The edifice of the House of Worship has a powerful influence at every level.³ This has been put into practice in the east, and clearly demonstrated. Even if a house in some small village was given the name “Mashreq el-adhkār,” it then had a different effect: what then if it was built and instituted [for the purpose]?⁴

The English records of the talks given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā in the United States, published in *Star of the West* and in edited forms in *Promulgation of Universal Peace* contain a number of indications of a ‘high’ theology of the Mashreq el-adhkārs, the “House of the Covenant” and “symbols of the Reality and Divinity of God--the collective center.”⁵ The Mashreq el-adhkār is to be built “for all the religionists of the world” as “a place where various peoples of different ... faiths and denominations, meet ...

lective prayers which are not obligatory prayers.

¹ در ایام ظهور , literally, in the days of appearances. My translation is based on a similar phrase in Bahā’u’llāh, *Gleanings*, section XXXV.

² ترویج in the Bahai writings usually refers to the consolidation and advance of the religious community. Advancement in general is ترقیات (progress).

³ در جميع مراتب As the following sentences show, the reference is to the various levels of the Mashreq el-adhkār, from a “house church” to something resembling a cathedral.

⁴ My translation, *Montakhabāt-i az Makātib-e Hazrat-e ‘Abd-al-Bahā* section 60, see another translation in *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā*, section 60.

⁵ *The Star of the West*, Vol. 3 No. 10. 25; 3.4.7; etc.

under the dome of the Mashrak-el-Azkar and adore the One God.”¹ Yet I have not found any equivalents in the Persian records of the talks ‘Abdu’l-Bahā gave, which partially overlap with those for which there are English notes. Nor have I found equivalents in the authenticated writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā. It appears likely that both the high theology of the Mashreq el-adhkār, and the idea that people of all religions will worship there, are created by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’s interpreters and the editors of the English records. The idea that ‘all religionists’ would gather in the Mashreq el-adhkār was prominent in the publicity for the building project in Wilmette, Chicago, as an *apologia* for the resources and effort the Bahais were devoting to it. While Bahā’u’llāh’s and ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’s approach to religions is inclusive, in the case of places of worship this takes the form of giving the diverse places of worship an equivalent standing,² rather than expecting people of diverse religions to conduct their worship in a Mashreq el-adhkār built and controlled by the Bahais.

Prominence and centrality of the Mashreq el-adhkār

To justify my choice of the Mashreq el-adhkār for the first chapter of this work, I will translate here some of the passages in the writings of the founders showing how important the Mashreq el-adhkār was to their conception of the Bahai community.

Bahā’u’llāh’s instruction, in paragraph 31 the *Ketab-e Aqdas* “O people of the world! Build ye houses of worship throughout the lands”³ has already been cited. The previous paragraph states “The Lord hath ordained that in every city a House of Justice be established,” and the following paragraph begins “The Lord hath ordained that those of you who are able shall make pilgrimage to the sacred House.” These three paragraphs juxtapose three central institutions and practices for the Bahai community. The idea of the house of justice and house of worship as twin centers of the local Bahai community is explicit in the writings of Shoghi Effendi, who calls the Universal House of Justice and the Mashreq el-adhkār to be constructed at the Bahai World Center the “two spiritual cen-

¹ *The Star of the West*, 3.3.27, report of a talk on April 30, 1912.

² See for example Bahā’u’llāh, *Ketāb-e Aqdas* paragraph 115.

³ Paragraph 31. ياملأ الانشاء عمروا بيوتاً باكمل ما يمكن في الامكان باسممالك
الاديان في البلدان

ters” of the Bahai community.¹ As for the national Bahai administration, he writes that:

the exertions ... of those who within the precincts of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar will be engaged in administering the affairs of the future Baha'i Commonwealth² [cannot] fructify and prosper unless they are brought into close and daily communion with those spiritual agencies centering in and radiating from the central Shrine of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar. Nothing short of direct and constant interaction between the spiritual forces emanating from this House of Worship centering in the heart of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar,³ and the energies consciously displayed by those who administer its affairs in their service to humanity can possibly provide the necessary agency capable of removing the ills that have so long and so grievously afflicted humanity.⁴

The establishment of the Mashreq el-adhkār is imbued in the Bahai writings with a mystical, world-transforming, significance. In a tablet addressed to the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahais in Boshruyeh, 'Abdu'l-Bahā writes:

The Mashreq el-adhkār is the dawning place of lights and the meeting place of the righteous. When precious souls gather in those heavenly meeting and establish the obligatory prayers, and are reciting the verses of God and chanting the prayers with glorious voices, the Concourse on High will hear them, and exclaim, "Glad tidings!" and "What a bounty, praise be to God..."⁵

¹ "این دو مرکز روحانی" in a letter published in *Mā'edeh-ye āsemāni* vol. 6, p. 36.

² Shoghi Effendi's use of the terms, 'commonwealth of nations' and 'Bahai Commonwealth' has led some to suppose that "the future Baha'i Commonwealth" is an international government. We can see here that the 'Bahai Commonwealth' is a nationally organized religious community, analogous to the *umma* in Islamic ecclesiology.

³ Mashreq el-adhkār here refers to the complex of social institutions with the House of Worship at its heart.

⁴ *Baha'i Administration* 186.

⁵ Published in Eshraq-Khavari's *Ganjineh-ye Hodud wa Ahkām* 231.

52 *Houses of Worship in every land*

In a letter that I have referred to above as the hymn to the Mashreq el-adhkār, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā writes:

The Mashreq el-adhkār is a magnet for the confirmations of God.

The Mashreq el-adhkār is the greatest institute of God the Forgiver.

The Mashreq el-adhkār is the firm pillar of the religion of the Almighty.

The Mashreq el-adhkār’s foundation will exalt the Word of God.

The Mashreq el-adhkār’s hymns of praise gladden the hearts of those who do good.

The Mashreq el-adhkār’s sweet savours of holiness revive every righteous soul.

The Mashreq el-adhkār’s life-giving breezes revivify all the untrammelled hearts.

The Mashreq el-adhkār’s lamps are like a clear sun dawning on the horizons of the world.

The Mashreq el-adhkār’s melodies stir the hearts of the concourse on high in rejoicing.

Today the most important matter and the greatest service at the sacred threshold is the establishment of the Mashreq el-adhkār. But not to such an extent that it would be contrary to wisdom and raise alarm among the heedless ones and occasion mischief and strife from the wayward. Its establishment to the Glory of God in that land, with the utmost concealment, is a cause of joy and fellowship. If the exigencies of wisdom do not permit the place to be called by that name, give it some other title and name. The point is that the friends of God should busy themselves with the obligatory prayers (*namāz*) and worshipping God and chanting the verses of God’s Word and singing odes and the praises of the Merciful in that place, with perfect wisdom.¹

In both of these letters, written to Bahai communities in the East, the vital importance of the local Mashreq el-adhkār is related to creating fel-

¹ *ibid* 231-232, also published in Mazandarani’s thematic compilation *Amr wa Khalq* Vol. 4 149-150.

lowship and the practice of saying obligatory prayers in a designated place.¹ In his letters and talks to Bahais in the West, there is an additional theme: the Mashreq el-adhkār is a silent preacher. One letter, to one of the early American believers, has been particularly seminal:

... a Mashrak-el-Azcar will soon be established in America. The cries of supplication and invocation will be raised to the Highest Kingdom therefrom and, verily, the people will enter into the religion of God by troops with great enthusiasm and attraction.²

This idea of people entering into the religion of God 'by troops' has entered the Bahai imagination, and the phrase has become established in the Bahai vocabulary and taken on a life of its own,³ often quite apart from the original context of the Mashreq el-adhkār. At the least, entry by troops refers to the hope that large numbers of people will enter the Bahai Faith in relatively short periods, opening the way for the Bahai principles to transform not just individual lives but also social structures. By placing the phrase again in its original context, in relation to the Mashreq el-adhkār, it can be seen that this hope also implies a change in the stance of the community in relation to the world. Where the Bahai Faith has for several generations functioned primarily as a missionary organization, focusing on conscious propagation activities, the large-scale expansion which 'Abdu'l-Bahā envisions involves attraction rather than propagation. Its characteristic picture is not the missionary going out to the people, but rather the House of Worship with its door or doors⁴ open to

¹ Momen conjectures that it was around the year 1900 that 'Abdu'l-Bahā moved from advising caution or even forbidding the designation of Mashreq el-adhkārs in the Iranian sphere, to encouraging it (see 'Mašreq al-adkār'). Momen says that the first such Mashreq el-adhkār was established in Qom in 1901, but I have noted above Bahā'u'llāh's approval of a Mashreq el-adhkār in Tehran: Bahā'u'llāh died in May, 1892. In Eshqābād, where the Bahais had greater security, the project began about 1887.

² *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahā Abbās* 681.

³ The history of this expectation, from the time of Shoghi Effendi to the early 21st century, is outlined on my Bahai Studies blog at : <https://senmcglinn.wordpress.com/2009/02/17/entry-by-troops>.

⁴ I have not considered architectural requirements in detail: see Armstrong-Ingram, 'Review of Earthly Paradise' on how the custom of having nine doors origin-

welcome the people in. And if human beings are indeed created as beings who are for God, wonderers with a thirst for transcendence, the Mashreq el-adhkār also provides the magnet which will draw them through those doors. In Shoghi Effendi's paraphrase:

"A most wonderful and thrilling motion will appear in the world of existence," are 'Abdu'l-Bahā's own words, predicting the release of spiritual forces that must accompany the completion of this most hallowed House of Worship. "From that point of light," He, further glorifying that edifice, has written, "the spirit of teaching ... will permeate to all parts of the world." And again: "Out of this Mashreq el-adhkār, without doubt, thousands of Mashreq el-adhkārs will be born." "It marks the inception of the Kingdom of God on earth."¹

The community at prayer?

The Mashreq el-adhkār as the place for individuals to say obligatory prayers does not imply a general assembly of the local Bahai community, for reasons already mentioned. No general assembly is required for the Mashreq el-adhkār to exercise spiritual magnetism and be a silent teacher, nor is it required for the "close and daily communion" between administrators and the central shrine. One might almost think that the Mashreq el-adhkār building could serve all its purposes simply as a building with its doors always open, or that the Mashreq el-adhkār meetings were envisioned as each involving a small subset of the Bahai community. However letters from 'Abdu'l-Bahā suggest that Mashreq el-adhkār meetings, and eventually buildings, should bring together the bulk of the local Bahai community. One of these has already been quoted above (page 27), in relation to the obligatory prayers in meetings of no more than nine participants where oppression made large meetings unwise. In that letter, 'Abdu'l-Bahā says:

When they [the Mashreq el-adhkārs] are established, the private meetings will be abrogated. ... the place for worship and the public reading of scripture is the Mashreq el-adhkār, alone, which supplants all gatherings and meetings for worship.

ated.

¹ *Citadel of Faith* 69.

This certainly means that general meetings for the whole community are desirable, it is not so certain that it means that private Mashreq el-adhkār meetings should be forbidden. The term abrogated (*mansukh*) in Persian usually refers to a written rule that is abrogated, rather than a practice that is discontinued. My reading, therefore, is that ‘Abdu’l-Bahā is saying in a compressed way, “when the public meetings are established, the rule that only private meetings can be held will be abrogated.”

Another letter, cited above (p. 27) says that, for now, “no large group” should gather in a Mashreq el-adhkār so as not to attract persecution. This implies that a general gathering¹ should be held, when this is possible. There are also strong indications that Bahā’u’llāh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahā envisioned the Mashreq el-adhkār institution – whether a building or a meeting – as having a cantor or readers and a choir, which imply services, or perhaps an ongoing cycle of readings and music, at times such as ‘dawn’ and noon.² The very scale of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’s design for the Mashreq el-adhkār in Eshqābād suggests that he expected the bulk of the Bahai community there to attend simultaneously.

The administration of the Mashreq el-adhkār

The sources already cited have referred primarily to local rather than national Mashreq el-adhkār meetings and buildings: even the large and sophisticated Mashreq el-adhkār in Eshqābād served one small city. At that time, plans were considered for Mashreq el-adhkārs in neighbouring cities, so it is evident that the Mashreq el-adhkār in Eshqābād was not ini-

¹ I have commented above (page 10) on Shoghi Effendi’s term “the universal House of Worship.” I suspect that he meant a Mashreq el-adhkār building where the bulk of the community would gather, as distinct from more select meetings and modest buildings.

² “The Mashriqu’l-Adhkār’s hymns of praise gladden the hearts of those who do good.” (‘Abdu’l-Bahā, see above). “Blessed is he who ... seats himself in silence to listen to the verses of God.” (Bahā’u’llāh, cited at page 30). Since dawn in this context extends from first light to two hours after sunrise (see page 37), and there is no provision for either a more specific “correct” time for services or a call to prayer, we cannot assume that the religion’s founders envisioned a programmed service with a beginning, middle and end, analogous to those in Christian and Islamic collective worship.

tially conceived as a national or continental institution, whereas the Mashreq el-adhkār in Wilmette was. For this reason, I have not looked to the history and texts about the administration of the Mashreq el-adhkār in Wilmette, and the other Continental Mashreq el-adhkārs, for indications of how the founders envisioned a local Mashreq el-adhkār being administered. It is the local institution that primarily concerns me here, for that is a key part in the founders' conception of the shape of the religious community they were establishing. The *Aqdas* mandate refers to local institutions to be erected in cities and villages "throughout the lands."

When Bahā'u'llāh writes of building Houses of Worship, in the *Aqdas*, he says nothing about their administration, and so far as I can discover he did not write anything on the topic later, although during his lifetime the first local Houses of Justice (later called Spiritual Assemblies) were being formed, and meetings and buildings dedicated to Bahai worship existed, in the Persian cultural sphere, and these were called Mashreq el-adhkārs. 'Abdu'l-Bahā also appears to have said nothing systematic on the topic, although his letters about local Mashreq el-adhkār projects are sometimes addressed to a committee or Assembly. In a tablet to the Assembly of Eshqābād, 'Abdu'l-Bahā includes "the affairs of the Mashreq el-adhkār" in a list of important matters that must be supervised by the Spiritual Assembly of the city.¹ Shoghi Effendi corresponded about a number of Mashreq el-adhkār projects which were initiated and overseen by National Spiritual Assemblies, but he did not – as far as I know – lay down a general rule that all Mashreq el-adhkār buildings, or meetings, should be funded and overseen by an Assembly. It seems likely, to me, that the founders made no general ruling about how a Mashreq el-adhkār should be administered, and funded, because no general ruling would be possible, and none is necessary.

No general provision for administering the Mashreq el-adhkār was *necessary* because no priesthood or other clerical profession – even an amateur one – in relation to the Mashreq el-adhkār was envisioned. There are no calls to prayer, no confessions, no prayer leaders and perhaps (as discussed previously) no sermons. There is in any case no provision for preachers with an exclusive consecration or training. Although the Bahai community has its divines (*'ulama*) in the senses of religious experts and

¹ Published in Mazandarani, *Amr wa Khalq* Vol. 4, 374.

effective activists,¹ there is nothing about worship in the Mashreq el-adhkār to make religious expertise necessary there. The services are in the vernaculars of the community. All the functions of worship that, in other religions, have given rise to a clerical profession that also administers the building and controls the meetings are absent, or much weakened.

No general ruling is *possible*, because ‘Abdu’l-Bahā allows for multiple Mashreq el-adhkārs in a locality, and individuals and groups are encouraged to initiate both Mashreq el-adhkār meetings and buildings. “He who pays the piper, calls the tune.” Someone who dedicates their home, or a room in their home, as a place of worship (see for example page 16) could hardly be expected to surrender control of it. Where, in the absence of a Spiritual Assembly, a committee has been formed to gather funds and erect a Mashreq el-adhkār (as in Eshqābād), that committee has naturally administered the site and building until a Spiritual Assembly can be elected. Mashreq el-adhkārs, with their dependent institutions, are also envisioned at holy places such as the graves of exemplary believers, as in the case of the grave of Mirza Muhammad-’Ali Afnan in Ctesiphon, near Baghdad, which ‘Abdu’l-Bahā designates as:

... one of the holy places where a magnificent Mashriqu’l-Adhkār must be raised up. If possible, the actual arch of the royal palace should be restored and become the House of Worship. The auxiliary buildings of the House of Worship should likewise be erected there: the hospital, the schools and university, the elementary school, the refuge for the poor and indigent; also the haven for orphans and the helpless, and the travellers’ hospice.²

¹ “Effective activists” paraphrases Shoghi Effendi’s definition of the ‘*ulamā*’ as including “the teachers and diffusers of His teachings who do not rank as Hands, but who have attained an eminent position in the teaching work.” (November 4, 1931, in Persian, translated in *The Universal House of Justice, ‘Elucidation of the Nature of the Continental Boards of Counsellors,’* letter dated April 24, 1972, in *Messages 1963-1986*, p. 215). A separate chapter will be devoted to the role of religious expertise and experts; as a foretaste I will cite here Bahā’u’llāh’s dictum “They who disregard and neglect the divines and learned (*al-‘ulamā*) that live amongst them ... have truly changed the favour with which God hath favoured them.” (tr. in *Gleanings* 128).

² *Memorials of the Faithful* 20.

Such Mashreq el-adhkārs might be built by a National Spiritual Assembly and associated with a Haziratu'l-Quds, but if their reason for being derives from a sacred site this is not necessarily what the founders would have envisioned: in Shiah Islam such complexes of shrines and charitable institutions would usually be administered by a charitable trust. Mashreq el-adhkārs initiated by individuals and funded through bequests and charitable trusts, and those attached as chapels to some other institution, such as a hospital or a large or wealthy household, would be expected to have a variety of degrees of independence in funding and administration and, as noted, I have found nothing to indicate that the founders envisioned any one form of administration for all Mashreq el-adhkārs.

Nor is the Mashreq el-adhkār given authority over any other institution (including its own educational and philanthropic 'dependencies,' to be discussed separately). While the founders have envisioned national and international Mashreq el-adhkār institutions, there is no indication of a hierarchy of authority and standing among continental, national and local Mashreq el-adhkārs, in the way that the bishop and cathedral, or the Imam Jum'a and the Friday Mosque, enjoy primacy over parish churches and lesser mosques. The lack of authority and hierarchy is natural, if the founders envisioned the Mashreq el-adhkār as, in the first place, a channel for "the fragrant breathings of the Holy Spirit."¹

As we will see in the following section, the Mashreq el-adhkār, unlike the churches (in every sense) of Christianity, has no doctrinal authority or test. Here I touch on a theme that will recur as we consider the other institutions of the Bahai community: the founders did not envision a monist structure, but rather an organic unity between diverse institutions with different functions. The three central organs of the community: House of Worship, House of Justice, and Guardianship can be compared to the *trias politica* of the modern state.² But I am getting ahead of myself: for

¹ *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahā* 94.

² They can be compared in the sense that the introduction of functional differentiation in both cases is a qualitative leap in the forms of organization. The three separate functions in Bahai ecclesiology have developed, characteristically, as pairings: in the Aqdas it is House of Worship and House of Justice, in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahā and in Shoghi Effendi's exposition of it, it is the Guardianship and the House of Justice, the twin institutions of the Administrative Order, and in Shoghi Effendi's picture of the Bahai community, it is the Mashreq el-adhkār and the Hazerat

now it is enough to note that the organic separation of functions in the Bahai community makes it possible to envision the Mashreq el-adhkār as an institution devoid of authority, without a clergy or an elected presbytery, and therefore lacking the capacity to administer itself. It is administered externally, by the individual or family who create it in their home, by a charitable trust, and most commonly, by the local or national Spiritual Assembly that gathers the funds to create and maintain it.

Shoghi Effendi stated that the Bahai administrative activities cannot prosper unless they are in daily communion with the forces of the Mashreq el-adhkār.¹ It follows that no administrative body can in the long term function without a Mashreq el-adhkār. Since these administrative bodies exist on at least three levels -- local, national and international -- this implies at least three types of Mashreq el-adhkār institution. However it does not follow that there is a hierarchical relationship between Mashreq el-adhkārs at these levels.

If the local, national and international Mashreq el-adhkārs are differentiated simply because they are paired with administrative institutions at these three levels, is there any essential difference between them? Are they in fact identical? Since I have cited Bahai writings referring to both local and national Mashreq el-adhkārs in discussing the nature of the Mashreq el-adhkār and its relationships, I have clearly assumed that there is no essential difference. All are centred on the remembrance of God, and there appears to be nothing in the Baha'i Writings to differentiate between them. But if the essences are the same, some reflections on the different ways in which Mashreq el-adhkārs at the various levels function suggests that they have their own individualities.

A national Mashreq el-adhkār building is erected by the combined efforts of a national community, channelled through their National Spiritual Assembly. Its erection, as the national Administration's "mighty bulwark," is part of the community's efforts to create national institutions which express the fact that they see themselves not as so many local communities but also as a national faith community. It is 'their' Mashreq el-adhkār, in an ideal sense, but they do not comprise the worshipping com-

al-Qods. The effect of these pairings is that administration, doctrine and worship are distinguished as organic functions with their own rules and purposes.

¹ *Bahai Administration* 186, and quoted on page 51 above.

munity of that Mashreq el-adhkār on a day-to-day basis, and they will generally not be in close contact with its dependent institutions. A local Mashreq el-adhkār building, in contrast, is purchased or erected by the efforts of those in the local community, who also comprise the Mashreq el-adhkār community, and work in and benefit from its dependencies. The national Mashreq el-adhkār exists in the first place because there is a national Hazerat al-Qods, with its National Spiritual Assembly and all of its staff, which needs to be in "close and daily communion" with "the spiritual forces emanating from this House of Worship"¹ and in the second place because there is a sense of national community. All of this suggests that the relationship with the National Spiritual Assembly and the institutions and personnel of the Hazerat al-Qods largely determines the character of the national Mashreq el-adhkār, whereas for a local Mashreq el-adhkār the relationship to the Local Spiritual Assembly is only one among many factors in its life.

If a local Mashreq el-adhkār and its social programmes are limited to the scale which can be funded by those who worship in it and constitute its Mashreq el-adhkār community, the local Mashreq el-adhkār, unlike its national counterpart,² could be a self-sustaining institution, not necessarily directly funded and administered by the Local Spiritual Assembly. In some circumstances, there might be legal and prudential advantages to having a local Mashreq el-adhkār or one attached to a hospital or school administered by a trust, rather than a property of the Spiritual Assembly – especially if the latter is not firmly established and solvent. While every House of Justice requires a House of Worship, the reverse is not true, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahā says that there may be more than one Mashreq el-adhkār in the area administered by a Local Spiritual Assembly.³ Mashreq el-adhkār buildings and meetings, if they are to be used daily, or even weekly, must necessarily be neighbourhood institutions that serve the people living nearby, and this implies that most Mashreq el-adhkārs cannot have been envisioned as being in "daily communion" with the Haziratu’l-Quds for

¹ See the previous note.

² Funds for a national Mashreq el-adhkār by necessity flow primarily through the channels of the national Bahai funds.

³ A tablet quoted in Eshraq-Khavari, *Ganjineh-ye Hodud wa Ahkām* 234, says that a multiplicity of Mashreq el-adhkārs in a single locality is acceptable.

that town or city (unless that also develops a neighbourhood structure: I have found no indication that the founders envisioned this). Yet, as noted above (page 27), ‘Abdu’l-Bahā envisions that once the city or village Mashreq el-adhkār is established, “the private meetings will be abrogated.” I believe this means that the rule against meetings of more than nine persons will be abolished.

The Mashreq el-adhkār and doctrine

The Mashreq el-adhkār not only lacks a prescribed administrative structure, such as a clergy or presbytery, it has no doctrinal test¹ and prescribes no doctrine, although this point is not, so far as I know, specified in any authentic text. Rather it stands out by the absence of any mention of doctrinal restrictions or authority in those texts. The absence of a doctrinal dimension is in striking contrast to the institutions of worship in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This does not mean that the Mashreq el-adhkār lacks doctrinal and moral significance: see the section above on a Mashreq el-adhkār as the House of Unity (page 48). In one tablet – one of those that refer to the Mashreq el-adhkār as a meeting held, if necessary, underground – ‘Abdu’l-Bahā says that “the Mashreq el-adhkār inspirits the lovers of God ... and causes them to become steadfast and firm,”² and in another he says, *vice versa*, that firmness in the Covenant leads to support for the Mashreq el-adhkār:

O Lord, O Thou Who dost bless all those who stand firm in the Covenant by enabling them ... to expend what they have as an offering to the Mashriqu’l-Adhkār, ...³

The relationship in these verses between the Covenant and the Mashreq el-adhkār rests first on the immediate effect of the Mashreq el-adhkār on the individual: a heart which is ‘inspirited’ is, if not automatically inclined to a life within the Covenant, at least proof against those motives which lead to weakness. This has a logical priority over the way communal worship creates a sense of community, as discussed above.

¹ A doctrinal test, in Church history, is a statement of essential doctrines which a candidate for membership, or for consecration, must subscribe to in order to be admitted.

² Adapted from *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā* 95.

³ *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā* 96.

62 *Houses of Worship in every land*

The healing of the hatred arising from doctrinal and inter-religious disputes is one of the central themes of Bahā'u'llāh's work, and hardly needs to be elaborated on here. It was, apparently, his first motivation when he set out on the path that led to the creation of a new religion.¹ Bahā'u'llāh took at least three steps in his community structure to ensure it is realized: by establishing two central institutions for the community, the House of Worship and House of Justice, neither of which has any role in defining doctrines or orthodoxy; by appointing 'Abdu'l-Bahā as the authorized interpreter of the Writings (see the discussion of "Covenant" in another Chapter) and denying any authority to the interpretations of others; and by "commanding that there be no interference in beliefs or conscience."²

From what has been said, it is clear that the Founders could not have envisioned Mashreq el-adhkārs being differentiated from one another by differences of doctrine, although their prescriptions for the forms of worship are broad enough to allow various rites of worship and different cultural influences. The Mashreq el-adhkār's doctrine is only that "all things are of God."³

¹ See his 'Tablet of the Banu Qurayzeh,' translated and discussed at: https://sen-mcglinn.wordpress.com/2010/03/06/lawh_banuqurayza/

² 'Abdu'l-Bahā, in Zarqani, *Mahmud's Diary* 312; original in idem *Kitāb-i Badā'e' al-Athar*, 1982, vol. 1, 294. '[Abdu'l-Bahā] spoke of the differences [in doctrine, saying] "But Bahā'u'llāh has closed all the doors to such differences by appointing the interpreter of the Book [(Abdu'l-Bahā)], and by establishing the Universal House of Justice ... by commanding an end to interference in people's beliefs and consciences, He has barred the way to these divisions. He has even said that if two persons differ in a matter and that difference ends in discord, then both are wrong and their position unacceptable."

Here we touch upon another very large subject which has some relevance to the Mashreq el-adhkār but must be passed by: the relationship between the individual and the collective. On "the right of unrestricted individual belief" see 'Abdu'l-Bahā in *A Traveller's Narrative*, notably pages 20-21, 40, and 86-92. 'Abdu'l-Bahā has said: "In the religion of God, there is freedom of thought because God, alone, controls the human conscience..." (tr. from Persian notes, in a letter on behalf of The Universal House of Justice, February 8, 1998). Upholding freedom of conscience is assigned as a formal duty to the Houses of Justice (Shoghi Effendi, letter of January 30, 1926, tr. in *The Compilation of Compilations: 'Trustworthiness'* 348).

³ From Bahā'u'llāh's 'Book of the Covenant' : "O servants! Let not the means of order be made the cause of confusion and the instrument of union an occasion for discord. We fain would hope that the people of Bahā may be guided by the blessed words: 'Say: all things are of God.' This exalted utterance is like unto water for quenching the fire of hate and enmity..." (tr. in *Tablets of Bahā'u'llāh* 222).