

The End of the World Whatever Happened? Or Leftover Time to Kill

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Abstract

When the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh announcing at once the end of the world and the birth of a new creation is located in a nineteenth-century setting, surrounded by the eschatology of Hegel at its beginning and the eschatology of Nietzsche at its end, the unique station of the Manifestation of God and the meaning of Revelation becomes clear. By contrasting the eschatology of Bahá'u'lláh with that of Hegel and Nietzsche, this article attempts to locate and explore in the prophetic context of resurrection and return as interpreted by Bahá'u'lláh in, for example, the Kitáb-i-Íqán, the spiritual origins of the planetary consciousness upon which the survival of humankind and the globe itself now depends. Primary emphasis in locating and exploring these origins is placed upon a close reading of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet, "The Divine Springtime is come, O Most Exalted Pen..."

Résumé

La station unique de la Manifestation de Dieu et la signification de la révélation deviennent évidentes quand la révélation de Bahá'u'lláh annonçant en même temps la fin du monde et la naissance d'une nouvelle création est située dans un contexte du dix-neuvième siècle, entourée par l'eschatologie de Hegel à ses débuts et celle de Nietzsche à sa fin. Cet article essaye de situer et d'explorer dans le contexte prophétique de la résurrection et du retour comme interprété par Bahá'u'lláh, dans le Kitáb-i-Íqán, les origines spirituelles de la conscience planétaire dont dépend maintenant la survie de l'humanité et le globe même, en comparant l'eschatologie de Bahá'u'lláh avec celle d'Hegel et celle de Nietzsche. On attache une importance primordiale à l'étude de la situation et de l'exploration de ces origines par la lecture approfondie d'une tablette de Bahá'u'lláh, «Le Printemps Divin est venu, ô très Sublime Plume...»

Resumen

Quando la Revelación de Bahá'u'lláh, anunciando a su vez el fin del mundo y el nacimiento de una nueva creación se coloca dentro de un escenario del siglo diecinueve, rodeado de la escatología de Hegel en su comienzo y la escatología de Nietzsche al final, se pone en claro el rango espiritual de la Manifestación de Dios y el significado de su Revelación. Al poner en contraste la escatología de Bahá'u'lláh con la de Hegel y Nietzsche, la disertación procura localizar y explorar dentro del contexto profético de resurrección y regreso, según lo interpreta Bahá'u'lláh, por ejemplo, en el Kitáb-i-Iqán, los orígenes de aquel sentido planetario del cual depende la supervivencia de la humanidad y del globo terrestre. Se le da primer énfasis a la localización y exploración de estos orígenes haciendo cuidadosa lectura de la Tabla de Bahá'u'lláh, "La Divina Primavera ha llegado, oh Más Excelsa Pluma..."

Lo, the entire creation hath passed away! Nothing remaineth..." (*Gleanings* 29). If the "entire creation hath passed away," if, as Bahá'u'lláh writes, "Nothing remaineth," then where are we? We are, Bahá'u'lláh declares, in a "new creation" (*Gleanings* 29). People who suffer the amputation of a limb report continuing to "feel" its presence. They may, for example, attempt to get out of bed and stand on what is no longer there. A mother who has suffered the death of her child may find herself waiting for the front door to open and the child to announce, "I'm here." A house burns down with everything in it. Night after night, the owner dreams it is still there.

Is there a limit to what the mind can grasp? Does the physical extinction of one's limb or one's child or one's home initially stretch the mind beyond its limit? And when the mind is stretched beyond its limit, does it go out of itself? Does it go out of its mind? And if so, into what? Hallucination? Fantasy? Autism? Nothingness? Or does it enter a *new* mind? A new state of mind? Or a new life? Are there other worlds? Are we now in a new world that we still see, or try to see, as the old one? Is the planet really in danger? Could it really be dying? Or is it only now coming into conscious existence, into our consciousness of it? Is our growing fear for planetary life our new awareness of Earth as one country and of ourselves as the citizens of the world? Is the planet dying into our consciousness of it, dying, that is, into the human form of its life, a form directly related to our own planetary

citizenship?

Consciousness now for the vast majority is like waking up after a long and regressive sleep to discover that what seemed to be there is no longer really there. The limb is gone; the child is gone; the house is gone. Consciousness is now initially attached to absence and loss, the memory of what is gone. The initial impact is often paralysis, stunned silence, radical disorientation. We do not know what to do. We have no idea how to act. The old, familiar, and habitual ways do not work. We keep trying, and the harder we try, the more we fail. Finally, we grind to a halt. “Methinks that thou hast halted and movest not upon My Tablet” (*Gleanings* 28), declares the personified Voice of the Holy Spirit to Bahá’u’lláh, who had been, until aroused, “asleep on [his] couch” (*Gleanings* 90). “Could the brightness of the Divine Countenance have bewildered thee, or the idle talk of the froward filled thee with grief and paralyzed thy movement?” (*Gleanings* 28). If Bahá’u’lláh is momentarily “halted” so that the movement of his Pen is “paralyzed,” how much more are we likely to be “paralyzed” and “halted”!

“Think ye, O people,” declares Bahá’u’lláh in another Tablet, “that I hold within My grasp the control of God’s ultimate Will and Purpose? Far be it from Me to advance such claim” (*Gleanings* 91). “Had the ultimate destiny of God’s Faith been in Mine Hands,” He continues, “I would have never consented, even though for one moment, to manifest Myself unto you, nor would I have allowed one word to fall from My lips” (91). Not, that is, until He was “utterly effaced and non-existent” (*Gleanings* 55) before God could Bahá’u’lláh receive the dictation of the Holy Spirit. What was required of Him was “the uttermost state of servitude, a servitude the like of which no man can possibly attain” (55). Only then could Bahá’u’lláh become the “Most Exalted Pen,” receiving the divine dictation of God. A state of servitude far less than that attained by the Manifestation and wonderfully described in *The Seven Valleys* is equally essential if we are to realize that in this Day “all created things” have been “regenerated and made new” (*Gleanings* 27). The grinding to a halt, the reduction to a state of paralysis, which initially may outwardly appear as “calamity,” “fire,” and “vengeance” is in reality (that is, “inwardly”) “providence,” “light,” and “mercy” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Hidden Words* 15). In short, “Nothing remaineth except My Face, the Ever-Abiding, the Resplendent, the All-Glorious” (29). We come face to face with the Manifestation only when “nothing remaineth.” In that spiritual fact of life resides the “providence” of “calamity.” Within, that is, the “calamity” that has overtaken this century resides the Resplendent, All-Glorious Face of the Ever-Abiding. For this reason, what has on one level been the darkest century in the history of humankind is, in its spiritual perspective, the century of Bahá, the century of Light.

The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh announcing the passing away of the “entire creation” so that “Nothing remaineth except My Face” was initially announced to Bahá’u’lláh while a prisoner in chains in the dreaded Sýáh-Chál (the Black Pit) in Tehran during the final four months of 1852. Recording his experience in *Epistle to the Sun of the Wolf*; He wrote:

During the days I lay in the prison of Tihrán, though the galling weight of the chains and the stench-filled air allowed Me but little sleep, still in those infrequent moments of slumber I felt as if something flowed from the crown of My head over My breast, even as a mighty torrent that precipitateth itself upon the earth from the summit of a lofty mountain. Every limb of My body would, as a result, be set afire. At such moments My tongue recited what no man could bear to hear. (22)

A shock similar in certain respects to the one experienced by Bahá’u’lláh and affecting his whole body overcame the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche toward the end of the 1870s. He too experienced the passing away of the entire creation in his apocalyptic conviction that the God who supported that creation was dead. Inventing, in *The Gay Science* (1882),¹ a parable of a madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours and ran into the market place crying incessantly, “I seek God! I seek God!” Nietzsche describes his madman (who is a version of himself) met on all sides by the derision of unbelievers. “Whither is God,” the madman cries in their midst. “I shall tell you,” he replies to his own question, which is for Nietzsche the only question worth asking:

We have killed him—you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how have we done this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What did we do when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving now? [“Whither are gone all created things, whether seen or unseen?” declares Bahá’u’lláh.] Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night and more night coming on all the while. . . . God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. . . . What was holiest and most powerful of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives. Who will wipe

this blood off us? (*Portable Nietzsche* 95)

Nietzsche's conviction that the Adamic or prophetic cycle had ended not in the descent of its Father or Author but in its extinction as a result of godless rationalism confronted him with chaos or the void. Humankind, he argued, was now left to wander "through an infinite nothing," feeling only "the breath of empty space." Given this condition, epitomized as human madness (Nietzsche would remain incurably insane during the last decade of his life), he concluded that, in the absence of a Creator, humanity would henceforth have to invent itself, though in the process of that invention a universal madness filled with unspeakable crimes would break out all over the earth. Having, that is, killed God, humankind must itself become God, struggle with chaos or the void as the God of Genesis struggled with the darkness of the deep in an attempt to bring forth a creation from it.

Nietzsche's God, it may thus be argued, is the God of the Romantic imagination, the God of the nineteenth-century artist, the great myth- or fiction-maker. Humankind, declares Nietzsche (as did the Romantics, Shelley and Keats among them), must henceforth reside in its own inventions, in its own fictions, its own creative lies. Truths, argues Nietzsche, are merely fictions that have forgotten they are fictions. Our true prophets are those like Joseph Campbell who show us what our fictions are and tell us how we may best suspend our disbelief in them rather than believe or not believe in them. We must dwell within our imagination of ourselves, "pavilioned," as Shelley writes, "upon chaos" ("Hellas" in *Shelley's Poetry* 772).

Nietzsche embraced the chaos or void that between 1889 and 1900 claimed him as its own in order to release himself completely from the nationalism, racism, and materialism that he identified with the bourgeois culture of his native Germany. Addressing himself to these false values (which Nietzsche violently rejected by cutting himself off completely and dangerously from the culture in which he was reared), Shoghi Effendi, in *The Promised Day is Come*, described "Nationalism, Racialism, and Communism" as "the three false gods." "God Himself," he writes, "has indeed been dethroned from the hearts of men, and an idolatrous world passionately and clamorously hails and worships the false gods which its own idle fancies have fatuously created, and its misguided hands so impiously exalted" (113). Anticipating the horrors described in *The Promised Day is Come* (which deals with the dire consequences of the rejection of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh by the world's leaders), Nietzsche in the 1880s announced in his writings many of the warnings issued by Bahá'u'lláh in his Tablets to the secular and spiritual rulers of the world. "He felt the agony, the suffering, and the misery of a godless world so intensely, at a time when others were blind to its tremendous consequence," writes Walter Kaufmann of Nietzsche, "that he was able to experience in advance, as it were, the fate of a coming generation" (*Nietzsche* 82). The passing away of an entire creation upon which the very life and structure of civilization rested meant for Nietzsche the collapse "of any cardinal distinction between man and animal"; with that collapse, he declared in *Ecce Homo* "there will be wars such as have never happened on earth" (quoted in Kaufmann, *Nietzsche* 82–83.).

At the same time, however, Nietzsche saw in the universal convulsion attending the murder of God in the triumph of false values the birthpangs of a new era. He saw the emergence of a new race which he described as the *Übermensch*, the superman. For this reason, in his added fifth book to *The Gay Science* published in 1887, he saw within the darkness itself what he called "a new, scarcely describable kind of light, happiness, relief, exhilaration, encouragement, dawn" (*Portable Nietzsche* 447). The death of the old was the birth of the new, though, as yet, very few could recognize the birth within that death. "Even we born guessers of riddles," he writes in *The Gay Science*,

who are, as it were, waiting on the mountains; put there between today and tomorrow and stretched in the contradiction between today and tomorrow, we firstlings and premature births of the coming century, to whom the shadows that must soon envelop Europe really *should* have appeared by now—why is it that even we look forward to it without any real compassion for this darkening, and above all without any worry and fear for *ourselves*? Is it perhaps that we are still too deeply impressed by the first consequences of this event—and these first consequences, the consequences for *us*, are perhaps the reverse of what one might expect: not at all sad and dark, but rather like a new, scarcely describable kind of light, happiness, relief, exhilaration, encouragement, dawn? Indeed, we philosophers and "free spirits" feel as if a new dawn were shining on us when we receive the tidings that "the old god is dead"; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, anticipation, expectation. At last the horizon appears free again to us... the sea, *our* sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an "open sea." (In *Portable Nietzsche* 447–48)

In his *Defence of Poetry*, the English Romantic poet Shelley distinguishes between poets and moral reformers by suggesting that the latter "follow in the footsteps of poets and copy the sketches of their creations into

the book of common life” (quoted in *Shelley’s Poetry* 501). In the process of copying, however, inevitable distortions take place, never more so than in the case of Nietzsche. Nietzsche’s philosophy, grotesquely distorted to suit its own purposes, was adopted by the Nazi party in Germany to reinforce its racist, anti-Semitic, “Aryan” designs upon the planet. It interpreted Nietzsche’s announcement of the death of God as the death of the Semitic God of the Old and New Testaments. It found in his horrified confession—“We have *killed him*—you and I. All of us are his murderers”—an invitation, indeed a command, to exterminate the Jews, Hitler leaving it written in his will that the extermination must not cease until not a single Jew was left alive on the face of the earth. When at last the genocide was complete, the entire creation of the Semitic God would have at last passed away so that of it nothing would remain. Then and only then would a new Aryan creation, the so-called Third Reich, govern the planet under the leadership of a pure Aryan race identified with Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*. Thus, for the Third Reich, the Holocaust was not a crime; it was the removal of an abscess from the body of humanity. “My pedagogy is hard,” Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf*,

What is weak must be hammered away. In my fortress of the Teutonic Order, a young generation will grow up before which the world will tremble. I want the young to be violent, domineering, undismayed, cruel. The young must be all these things. They must be able to bear pain. There must be nothing weak or gentle about them. The free splendid beast of prey must once again flash before their eyes. I want my young people strong and beautiful. That way, I can create something new. (Quoted in Miller, *For Your Own Good* 142)

To train them in this violence, undismayed cruelty, and Teutonic domination, there had to be a target on which to practice. That target was the Jew, a target ready made and waiting in the pervasive anti-Semitism Hitler early experienced in Vienna. “Wherever I went [in Vienna],” he wrote in *Mein Kampf*,

I began to see Jews, and the more I saw, the more sharply they became distinguished in my eyes from the rest of humanity. Particularly the Inner City and the districts north of the Danube Canal swarmed with a people which even outwardly had lost all resemblance to Germans.... If you cut even cautiously into such an abscess, you found like a maggot in a rotting body, often dazzled by the sudden light—a kike!.... Gradually, I began to hate them. (Quoted in Miller, *For Your Own Good* 179)

Nietzsche did not live to see translated into the Holocaust his conviction that the prophetic cycle had ended with the murder of God by the combined forces of racism, materialism, and nationalism. He did not live to see his vision of the *Übermensch* translated into the undismayed cruelty of Hitler’s “Aryan” storm troopers. Indeed, he did not in the nightmarish depths of his own final madness live to see the global nightmare which that madness prophetically announced. Perhaps more than any other single individual whose record of himself has been brilliantly and exhaustively recorded, Nietzsche enacted within his own mind the end of the world announced by Bahá’u’lláh.

Earlier in the century (1807) another German, Friedrich Hegel, published his widely influential *Phenomenology of Mind*. Like the philosophy of Nietzsche, Hegel’s phenomenology, when “copied into the book of common life,” was to undergo in the guise of Communism a fate as diabolic in its outcome as the fate of Nietzsche at the hands of the Nazis. Developing a theory not unlike the Bahá’í principle of progressive revelation, Hegel argued that the Absolute Spirit arises out of unconsciousness into a consciousness of itself as it slowly and progressively unfolds first in nature and then in humanity, moving under the stress of its triadic dialectic (thesis, antithesis, synthesis) toward its consummation in a pervasive global consciousness by which and in which it becomes known not only to humanity but also to itself. The progress of humanity thus becomes for Hegel the Absolute Spirit’s awakening to its consciousness of itself, a consciousness that he attributed in a very specific way to the Germanic people embodied in the Prussian monarchy and the Prussian State. Perceiving in the Prussian State an emerging model for a world State and, in the figure of Napoleon, a possible candidate for its presiding monarch, that history in his day had been brought to its destined goal, a goal that announced not only humanity’s coming of age but also in that coming of age the presence of the Absolute Spirit in and as a planetary consciousness, the earth itself as the kingdom of God.

Interpreted by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in material rather than spiritual terms, Hegel’s phenomenology was relocated in matter (or property) rather than in spirit. The dialectic of the Absolute Spirit moving toward its divine consummation in a world order that would constitute the kingdom of God on earth was secularly reinterpreted by Marx and Engels as dialectical materialism. Humanity, they argued, was simply a highly evolved state of matter operating in a complex form of motion. That form of motion was essentially the class struggle governed by economic or material factors rooted in property, which is to say, the struggle to possess the earth, The dialectic

governing the struggle in its evolution from the feudal and bourgeois modes of economic organization toward the dictatorship of the world proletariat (which they announced in their Communist Manifesto of 1848) belonged not to the realm of the spirit but to the realm of matter itself. The dictatorship of the proletariat simply meant that the laboring class, bound to matter by virtue of its labor, should control or “own” matter. According to the logic of matter, which is to say, according to the consciousness drawn out of matter by the human mind, the laboring class should inherit the earth because of its total commitment to or dependence upon matter. Since the proletariat’s life was spent working with matter, it should inherit matter. Marx’s world proletariat was at once the secular counterpart of Hegel’s historically realized Absolute Spirit and the Christian meek who would, as decreed by Christ, inherit the earth.

The nightmare inherent in the dialectical materialism of Marx (which, in the Nietzschean sense, declared the death of God) is, with the collapse of world Communism, now coming fully to light. It is indeed as if the concentration camps of the Russian block have been opened to reveal the Holocaust in another guise. The rejection of spirit in the name of dialectical materialism is, in essence, the rejection of humanity in the name of matter understood as a humiliating enslavement to it which a brutally exploited nature itself rejects.

By framing the nineteenth century with Hegel at its beginning and Nietzsche at its end, we are confronted by its fundamentally apocalyptic character. The century itself was governed by a controlling vision of the end of the world understood as the end of what Bahá’u’lláh has called “the Prophetic Cycle” (*Gleanings* 60). Whether as the Hegelian advent of the world State understood as the earthly embodiment of the Absolute Spirit or as the advent of the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, the vision of the end of the world is accompanied, as in Revelation, the final book of the Bible, by a vision of a new world. “Behold, I make all things new” (21:6) declares the Voice of God to John of Patmos, the author of Revelation. The nightmare attendant upon the perverse historical application in Communism and National Socialism of the eschatological vision of Hegel and Nietzsche that largely defines the dark side of this century is a demonic parody of the new world of Revelation, the Babylon that Jerusalem becomes when humankind usurps the creative power of God and claims it as its own.

Henri Corbin, the leading scholar of Iranian theophany in this century and a keen student of the *Shaykhí* school founded by *Shaykh* Ahmad in the early nineteenth century (the school from which, in the Bábí Dispensation [1844-1863], all nineteen Letters of the Living emerged), argues with specific reference to Hegel’s eschatology that history should have ended. “What is the situation actually, at the end of Hegelian ‘phenomenology,’” he asks in “The Question of Comparative Philosophy: Convergences in Iranian and European Thought”:

Absolute Spirit has gained consciousness of itself. The times are perfected. History is fulfilled. Its *eschaton*, its final expression, has arrived. That which the language of theology calls eschatology, to designate the events at the end, has been achieved forever. (“The Question” 4)

History, however, did not end in the actualization of the Absolute Spirit in the Prussian State. And because it did not end, but continued beyond its end, history was deprived of the eschatology that had given it meaning. “Unfortunately, History continued,” writes Corbin in his analysis of a history without meaning,

but to do so it had to pass beyond the eschatology that until then *oriented* by giving it meaning. Deprived of that eschatology, since it was behind in the past now rather than before it, History cannot help being *disoriented* and desperately seeking a direction [*sens*] that it can no longer find. In losing its meaning [*sens*] by continuing beyond eschatology, history has gone mad. (Thus I am echoing Chesterton’s declaration that the world today is full of Christian ideas gone mad.) We have here the live drama of a theological system founded on the eschatological point of view that is, an essential and continual waiting—being laicized, or secularized. To disrupt that waiting is to deliver eschatology to all the perils of history. After that nothing is left but a pseudo-eschatology burdening our mind with a pseudo-mythological “sense of history.” (“The Question” 5)

History “*disoriented* and desperately seeking a direction [*sens*] that it can no longer find,” which is to say “history...gone mad,” is for Corbin (who committed himself to what he considered “an essential and continual waiting” that disallowed any historical fulfillment) evident in the nightmarish “pseudomythological” history of Nazi Germany on the right and of Communism on the left. The actualization of the Absolute Spirit in either the Third Reich or in the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” which constitutes in large measure the mass psychosis of this century (“history...gone mad” as Nietzsche went mad, as Hitler and Stalin went mad), is the demonic form of an eschatology that in fact completed itself in the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh. Modern history, as interpreted by Shoghi

Effendi in *The Promised Day is Come*, is thus indeed Corbin's "history...gone mad." The source or cause of that madness, however, lies not in the fact that history continued beyond the eschatology that gave it meaning but in the fact that, in the rejection of Bahá'u'lláh, it denied its eschatological meaning. Hegel's Absolute Spirit fulfilled itself not in Napoleon and the Prussian monarchy, but in Bahá'u'lláh. Nietzsche's horrified announcement of the death of God was his intuitive recognition that the Adamic cycle had come to an end, even as his invention of the *Übermensch* was his intuitive response to the coming of the "Great Age."

"The ages of [humanity's] infancy and childhood are past, never again to return," writes Shoghi Effendi in *The Promised Day is Come*,

while the Great Age, the consummation of all ages, which must signalize the coming of age of the entire human race, is yet to come. The convulsions of this transitional and most turbulent period in the annals of humanity are the essential prerequisites, and herald the inevitable approach, of that Age of Ages, "*the time of the end,*" in which the folly and tumult of strife that has, since the dawn of history, blackened the annals of mankind, will have been finally transmuted into the wisdom and the tranquility of an undisturbed, a universal, and lasting peace, in which the discord and separation of the children of men will have given way to the worldwide reconciliation, and the complete unification of the diverse elements that constitute human society. (117)

What at this point it may well be asked do "the convulsions of this transitional and most turbulent period in the annals of humanity" look like? In what guises does our mass psychosis appear? How does it enact itself? It looks, it may be argued, like a world with leftover time to kill. It enacts the genocide, mass murder, self-annihilation that affirm humanity's loss of meaning as a way of blindly calling attention to its loss. "Nobody heard him, the dead man," writes Stevie Smith in "Not Waving, but Drowning,"

But still he lay moaning:
I was much further out than you thought
And not waving but drowning.

In the irrational destruction of all life on this planet (including human life), humanity, confronted by leftover life to kill, turns, as in *A Clockwork Orange*, the Earth into a vast battlefield with every human being redefined, not as a person, but as a target, someone or something to throw a grenade at or to locate in the sight of an automatic weapon—the world as Vietnam, El Salvador, Panama, South Africa, Beirut, Brixton, the Bronx, every door with a triple lock, police on every subway coach, curfews after dark, entertainment on closed circuit television, and all deliveries in armored trucks.

"Lo, the entire creation hath passed away! Nothing remaineth...." Except for one thing: "... My Face, the Ever-Abiding, the Resplendent, the All-Glorious." In the Tablet in which God addresses Bahá'u'lláh as the "Most Exalted Pen" (*Gleanings* 27–35), God, as Adib Taherzadeh suggests, may be compared to the Father and Bahá'u'lláh to the Mother (*Revelation* 21). Their sacred union, *hieros gamos* or divine marriage, is a metaphor of Divine Revelation that brings forth the Word of God. That Word is the "only begotten" of Their mysterious union, the nature of which is beyond our human comprehension. In this extraordinary Tablet we are witnesses to the consummation of the sacred marriage itself, as God lovingly but insistently draws Bahá'u'lláh away from all that stands between Him and union with his Beloved. In the Tablets, that process is usually described in the metaphor of unveiling. In one Tablet, for example, the unveiling becomes "the chain of successive Revelations" from Adam to the Báb, which culminate in God's ultimate unveiling of Himself to Bahá'u'lláh, an unveiling which yet leaves Him "wrapt within a myriad veils" (*Gleanings* 74–75).

The metaphor of marriage, of consummation and marriage feast, is perhaps the oldest and most pervasive metaphor of Revelation, one that more than any other focuses upon love as the source and foundation of creation ("I loved thy creation, hence I created thee," declares the Hidden Word revealing Itself [4]). Thus, Christ images his return as the Bridegroom Who comes at midnight and takes the wise virgins into the marriage chamber. In the Book of Revelation, his return is celebrated as the marriage feast of the Lamb to which all the Sons of God are invited. And in the Songs of Solomon, the awakening of the Manifestation of God to his station is imaged in the loving caresses of the bridal chamber. "I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roses, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake *my* love, till he please," declares the divine Voice (Songs of Solomon 2:7). The awakening, prepared for throughout both the Old and New Testaments as well as the Qur'án, thus finds its ultimate apocalyptic image in the metaphor of marriage with which John of Patmos describes the descent of the New

Jerusalem. “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth,” declares John, “for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.” The union of earth and heaven is then, as throughout the Bible, imaged as a marriage. New Jerusalem, in John’s metaphor of the promised kingdom (a single earth no longer divided) comes down “from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” The marriage vows repeated within the tabernacle now become God’s covenant or marriage with his people: “And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God” (Revelation 21:1–3).

Revelation as courtship leading to marriage between God and his people is precisely the metaphor that governs the gradual awakening (“nor awake *my* love, till he please”) and consummation in Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablet announcing the “Divine Springtime.” “The Divine Springtime is come, O Most Exalted Pen, for the Festival of the All-Merciful is fast approaching,” declares the Divine Voice to Bahá’u’lláh:

Bestir thyself, and magnify, before the entire creation, the name of God, and celebrate His praise, in such wise that all created things may be regenerated and made new. Speak, and hold not thy peace. (*Gleanings* 27–28)

Bahá’u’lláh, however, does not stir; the Voice of God continues to address Bahá’u’lláh in the lower case (“thee,” “thyself”) as gradually Bahá’u’lláh awakens to the fullness of his station as the Manifestation of God for this day.

“Methinks that thou hast halted and movest not upon My Tablet” (28), declares the Voice. Interrogating Him in search of a reason, the Voice of God continues: “Could the brightness of the Divine Countenance have bewildered thee, or the idle talk of the froward filled thee with grief and paralyzed thy movement?” (28). Could, that is, the overwhelming nature of what in this very instant is happening to and in Him as the Voice of God addresses Him have simply paralyzed Him as it had in previous Dispensations paralyzed Moses confronted by the Burning Bush or Muhammad confronted by the angel Gabriel? “Take heed lest anything deter thee from extolling the greatness of this Day—the Day whereon the Finger of majesty and power hath opened the seal of the Wine of Reunion, and called all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth” (28), the Voice continues.

The metaphor of unsealing, which refers directly to Muhammad as the Seal of the Prophets, the last of the Prophets in the Adamic cycle, indicates to Bahá’u’lláh the awesome nature of the Revelation now being announced to Him. “It is evident that every age in which a Manifestation of God hath lived is divinely ordained, and may, in a sense, be characterized as God’s appointed Day,” Bahá’u’lláh writes in another Tablet,

This Day, however, is unique, and is to be distinguished from those that have preceded it. The designation “Seal of the Prophets” fully revealeth its high station. (*Gleanings* 60)

In the final book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation, the unsealing of the seven seals (the seven world religions preceding the Revelation of the Báb) brings with it not only the Kingdom of God on earth but also releases at the same time the poisonous waste of abrogated Dispensations whose followers still cling to a darkened sun, a moon without light and stars which have fallen (Matthew 24:29). The judgment upon those abrogated Dispensations was indeed enough to paralyze the movement of his Pen. Bahá’u’lláh, that is, was initially reduced to muteness by his recognition of human denial, of the “impediments” standing in the way of God’s people in their acceptance of God’s truth, impediments “that Bahá’u’lláh had thoroughly explored in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, written one year before his Declaration in the Garden of Ridván. “My silence,” He confesses, “is by reason of the veils that have blinded Thy creatures’ eyes to Thee, and my muteness is because of the impediments that have hindered Thy people from recognizing Thy truth” (*Gleanings* 28). “

The “breeze announcing the Day of God,” that is, had already breathed over and through Bahá’u’lláh in, for example, the *Síyáh-Chál* in 1852. “Preferrest thou to tarry when the breeze announcing the Day of God hath already breathed over thee, or art thou of them that are shut out as by a veil from Him?” (*Gleanings* 28), the Voice asks. “No veil whatever have I allowed, O Lord of all names and Creator of the heavens, to shut me from the recognition of the glories of Thy Day” (28), declares Bahá’u’lláh by way of reply. That glory, however, though He recognized it in his instant acceptance of the Báb, had not yet fully penetrated Him as the One in whom it must now fully reside. “Thou knowest what is in me, but I know not what is in Thee,” Bahá’u’lláh declares. “Thou are the All-Knowing, the All-Informed” (29). He then goes on, moving closer to that instant of ultimate recognition:

By Thy name that excelleth all other names! If Thy overruling and all-compelling behest should ever reach me, it would empower me to revive the souls of all men, through Thy most exalted Word, which I have heard

uttered by Thy Tongue of power in Thy Kingdom of glory. It would enable me to announce the revelation of Thy effulgent countenance wherethrough that which lay hidden from the eyes of men hath been manifested in Thy name.... (29)

“If,” then “it would”—the situation is still conditional. Bahá’u’lláh, of course, is not resisting; He is by degrees awakening. The final stage of the awakening is the removal of Bahá’u’lláh from all that still binds Him to the created world. “Canst thou discover anyone but Me, O Pen, in this Day?” the Voice now asks. “What hath become of the creation and the manifestations thereof? What of the names and their kingdom? Whither are gone all created things, whether seen or unseen? What of the hidden secrets of the universe and its revelations? Lo, the entire creation hath passed away! Nothing remaineth except My Face, the Ever-Abiding, the Resplendent, the All-Glorious” (29).

Precisely in this instant in which “the entire creation” passes away, Bahá’u’lláh experiences that ultimate extinction that immerses Him completely in the Will of God. In that moment so also every soul expires to be, like the cells of the body, newly created. “Verily,” declares the Voice, “We have caused every soul to expire by virtue of Our irresistible and all-subduing sovereignty. We have, then, called into being a new creation, as a token of Our grace unto men. I am, verily, the All-Bountiful, the Ancient of Days” (29–30).

The Voice addressing Bahá’u’lláh as the Pen is the Ancient of Days who, in Daniel, sits, clothed in white, upon a throne that “was like the fiery flame.” “Thousand thousands ministered to him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgement was set, and the books were opened” (Daniel 7:9–10). In Revelation, He is seated before the twenty-four elders declaring “Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:5). “Great is thy blessedness, O earth, for thou hast been made the foot-stool of thy God, and been chosen as the seat of His mighty throne,” the Ancient of Days declares to Bahá’u’lláh (30).

Bahá’u’lláh now partakes of the unsealed Wine of Reunion. “The inebriation of Thy presence, O Well-Beloved of all worlds, hath seized and possessed me,” He declares. The Ancient of Days is now able to command Him to arise and proclaim His Word. “Arise,” He declares,

and proclaim unto the entire creation the tidings that He Who is the All-Merciful hath directed His steps toward the Ridván and entered it. Guide, then, the people unto the garden of delight which God hath made the Throne of His Paradise. We have chosen thee to be our most mighty Trumpet, whose blast is to signalize the resurrection of all mankind. (31)

Bahá’u’lláh then continues as the “Most Exalted Pen” to write as the Ancient of Days dictates, ceasing only when “the inebriating effect of the words of God upon Him” completely overcomes Him so that “His Pen can move no longer” (35).

Nietzsche’s announcement of the death of the Ancient of Days, his declaration that “We have *killed him*—you and I. All of us are his murderers” tragically proclaimed the onset of a psychosis destined to overwhelm Western civilization. Nietzsche’s announcement and his own fate images as metaphor Death on a pale horse. The full horror of his insanity resides in the fact that his madness was itself prophetic of that larger, collective madness present in his conviction that “All of us are his murderers.” The delusion that “We have *killed him*—you and I,” that humanity has the power to kill God (and has indeed used it) haunts the conscience and the consciousness of this century. Crucial, that is, to any genuine understanding of the human condition in this century is its attempt to kill God by the rejection of his Manifestation. In Tablet after Tablet, Bahá’u’lláh addresses Himself to this most ancient of all tragic facts repeated in our time in the martyrdom of the Báb and in the lifetime imprisonment of Bahá’u’lláh.

The significance, therefore, of the Tablet announcing that “The Divine Springtime is come, O Most Exalted Pen” lies in God’s announcement of his presence among us in the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh. In that announcement resides, as the Tablet makes abundantly clear, the “new creation,” which is what, by virtue of that announcement, all of us—you and I—are. We have not, that is, killed God; God, rather, has killed us: “Verily, We have caused every soul to expire by virtue of Our irresistible and all-subduing sovereignty” (29). That expiration, however, is in the same instant the calling into being of “a new creation, as a token of Our grace unto men” (29-30). We have been made new (“Behold I make all things new”).

The tragedy of Nietzsche, the spiritual ground of his madness, lay in his intuitive recognition that he had at once expired and been made new. He was, in his own prophetic words, the recipient of what he called a “new, scarcely describable kind of light.” He found himself present at a “new dawn.” Standing in that new “light,” living in that new “dawn,” rejoicing in the death of institutional religion presided over by a God who was Himself dead,

Nietzsche tragically located the new life source within himself, constructing by means of his dazzling imagination a new world that he attempted to inhabit as a child inhabits a fairy tale. Like so many Romantic artists of the nineteenth century, he was the victim of his own creativity, which is to say, of a creativity whose “strength/ Of usurpation” (to use Wordsworth’s phrase to describe the imagination) cut him off from its spiritual source, Nietzsche could not finally live with what he considered the murderer in himself, He could not inhabit the usurping satanic divinity he attributed to himself.

More than any other nineteenth-century figure living in the very midst of a Revelation of the Ancient of Days, which he tragically received as the invention of his own creative power, Nietzsche epitomizes the moral and spiritual crisis of this century. That crisis may be described as humanity’s threatened extinction at its own hands through usurpation of power that belongs to God. Unless we return that power to its spiritual source through the kind of acknowledgement of it which Bahá’u’lláh affirmed, the “new creation,” which is its presence among us, may indeed be our expiration. Nietzsche’s madness enacts the dark side of “the resurrection of all mankind,” which is the calamity it also contains. Nazi Germany enacted that calamity even as Communism enacted the calamity inherent in the secular eschatology of Hegel in which Napoleon as the incarnation of the World’s Spirit assumes a station which belongs to the Manifestation in the person of Bahá’u’lláh.

Bahá’u’lláh identified this “strength / Of usurpation” at its source with the failure to distinguish between the unknowable essence of God and the revelation of Himself in the Manifestation. In the theological assertion of an incarnate God, the way is opened for humanity fatally to identify itself with God by relocating Him in its own imaginings of Him. “To every discerning and illuminated heart,” writes Bahá’u’lláh,

it is evident that God, the unknowable Essence, the Divine Being, is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute, such as corporeal existence, ascent and descent, egress and regress. Far be it from His glory that human tongue should adequately recount His praise, or that human heart comprehend His fathomless mystery. He is, and hath ever been, veiled in the ancient eternity of His Essence, and will remain in His Reality everlastingly hidden from the sight of men. “No vision taketh in Him, but He taketh in all vision; He is the Subtile, the All-Perceiving. . . .” (*Gleanings* 46-47)

One disastrous result of the false identification of the Creator with his creation (the Creator incarnate in his creation) is the failure, evident in Nietzsche, to distinguish between God as Creator and humanity as creature. Creator and creature become one; humans as creatures become humans as creators, the one being indistinguishable from the other. In radically rejecting this essentially Romantic view of humanity with its Nietzschean insistence upon a human creator, Bahá’u’lláh restores humanity to its creaturely condition within a divinely ordained order upon which it depends for its life and to which it must therefore surrender. Surrender rather than usurpation is for Bahá’u’lláh the essential law governing all forms of life, including human life. In the divine encounter between God and the Manifestation that constitutes Revelation, we encounter, in its highest and purest form, that act of surrender upon which all life depends. Indeed, it is precisely this supreme act of surrender on the part of the Manifestation that in each Dispensation renews the creation itself by restoring it not only to its origin but also to the eternal and essential form of its life. That restoration is at once the resurrection and the return addressed by Bahá’u’lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, the Book of Certitude.

The distinction between the Creator and his creation is essential to any adequate understanding of surrender as the primary law of life without which no life is possible. Surrender, understood as submission to the divine law of one’s nature, is perfectly realized in the various orders of nature, mineral, vegetable, animal, with the single exception of the human. Humankind alone has thus far again and again chosen usurpation rather than surrender, with the result that those who have chosen surrender remain the exceptions to what is considered the aggression inherent in human nature. Surrender, that is, is still not recognized as the fundamental law governing human life, though the danger of human extinction arising from humanity’s “strength/Of usurpation” is awakening humankind to a growing recognition of its necessity.

In the Tablet, “The Divine Springtime is come” (*Gleanings* 27–35), the surrender of Bahá’u’lláh to the personified Voice of the Holy Spirit repeats the first creative fiat: Be and It Is. In Bahá’u’lláh’s gradual surrender imaged by Him as an awakening from sleep, “all created things” are “regenerated and made new.”

The Manifestation is to the human world what the law of atomic cohesion is to the mineral, the law of cellular life is to the vegetable, and the law of biological reproduction is to the animal. In “the consciousness of the oneness of mankind,” which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá identifies as “the distinguishing feature of His [Bahá’u’lláh’s] Law” (quoted in *Promised Day is Come* 119), these laws reach their destined goal: the conscious recognition of God and the willing

submission to his Will.

Though unity is the sign of creation, the consciousness of it on the human level is, so far as this planet is concerned, its ultimate achievement, an achievement now issuing from the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Though, of course, the oneness of humankind co-exists with the creation itself, the “consciousness” of it belongs, as Bahá'u'lláh points out, to “this glorious century” as “the distinguishing feature of His Law.” What, therefore, in the final analysis distinguishes the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh from the philosophical adumbrations of it in Hegel and Nietzsche is the divine fiat drawing humanity through a consciousness of its oneness into a new understanding of the unity of creation. Creation itself is thus made new by the consciousness that, through the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, now at last informs it.

What, then, this article has presented is three nineteenth-century visions of “the end of the world” understood as three eschatologies. Nietzsche’s eschatology, grounded in his announcement of the death of God, released the German imagination in ways that he at once initiated and feared. The horror with which he announced the death of God was accompanied by a radical sense of liberation that would carry him, as it carried the Nazis, beyond recognizable human limits into a kind of madness that can perhaps best be described as possession by the very God he and they were determined to murder. The God whom Nietzsche declared dead was a God whose power he attempted to usurp. That attempt eventually destroyed him, even as it destroyed the Nazis. Hegel’s eschatology announced not the death of God, but the actualization of God in the Prussian State. Though his theistic rather than atheistic vision would appear to separate Hegel in a fundamental way from Nietzsche, Hegel and Nietzsche nevertheless came together in what amounted to their deification of humanity implicit in Nietzsche’s notion of the *Übermensch* and in Hegel’s view of God as humanity’s becoming consciousness of itself. Apart from these two eschatologies (which in their different ways deified humanity) stands the eschatology of Bahá'u'lláh in which the distinction between God the Creator and humankind the creature is absolute, God, in his essence, remaining unknowable even to the Manifestation. In the human absorption of God through the usurpation of his power, whether by consciousness or by murder, I suggest, lies the mass psychosis that has threatened humanity (and the globe humanity inhabits) with extinction. The returning of both eschatologies to their Creator in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is not only a return to sanity but also the essential and therefore now recreated ground for humanity’s coming of age.

Notes

1. Contained in *The Portable Nietzsche*.

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