



SHARING THE

MESSAGE

WITH

CHRISTIANS

BY

MAXWELL  
ALEXANDER

CHRISTIANITY

RENEWED

VOLUME V

Sharing the Message

with

Christians

BY

Maxwell Alexander

(author's name for  
Marc and Helen Vloeberghs)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### **UNIT 1: Baha’i Writings glorify Christ**

Section 1: Baha’u’llah glorifies Christ.....	5
Section 2 Abdu’l-Baha glorifies Christ.....	6

### **UNIT 2: How to share the Message**

Section 1: Approach to sharing the Message.....	9
Section 2: The importance of listening.....	10
Section 3: The importance of validating the speaker.....	13
Section 4: How to explain to the seeker.....	13
Section 5: How to remove apprehensions.....	14
Section 6: Questions Christians ask (Role-plays).....	16

### **UNIT 3: Important Christian beliefs**

Section 1: Christian issues .....	22
Section 2: Man-made ideas .....	22
Section 3: Jesus explains “who He is”.....	24
Section 4: Jesus, the Son of God.....	25
Section 5: Christ is a Title.....	28
Section 6: Trinity .....	29
Section 7: Need for Renewal.....	32
Section 8: The Divine Messengers.....	34
Section 9: History of Christianity.....	36
Section 10: The Holy Bible.....	39
Section 11: Adam and Eve.....	46
Section 12: Original Sin.....	48
Section 13: Jesus’ Sacrifice.....	49
Section 14: Salvation .....	50
Section 15: Baptism .....	53
Section 16: Holy Communion .....	56
Section 17: Heaven and Hell .....	58
Section 18: Devil .....	61

Section 19: Miracles .....63

**UNIT 4: Proofs**

Section 1: The Spiritual Return.....67  
 Section 2: Examples for Spiritual Return.....68  
 Section 3: Spiritual Return of Elias.....69  
 Section 4: “Compare the days of the Manifestation” .....71  
 Section 5: Recognize the Promised One with His voice .....73  
 Section 6: Prophecies regarding 1844.....74  
 Section 7: Other signs for His Return .....75  
 Section 8: The new Name and the Place of His Coming.....79  
 Section 9: The same Spiritual Reality and Sign of Peace .....79

**APPENDIX:**

Appendix 1: Can the Bible be Added To?.....80  
 Appendix 2: What is new in the Baha’I Faith?.....80  
 Appendix 3: Some Symbols used in the Bible.....82  
 Appendix 4: Gradual development of Eastern doctrine - with Table .....83  
 Appendix 5: Station of Baha’u’llah in the Christian Tradition .....88  
 Appendix 6: Miracles in Old Testament.....90

**Suggested Weekend Schedule**

Saturday	8:30 - 12:30 pm	Unit 1 and 2
	1:30 pm - 5 pm	Unit 3 - Section 1 - 8
	7 pm - 9 pm	Questions Christians Ask
Sunday	8:30 -12:30 pm	Unit 3 - Section 9 - 19
	1:30 pm - 5 pm	Unit 4 - Section 1 - 9

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## INTRODUCTION:

The 9<sup>th</sup> January 2001 letter of the Universal House of Justice indicated that “*some of the courses devoted to teaching will no doubt treat the subject in general terms. Others will focus on various means of sharing Bahá’u’lláh’s message with specific segments of society, incorporating the wisdom gleaned from the teaching endeavors of the friends.*”

In this special course we are sharing the Baha’i message with people from a Christian background in a non-controversial and more systematic approach; exploring concepts that unite rather than divide; and creating a Christian friendly dialogue. The goal is to invite the seeker to participate in the core activities. The course content is based on the Word of God from both the Bible and the Baha’i Writings. To assist the participants in giving a simple presentation on this theme, a flipchart consisting of drawings and brief explanations will be used throughout the course, thus through a practical demonstration, they will feel more confidence in addition to acquiring the necessary skills.

**The first unit** consists of passages from the Baha’i Writings glorifying and exalting the Cause of Christ. By reflecting on these Writings, new insights will be formed about the attitude of our beloved Central Figures towards Jesus Christ.

**In the second unit** participants develop the specialized skills necessary for approaching Christians and answering their questions.

**The third unit** discusses some basic Christian beliefs in the light of the Baha’i Revelation. It is important that Baha’is know how to respond using the Baha’i perspective but at the same time using a terminology that is familiar to Christians and using the Bible as the proof.

**The fourth unit** discusses some of the proofs helpful for seeker in his/her personal search for truth. “*...what the soul longs for is the attainment of certitude. Such inner conviction is the ultimate goal of all spiritual seeking*” (Universal House of Justice “One Common Faith” p 52)

The empowerment to fulfill this important task is given: “*The stupendous enterprise of laying the foundations of the Kingdom of God has been set in motion, and the population of the earth has been endowed with the powers and capacities equal to the task*” (Universal House of Justice “One Common Faith p. 54)

The inspiration of the course is drawn from the words, teachings and the example of the magnetic figure of Abdu’l-Baha. During His teaching journeys throughout the West where he taught Christians, His unerring interpretation of the Holy Texts, His luminous discourses, His brilliant use of analogies all show us the best approach to share the Message with Christians.

This course originated in Papua New Guinea in the 1980’s and was based on the books “Christianity Renewed” Volume 1, 2 and 3 by Maxwell Alexander (author’s name for Marc and Helen Vloeberghs). It was developed at that time to assist the devoted new Baha’is in the remote villages to explain their newfound faith to their Christian brothers and sisters. This course was expanded in the Pacific region, has been tested in more than 15 countries and it is now ready to be used worldwide. We would like to thank all the people who helped us and gave suggestions for its further development.

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# UNIT 1: BAHA'I WRITINGS GLORIFY CHRIST

## PURPOSE:

- To gain a better understanding how Jesus Christ is glorified in the Baha'i Writings.
- To learn how to use quotations that praise and glorify Christ from the Baha'i writings and to quote verses from the Bible in our conversations with Christians. This will increase the love and respect for the divine reality of Christ and the Bible.
- To become a more effective teacher by systematically using the three steps: "listen, validate the speaker, and then explain".
- Learn to avoid arguments and criticism

## SECTION 1: Baha'u'llah glorifies Christ.

### ♥ See Flipchart p. 11 & 12

The following quotation is very important as it conveys Baha'u'llah's love and respect for Christ and it sets the tone of this course. We Baha'is should always follow His example and demonstrate our love for Christ to the Christians when we teach them.

*"Say, this is the One Who hath glorified the Son and hath exalted His Cause."*

(Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p.12)

Baha'u'llah tells us to meditate on the following:

*"Reflect how Jesus, the Spirit of God, was, notwithstanding His extreme meekness and perfect tender-heartedness, treated by His enemies. So fierce was the opposition which He, the Essence of Being and Lord of the visible and invisible, had to face, that He had nowhere to lay His head. He wandered continually from place to place, deprived of a permanent abode."*

(Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 57)

1. Which qualities of Jesus does Baha'u'llah mention? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Which three titles does Baha'u'llah bestow on Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Why had Jesus "nowhere to lay His head"? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Memorize the three titles for Jesus.

### Role-play:

Purpose: To learn to glorify Christ when we are teaching Christians.

Many devout Christians when meeting a Baha'i are eager to find out if the Baha'i believes in Christ, the Son of God. They think that only people who truly believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God will be saved. Often it is necessary to give a short introduction about how Baha'is love and glorify Christ to prepare the heart of the Christian for an introduction of Baha'u'llah's teachings.

**Form pairs:** One person is Christian, the other is a Baha'i.

### **Scenario:**

Christian asks: "Who is Jesus Christ for you?"

Baha'i answers: "Baha'is believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The Baha'i Writings tell us that Jesus Christ is "the Essence of Being". He is "the Lord of the visible and the invisible", He is "the Spirit of God".

*Baha'u'llah revealed that He "is the One who hath glorified the Son and hath exalted His Cause".*

Christian responds: *I am happy to hear that Baha'is believe in Jesus. But, who is Baha'u'llah?*

**Note:** To prepare the heart of the seeker, a short confirmation of how Baha'is love and glorify Christ is a good start. It is important to remember that every Christian is emotionally moved by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Therefore, after sharing ideas together, the Baha'i could give the following quotation as a gift to the seeker along with an invitation to a study circle.

*"Know thou that when the Son of Man yielded up His breath to God, the whole creation wept with a great weeping. By sacrificing Himself, however, a fresh capacity was infused into all created things. Its evidences, as witnessed in all the peoples of the earth, are now manifest before thee. The deepest wisdom which the sages have uttered, the profoundest learning which any mind hath unfolded, the arts which the ablest hands have produced, the influence exerted by the most potent of rulers are but manifestations of the quickening power released by His transcendent, His all-pervasive, and resplendent Spirit.*

(Bahá'u'lláh: Gleanings, p: 85 - 86)

What happened as a result of Christ sacrificing Himself? \_\_\_\_\_

Why do you think it is important to share this quote you're your Christian friends? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Fill in the blanks:

Know thou that when the \_\_\_\_\_ yielded up His breath to God, the \_\_\_\_\_ wept with a \_\_\_\_\_. By \_\_\_\_\_ Himself, however, a \_\_\_\_\_ was \_\_\_\_\_ into all \_\_\_\_\_. Its \_\_\_\_\_, as \_\_\_\_\_ in all the peoples of the \_\_\_\_\_, are now \_\_\_\_\_ before thee. The \_\_\_\_\_ which the \_\_\_\_\_ have uttered, the profoundest \_\_\_\_\_ which any \_\_\_\_\_ hath unfolded, the \_\_\_\_\_ which the ablest \_\_\_\_\_ have produced, the \_\_\_\_\_ exerted by the most \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ are but \_\_\_\_\_ of the quickening \_\_\_\_\_ released by His \_\_\_\_\_, His \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ Spirit.

## **SECTION 2: `Abdu'l-Baha glorifies Christ**

**♥ See Flipchart p. 11 & 12**

### **Group Activity:**

Imagine that you (as a Baha'i) receive a letter from a friend who you have been teaching the faith to and now he tells you that he/she has now become a dedicated Christian and is more involved in the activities of the church. What would you reply? Discuss in small groups for a few minutes.

Then read `Abdu'l-Bahá's reply to a similar letter when a lady wrote that she was a Christian.

*"Thou didst begin thy letter with a blessed phrase, saying: 'I am a Christian. ' O would that all were truly Christian! It is easy to be a Christian on the tongue, but hard to be a true one. Today some five hundred million souls are Christian, but the real Christian is very*

*rare: he is that soul from whose comely face there shineth the splendour of Christ, and who showeth forth the perfections of the Kingdom; this is a matter of great moment, for to be a Christian is to embody every excellence there is. I hope that thou, too, shalt become a true Christian.*" (Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Baha, p.29)

Often in his talks, Abdu'l-Bahá reflects on the "divine love of Christ" who prayed for the people who were about to execute Him. Baha'is could use the same example when they are teaching.

*"Read the Gospels". "Jesus Christ was mercy itself, was love itself. He even prayed in behalf of His executioners -- for those who crucified Him -- saying, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." If they knew what they were doing, they would not have done it. Consider how kind Jesus Christ was, that even upon the cross He prayed for His oppressors."*  
(`Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 42)

1. Jesus prayed on behalf of His executioners saying:

---

2. What was the attitude of Christ towards His executioners? \_\_\_\_\_

*"We should always remember the magnetic figure of 'Abdu'l-Baha, the Centre of the Covenant, the Mystery of God, the perfect Exemplar, Whose unerring interpretation of the Holy Texts and luminous examples of their application to personal conduct shed light on a way of life we must strive diligently to follow."*

(Messages of the Universal House of Justice, Ridvan 144, 1987)

`Abdu'l-Baha appealed to the peoples of Europe and America to follow Jesus Christ's teachings sincerely. He emphasized Jesus love for humanity and called for peace. He wove bonds of friendship between Jews, Christians and Muslims. He urged Jews to accept Christ and spoke about Muhammad's praise of Christ and the Gospel.

He removed the apprehensions of the Christians when He spoke of Jesus as "the perfect example of love" as a "divine mercy" as "One who had come in the World through the power of God", "born of the holy Spirit and of the blessed Mary" and whose reality "came from heaven". The word Christ was given a new meaning by `Abdu'l-Baha. He didn't speak about Christ of the churches but the reality of Christ which is "the Eternal Word of God". Sometimes He referred to Jesus Christ as "the Spirit of God", the "Essence of the Word itself", "the Sun of Reality", "the Sacred and Divine Light", the "Source or Dayspring of Divine knowledge", a "Perfect Example of Love", and many other terms.

The Master refers to the teachings of the Gospel as the "glorious" and "wondrous melodies of the Gospel". He mentions and praises Peter, Paul and the disciples. `Abdu'l-Baha refers to Mary Magdalene as a woman of great faith, bringing the disciples together after the crucifixion of Jesus and restoring their Faith in Christ. He affirms that Jesus offered Himself "*as a ransom for the life of this world*", and that He gave His life "in order to guide the world of mankind".

Practice sharing the following sayings of the Master with your Christian friends (in pairs) explaining that they are fulfilling the prophecies in the Bible that: "*He shall testify of me*". (John 15: 26) and "*He shall glorify me*" (John 16: 14)

♥ See Flipchart p. 11 & 12

1. "*The reality of Christ is the collective center of all the independent virtues and infinite significances. ...*" (Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 98)
2. "*But Christ, Who is the Word of God, sacrificed Himself*" (Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 120)

3. *“Therefore, the Reality of Christ, Who is the Word of God, with regard to essence, attributes and glory, certainly precedes the creatures”.*  
(Abdu’l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 116)
4. *“The position of Christ was that of absolute perfection; He made His divine perfections shine like the sun upon all believing souls, and the bounties of the light shone and radiated in the reality of men. “*  
(Abdu’l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 121)
5. *“The reality of Christ was the embodiment of divine virtues and attributes of God ”*  
(Abdu’l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 98)
6. *“Adam is the cause of man's physical life; but the Reality of Christ -- that is to say, the Word of God -- is the cause of spiritual life.”*  
(Abdu’l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 119)

**Note:**

As the Master recognized the widespread acceptance of Christianity in the West, He often spoke about the spiritual Reality of Christ but of course the same spiritual Reality is manifest in all the Manifestations of God.

Abdu’l-Baha confirmed that the Reality of all the Manifestations of God is the Word of God. He said:

*“Therefore, the reality of prophethood, which is the Word of God and the perfect state of manifestation, did not have any beginning and will not have any end; its rising is different from all others and is like that of the sun. For example, its dawning in the sign of Christ was with the utmost splendor and radiance, and this is eternal and everlasting.”*

(Abdu’l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 152)

**EXERCISES:**

Fill in the missing words.

1. “But \_\_\_\_\_, Who is the Word of \_\_\_\_\_, sacrificed \_\_\_\_\_”
2. “ Adam is the \_\_\_\_\_-of man’s \_\_\_\_\_ life; but the \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ- that is to say, the Word \_\_\_\_\_ - is the cause of spiritual life “
3. ”The reality of \_\_\_\_\_ was the \_\_\_\_\_ of divine \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ - of God. “
4. The \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ was that of \_\_\_\_\_; He made His divine \_\_\_\_\_ shine like the \_\_\_\_\_ upon all \_\_\_\_\_ souls, and the \_\_\_\_\_ of the light shone and \_\_\_\_\_ in the reality of \_\_\_\_\_.
5. “Therefore, the \_\_\_\_\_ Christ, Who is the Word of \_\_\_\_\_, with regard to essence, \_\_\_\_\_ and glory, certainly \_\_\_\_\_ the creatures.”

**EXERCISES:**

Complete the sentences below according to your own choice: {see example (a)}

- a) The reality of Christ: is the Word of God
- b) The reality of Christ is: \_\_\_\_\_
- c) The reality of Christ Who: \_\_\_\_\_

## UNIT 2: HOW TO SHARE THE MESSAGE

### PURPOSE:

- To increase insight into how Abdu'l-Baha taught Christians in a non-confrontational way using wisdom.
- To learn to follow the example of the Master
- To use role plays to learn “how to remove apprehensions”
- To use role-plays to learn skills to answer typical questions that Christians ask

### SECTION 1: Approach to sharing the Message

This section discusses how to share the Message.

*“There are innumerable ways of teaching the Cause. You can choose the one that suits best your nature and capacity”* (Shoghi Effendi, *The Individual and Teaching*, p. 45)

As every person is different, the way to teach that person is also different. But all of us can become better teachers by studying the perfect example of `Abdu'l-Baha.

*“Let him remember the example set by Abdu'l-Bahá, and His constant admonition to shower such kindness upon the seeker, and exemplify to such a degree the spirit of the teachings he hopes to instill into him, that the recipient will be spontaneously impelled to identify himself with the Cause embodying such teachings.”*

(Shoghi Effendi, *Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 52)

`Abdu'l-Baha explains how humility is necessary to be an effective teacher:

*“In accordance with the divine teachings in this glorious dispensation we should not belittle anyone and call him ignorant, saying: ‘You know not, but I know’. Rather, we should look upon others with respect, and when attempting to explain and demonstrate, we should speak as if we are investigating the truth, saying: ‘Here these things are before us. Let us investigate to determine where and in what form the truth can be found.’ The teacher should not consider himself as learned and others ignorant. Such a thought breedeth pride, and pride is not conducive to influence. The teacher should not see in himself any superiority; he should speak with the utmost kindness, lowliness and humility, for such speech exerteth influence and educateth the souls.”*

(Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha p. 29-30)

1. In accordance with the divine teachings what should we not do? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. In this glorious dispensation what should we not say? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. How should we look upon others? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. When attempting to explain and demonstrate, how should we speak? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. And what should we say? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. And what should such a thought of breed of considering oneself as learned and others as ignorant breed? \_\_\_\_\_

---

7. What should the teacher not see in himself? \_\_\_\_\_

---

8. How should the teacher speak? \_\_\_\_\_

---

9. What should such speech do? \_\_\_\_\_

---

### True or False:

When we teach we should make it clear from the beginning that only we have the truth and that the seeker does not True  False

Teaching is to help the seeker to find the truth together True  False

The teacher is the learned one – the others are ignorant True  False

The teacher is always superior. True  False

### Story:

Read the following story which illustrates why *“pride is not conducive to influence”*. Once upon a time a tribe was living in a deep valley where no day-light could penetrate. One day a person found a flashlight. He switched it on and now he was able to find a path out of the deep dark valley. While he was climbing he looked backwards. Hundreds of people were following him. He became very proud and thought: full of pride: “I am so important. That’s why people follow me.” At that moment, he dropped the flash-light. It went out, and rolled down the hill. But another person took the flash-light, and continued climbing. The proud person was left behind in the dark.

## SECTION 2: The importance of listening

Abdu’l-Baha always respectfully showed his love for Christ, His teachings and the Bible. He never diminished or lowered the station of Christ. Instead he told his Christian audience about Christ as being much greater and more universal than Christians ever imagined. Using Abdu’l-Baha’s guidance, we can learn how to create a “Christian friendly environment” which will attract traditional Christians to investigate the faith and enter into the study circle program.

The Master compares a Baha’i teacher to a good physician, who first listens, than asks a few questions to clarify what he had heard and then prescribes the suitable medicine:

***“First diagnose the disease and identify the malady, then prescribe the remedy, for such is the perfect method of the skilful physician.”*** (Abdu’l-Baha, SWAB, p. 269)

When we study the Master’s approach, we often find when He meets a seeker; he often would use the following three steps:

- First He would listen
- Second he would “validate” what the person had told him. To validate conversations means to let the person know what he told you is important and that it was worth sharing with you.
- Thirdly he would explain - gradually helping the person to find the truth.

The following examples show different attitudes of teachers. Classify these “attitudes” into different columns marked acceptable and not acceptable by putting a ✓ in the column which you select.

	ACCEPTABLE	NOT ACCEPTABLE
1. The Baha'i teacher listens attentively when the seeker expresses his/her ideas.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The teacher suits his answer to the needs of the seeker	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The teacher speaks for three hours non-stop telling everything he knows. Note: Ruhiyih Khanum laughingly said: The seeker asks us for a drop of the 'water of life' and we turn the fire hose on him!	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Before prescribing the remedy the teacher first silently turns his heart to the Concourse on High asking for Divine Assistance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. When the seeker gives an answer which is not in agreement with the Baha'i teachings, the teacher stops the seeker and corrects him in an argumentative way.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I always use the confrontational method to convince the Christians that they are wrong. (win-lose situation)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Very few people are good listeners. To develop the skill of becoming a good listener, read the story how the Master listened. This story is taken from the eyewitness accounts of a Unitarian Minister, Howard Colby Ives, in his book 'Portals to Freedom'. It shows the power of the Master teaching in America.

**THE MASTER'S ABILITY TO LISTEN:**

"Another characteristic always apparent was His silence. ... His encouragement always was that the other should speak and He listen. There was never that eager tenseness, that restlessness so often met showing most plainly that the listener has the pat answer ready the moment he should have a chance to utter it.

I have heard certain people described as "good listeners," but never had I imagined such a "listener" as 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It was more than a sympathetic absorption of what the ear received. It was as though the two individualities became one; as if He so closely identified Himself with the one speaking that a merging of spirits occurred which made a verbal response almost unnecessary, superfluous. As I write, the words of Bahá'u'lláh recur to me: "A servant is drawn unto Me in prayer until I answer him; and when I have answered him, I become the ear wherewith he heareth" That was just it! 'Abdu'l-Bahá seemed to listen with my ears..."

(Howard Colby Ives Portals to Freedom, p: 194, 95).

**Suggested activity to demonstrate the importance of active listening:**

**Material needed:** For this demonstration we need two cups or glasses, named cup B and C. Pour water in these two cups, so that they are completely full. It is useful to have a jug or any kind of container to refill the cups later during the demonstration.

**The symbolism:** Cup C (full of water) The meaning of the cup being full of water means that the devout Christian feels that he has all the knowledge and there is nothing more to learn.  
Cup B represents a Baha'i who also is full of knowledge and he is ready to teach this knowledge to any seeker.  
The meaning of "pouring out the water" from a cup is "to teach"  
The meaning of "receiving water" is active listening or receiving what the other person tells you.

**Purpose:** To demonstrate that it is essential to listen to the other before explaining. This demonstration helps us to become more attentive to the needs of the seeker.

One of the participants puts the two cups full of water on a tray for the demonstration

**SCENARIO 1: The Baha'i speaks and the devout Christian has no choice but to listen.**

Such a situation is demonstrated by the pouring of water from cup B or the Baha'i cup into cup C. Of course nothing is retained as the water simply overflows. Participants can see that a full cup cannot receive any more water.

**Discussion:** Pouring the water from cup B into cup C is not very helpful as it overflows. The same could happen in real life. The Baha'i speaks too much, giving all his knowledge but the devout Christian doesn't listen actively as he/she is filled up with their own ideas and needs to empty their cup before the Baha'i can fill it with the 'water of life', that is the Baha'i teachings!

**Conclusion:** Such a dialogue is not efficient. When teaching, be always aware of the needs of the seeker. Often the seeker likes to talk first. Have patience and show love and consideration and listen!

**SCENARIO 2: The Christian speaks and the Baha'i listen actively.**

The only way to "fill up cup C" is to remove some water first! This process of removing "water" symbolizes the process of attentive, active listening. Once it is empty it is ready to be filled up. Only when some space is created in cup C it is possible to refill the cup.

**Discussion:** In a similar way most people are filled up with their own ideas and need to empty their cup before you can begin to fill it with the 'water of life', that is the Baha'i teachings! The same could happen in real life, if the seeker is allowed to speak first and the Baha'i listens attentively. After the seeker has said what he/she wanted to say, the time has come for the Baha'i to start speaking. This time the conversation is more effective.

**Conclusion:** By allowing the seeker to speak, space has been created to add more knowledge. This shows that "listening" is extremely important and is not a waste of time!

**SCENARIO 3: The position of the cup is also important**

There are many concepts which can be demonstrated with a simple empty cup, held in the hand. (Do the demonstration)

Reflect that only a cup which is "standing up" will be able to receive the water of life fully. Demonstrate that when a cup is upside down, the water spills down the sides and is wasted.

We can also consider a situation where the seeker is first willing to listen (cup standing up) but our explanations create so many barriers that the seeker stops to listen. In such a case the position of the cup is changed from upright to upside down.

In reality we find that many people can be compared with cups which are not standing up or are upside down, but instead these cups are lying on their side or are in horizontal position - i.e. neither for nor against - just neutral. In this case our explanations of the Faith (and our deeds!) can either attract the friends to the Faith or in extreme cases turn them away.

### SECTION 3: Validating the speaker

After listening to the seeker, we should “validate” him. To validate means to let the seeker explicitly know that we “value” his/her contribution to the conversation. We can only “validate” the seeker if we have truly listened to him/her!

Definitely do not offend the person by telling him he is wrong or by attacking his belief or his church. If you do this he will immediately close his mind and heart to what you have to offer. As soon as you use the word no! -- no! to the devil, no! to heaven and hell, then you can't open any new doors for him to learn and grow.

`Abdu'l-Baha tells us:

***“Turn all your thoughts toward bringing joy to hearts. Beware! Beware! lest ye offend any heart “.***  
(Abdu'l-Baha, P.U.P, p. 453)

However, to validate somebody doesn't mean that you have to “mindlessly” agree with everything the “seeker” tells you. To validate or to acknowledge their contribution means to keep the door open and affirm the person on his present level of spiritual understanding. Always keep your purpose in mind that is to teach the Faith, not to oppose the seekers repetition of interpretation of religion that does not make sense.

Look at the example of how `Abdu'l-Baha taught. He would listen to all manners of trivial statements, then He would say in the kindest of tones how it was good, but then He would show the seeker how to look at it in a slightly different way, and very gently He would lead the seeker to a new understanding.

### SECTION 4: How to explain

After validating the seeker, and not making him feel uncomfortable about his lack of understanding, it is now time to explain!

Baha'u'llah tells us how to “explain”

***“The Great Being saith: One word may be likened unto fire, another unto light, and the influence which both exert is manifest in the world. Therefore an enlightened man of wisdom should primarily speak with words as mild as milk, that the children of men may be nurtured and edified thereby and may attain the ultimate goal of human existence which is the station of true understanding and nobility.”***  
(Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p: 173)

1. What may words be likened to? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Where do these words manifest their influence? [Manifest means to make known, to appear] \_\_\_\_\_
3. With what type of words should an enlightened man of wisdom primarily speak? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Why should an enlightened man of wisdom speak with words as mild as milk? \_\_\_\_\_

### Activity:

Purpose: To learn to look at teaching situations from the point of view of a Christian.

Form pairs:

- ❖ Discuss with your partner if the statements below could be considered as words of milk or fire when we are introducing the Faith to a devout Christian. Underline for example: (milk/fire) or (milk/fire)
- ❖ Please note that some of the statements or the concepts could be correct. The problem is that some of those statements could become a barrier for a devout Christian. Therefore we have to learn to look at situations from the standpoint of

a seeker

- ❖ Try to put yourself in the position of a Christian who is asking questions and discuss the impression which the following explanations given by a Baha'i would have on a devout Christian.
- ❖ Discuss if the explanation given by the Baha'i would encourage a Christian to further investigate the Faith.
- ❖ Suggest if necessary a better alternative statement. Later in the course we will discuss in detail better alternative answers.

1. Jesus is a Prophet, same as Moses and Mohammed. (milk/fire)
2. Jesus is not the Son of God. God has no sons! (milk/fire)
3. The trinity is man-made dogma. No explanation is given. (milk/fire)
4. The Bible is symbolic. It is just a collection of stories. (milk/fire)
5. Baha'is take the Bible very seriously and try to understand its meaning. (milk/fire)
6. Christ's teachings still exist to-day. (milk/fire)
7. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is just a symbol. It didn't happen at all. No explanation is given. (milk/fire)
8. Baha'u'llah came to replace Christ. Jesus time is finished now. This is the time for Baha'u'llah! (milk/fire)
9. The words of Jesus are the Words of God. (milk/fire)
10. Every religion has an expiry date! (milk/fire)
11. The devil and hell doesn't exist. (milk/fire)
12. As Baha'is we believe that Jesus is the Son of God and Baha'u'llah's title is the Glory of God. Baha'u'llah praises Christ and exalts His Cause. Christ is "the image of the invisible God" and to deny Christ is to "deny the Face of God" Even if a Baha'i is from Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim background he must believe in Christ. Nobody can be a Baha'i if he doesn't believe in Jesus. If you like I can share with you some of the quotations what the Baha'i writing tell about Christ. (milk/fire)
13. Baha'i Faith is an independent religion with its own founder Baha'u'llah, its own Holy Books, its own administration. (milk/fire)

## **Section 5: How to remove apprehensions**

Abdu'l-Baha tells us to try to remove any fear or misgivings in the initial stage of teaching;  
*"The friends of God should weave bonds of fellowship with others and show absolute love and affection towards them. These links have a deep influence on people and they will listen. When the friends sense receptivity to the Word of God, they should deliver the Message with wisdom. They must first try and remove any apprehensions in the people they teach ..."*

(Abdu'l-Bahá, The Individual and Teaching: Raising the Divine Call, p. 12)

Questions:

1. Which two steps should be followed when introducing the Faith?

2. How will you “weave bonds of friendship” in your environment? Make suggestions which could later be part of your personal teaching plan.

3. When you were teaching devout Christians, which fears or apprehensions did you notice?

### **Activity:**

**Purpose:** To learn to become more sensitive for the needs of the Christian you would like to share the Message with.

**Requirements:** For this activity you need two cups or any other object and a blank sheet of paper  
a) Circulate the blank paper amongst participants. Each participant writes down one apprehension or fear which Christians have when meeting Baha’is. Feel free to use the examples given below as a guideline or to add whatever you feel is important.

#### Examples for guidance only

1. Fear of associating with an unknown “non-Christian Cult, an Eastern Religion, New Age, branch of Islam or associating with those who have not understood the Bible or been touched by the Spirit.
2. Fear that Baha’u’llah could be a false prophet, Anti-Christ, the Devil, or 666.
3. Fear of loosing privilege of being saved as only those who believe in Christ will be saved.
4. Fear of hell
5. Fear that “non-Christians’ will diminish the uniqueness of Christ’s Station
6. Fear of diminishing the uniqueness of Christ’s Power (Miracles, Resurrection on judgment day, to raise Himself from the dead, etc.)
7. Fear for religious leaders, family and friends who will criticize their association with Baha’is which is looked on as an Eastern Religion, New Age, branch of Islam.
8. Fear of replacing a personal relationship with the Lord and Savior with an unknown person called Baha’u’llah.
9. Fear of being misled by the devil.
10. Fear of: (fill in other ideas) \_\_\_\_\_

#### Demonstration:

Once the participants had put the list of fears on the sheet of paper we can proceed with the following demonstration.

#### **Purpose:**

Often during a teaching conversation we are aware that there is a veil of misunderstandings, fear, doubt between people from different religions. This veil has to be removed first before we can teach the person.

The question of how to remove the veil is the purpose of this exercise.

#### **Preparation for activity**

Two participants sit opposite each other - one is the Baha’i and the other the Christian.

A third person lowers the barrier (the paper with all the fears, misunderstandings and differences written on it).

- The paper is used as an obstacle separating the two people
- **Activity:** Participants reflect now on the question: How can we get through that barrier of “apprehensions”? After listening to the suggestions, one of the participants shows that the best way is for the Baha’i to move around the obstacle and sit next to the Christian, looking at the obstacle from his standpoint. Only when they have a common vision of the problems will they be able to remove the obstacle.
- (In the demonstration both the Christian and the Baha’i roll up the paper TOGETHER)

## Section 6: Questions Christians ask and Baha’i answers

Each role-play requires four people, one Christian, two Baha’is and one “evaluator” to initiate the discussion and read the comments or observations.

Of course, these answers are only suggestions. Often they are “exaggerated” as this will help to understand in which way the answers could be more effective. It is important first to listen carefully to the seeker so that the answer can be adapted according to the requirements of the seeker. The seeker will most likely forget your words but he/she will never forget your attitude!! These are some of the most frequently asked questions by Christian seekers. Therefore sharing the Message with Christians should be relatively easy as the same questions come back repeatedly. (We would like to acknowledge the contribution of Gary Matthews, a well known author and manager of Stonehaven Publishing Trust, who gave permission to use some of the following material in this section)

### QUESTION 1: Do Baha’is believe in Jesus Christ?

#### ♥ Use Flipchart 5&6 and 7 &8

#### Typical answer:

“Yes, Baha’is believe in Jesus. Jesus was a Prophet. Other Prophets are: Abraham, Moses, Muhammad. There is no difference between any of the Prophets. Baha’is call this ‘progressive revelation’. The Prophet for today is Baha’u’llah”

Participants reflect: (initiated by “evaluator”) *Is this an effective answer? Explain why or why not? Any suggestions how to improve?*

#### Observation:

The Baha’i didn’t listen to the question. He just gives his “pat answer” To call Christ a Prophet is “an insult” to most Christians as this puts Christ on the same level as the other Messengers of God. There is a big difference between Baha’i and Christian understanding of the meaning of the word ‘*Prophet*’. To many Christians, a Prophet is often a person who foretells the future e.g. Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Daniel. Again, the word ‘same’ gives the impression that Christ is identical with Moses and Muhammed. Christians do not accept this. It is also incorrect from the Baha’i point of view.

As Christians are not familiar with the word “station” it might be better to say initially that all the “Divine Messengers” of God come from one source, which is the One God. There is only One God, One Cause. All Messengers of God are Divine Educators working for One and the same Cause.

*“Thus He saith: "Our Cause is but One." In as much as the Cause is one and the same, the Exponents thereof also must needs be one and the same.”*

(Baha’u’llah, *The Book of Certitude*, p. 153)

#### Short answer (effective)

Yes, Baha’is believe in the “Sonship and Divinity” of the Lord Jesus Christ!

#### Alternative answer (effective):

Baha’is believe that Christ is exactly as told in the Gospels. This Baha’i belief is based

on reason. We believe that Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Christ is the same yesterday, today and to-morrow. The spirit of Christ is eternal.

The Jews were expecting the Messiah to come as already promised by Moses: *“The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken;”* (Deuteronomy 18:15).

The word “Messiah” is a Hebrew title, which means “Anointed one” for example David was anointed by God as a king. The title “Christos” has the same meaning in the Greek language.

Jews are still waiting for their Messiah to come. But we know that He came already. We use his Greek title, **“the Christ”** because he was anointed by God as the “King of Kings”.

**Participants reflect:** (initiated by “evaluator”) **Is this an effective answer? Explain why or why not? Any suggestions how to improve?**

**Comments:**

In the first sentence the Baha’i establishes his belief in Christ and the Gospels. This creates a bond between the speaker and the listener. Fundamentally they share the same belief. Only the interpretation is different. Both believe that Christ’s spirit is eternal. The Baha’i then explains if time permits the historical origin of the title Christ.

**QUESTION 2: Do Baha’is believe that Christ is the Son of God?**

♥ **Use Flipchart p. 7 & 8 and Flipchart p. 9 & 10**

**Typical answer**

“Well, yes, sort of; but you can’t take that literally. The expression ‘Son of God’ is just a title which means that Jesus and God had a close relationship like a father and son.

**Participants reflect:** (initiated by “evaluator”) **Is this an effective answer? Explain why or why not? Any suggestions how to improve?**

**Observation:**

For Christians the belief that Jesus is the Son of God is a question of ‘going to heaven’ or ‘going to hell’. For most Christians the term ‘not literally’ means ‘symbolically’ or ‘lack of belief’. The lack of enthusiasm in the above response gives the feeling that Baha’is are ‘watering down’ the importance of the ‘Sonship of Christ’. This is a wrong interpretation not based on Baha’i teachings.. The beloved Guardian, Shoghi Effendi states: *“As to the position of Christianity, let it be stated without any hesitation or equivocation that its divine origin is unconditionally acknowledged, that the Sonship and Divinity of Jesus Christ are fearlessly asserted, that the divine inspiration of the Gospel is fully recognize.”* (Promised Day is Come, p. 109)

**Alternative answer**

Yes, Baha’is believe that Jesus is the Son of God as it is confirmed in the Holy Bible. When Jesus asked the disciples who He was, Peter said, *“...Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* (Matthew 16:16) Then Jesus confirmed Peter’s understanding with: *flesh and blood hath not revealed [it] unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.”* (Matthew 16:17).

**Participants reflect:** (initiated by “evaluator”) **Is this an effective answer? Explain why or why not? Any suggestions how to improve?**

**Comment:**

By using the authority of the Bible, we show that we love the Bible and that also the

Baha'is believe in the divinity of Christ, the Son of God.

### QUESTION 3: But do Baha'is believe that Jesus is God?

#### ♥ Use Flipchart p. 3 & 4

##### Typical answer

No, of course not, there is only one God. We call Jesus a Manifestation of God.

**Participants reflect:** (initiated by “evaluator”) **Is this an effective answer? Explain why or why not? Any suggestions how to improve?**

##### Observation:

The Baha'i Faith tells us that we should never argue about a divine question, and if two people argue, both are wrong. By saying no you are creating a barrier, and they will probably switch off or argue with you.

It is correct to use the word “Manifestation of God” but only if time permits to explain what you mean! First explain that “manifest” is a difficult word which means “to appear”. So God “appeared” in Jesus in the same way as the sun appears in a perfect mirror. It is impossible to see the difference between the perfect reflection of the sun in the perfect mirror and the sun itself.

The Christians don't have a clear understanding of the role of the Manifestation i.e. if you ask them who is Christ for them, they will answer either that He is God or He is the Son of God. Expanding their understanding about the title Christ can lead to expanding their understanding of the role of a Manifestation.

##### Short answer: (effective)

- Yes, the Bible tells us that Christ is the image of the invisible God as St. Paul explains in his letters. (II Cor. 3:18).
- Yes. Baha'is believe that Jesus is the “*Lord of the visible and the invisible* (GI p.56) and “*The Lord of all being*”. The Bible tells us Jesus is the “*image of the invisible God*” Baha'u'llah tells us that those people who deny Christ have denied the face of God. Jesus Christ had a dual nature. He has a human and a divine nature.

-

##### Alternative answer:

With genuine courtesy ask the Christian: “what does Jesus say in the holy Bible?” (This stops arguments)

Let us look together at the Bible. Doesn't it say; “*Before Abraham was, I am*” (John 8:58). What does this mean? It is impossible that Jesus in the flesh existed before Abraham. We all know that he was born in Bethlehem to his mother Mary. Therefore Jesus must be speaking about the spiritual reality of Christ, who is eternal.

Baha'i also believe that the “Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

When we study the Bible, we see that sometimes Jesus speaks as a man, and sometimes as God.

For example:

“...*The Father that dwelled in me, he doeth the work.*” (John 14:10) and

“...*My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.*” (John 7:16)

“*Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do...*” (John 5:19)

“*I come forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.*” (John 16:28)

“...*I and (my) Father are one*” (John 10:13)

The Bible solves this problem of the dual nature of Christ by explaining that Christ is the

image of the invisible God. (Col 1:15), and that we can see this image as in a mirror (see II Cor 3:18).

When you put a mirror in the sunlight, then you can see the sun in the mirror.

If anybody tells us: "I can see the sun in the mirror", he is correct. If he points that the sky and says, "I can see the sun" he is correct also.

Are there two suns? No, of course not. In one way you can say: the Sun is in the mirror or No, the Sun is not in the mirror, it is up in the sky!

In the same way Jesus made two opposite statements: "...*he that hath seen me hath seen the Father*" (John 14:9) and "*And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape.*" (John 5:37)

So in one sense we can say Jesus and the father are One, in another sense Jesus and the Father are different! This shows that we cannot argue about divine questions.

**Participants reflect: (initiated by "evaluator") Is this an effective answer? Explain why or why not? Any suggestions how to improve?**

**Comments:**

This answer demonstrates that Baha'is have a great love and respect for the Bible. The Baha'i example is explained in biblical language. Baha'is believe in the Universal Christ, who always has provided spiritual guidance for mankind.

(See Part 3 for relevant drawings and how Baha'i writings praise Christ)

**QUESTION 4: Do Baha'is believe in the Trinity?**

♥ Use Flipchart p.13, 14, 15, 16.

**Typical answer**

"No, the Baha'is do not believe in the Trinity. It is not in the teachings of Jesus. The trinity is just a man-made idea"

**Participants reflect: (initiated by "evaluator") Is this an effective answer? Explain why or why not? Any suggestions how to improve?**

**Observation:**

Such a negative answer only confuses the Christian. It doesn't open a new door of understanding. Abdu'l-Baha explains the meaning of Trinity using reason. (See Some Answered Questions)

**Alternative answer**

Baha'is believe in the spiritual reality of the Trinity. The dogma of the Trinity was established in AD 325 at the Council of NICEA to put an end to the fighting between church leaders. Some believed Jesus was a man, and others believed Jesus was God. The Trinity was a compromise to establish who was right and who was wrong.

This dogma has confused Christians for centuries.

Baha'is believe in the fundamental principle of the Oneness of God. Baha'is are using an analogy which confirms the spiritual reality of the Trinity without compromising the fundamental principle of the oneness of God. This analogy is completely in accordance with the Bible

God could be compared to the sun. The sun does not come down to earth to give its light. No, if the sun came down to earth, everything would be destroyed. It's the sun's rays that bring the light and heat of the sun. The sun's rays could be compared to the Holy Spirit, and Christ is the Divine reflection in the perfect mirror. We cannot separate the sun from

the sun rays, or from its divine reflection, in the same way we cannot separate God the Father, from God the Son, or from God the Holy Spirit. From one point of view, these three are the same, from another they are different. That's why Jesus says: "***I and [my] Father are one***" (John 10:30)

**Participants reflect:** (initiated by "evaluator") **Is this an effective answer? Explain why or why not? Any suggestions how to improve?**

**Comments:**

First the belief in spiritual Trinity is confirmed. If necessary the historical origin is discussed to show that this isn't a teaching directly from Jesus. Then it is confirmed that Baha'is believe in fundamental principle of Oneness of God. Baha'is do believe in reflection not in "incarnation" ("carne" means flesh)

Abdu'l-Baha explains:

*The Divine Reality is sanctified from singleness, then how much more from plurality. The descent of that Lordly Reality into conditions and degrees would be equivalent to imperfection and contrary to perfection, and is, therefore, absolutely impossible. It perpetually has been, and is, in the exaltation of holiness and sanctity. All that is mentioned of the Manifestations and Dawning-places of God signifies the divine reflection, and not a descent into the conditions of existence.[1]* (S. A. Q., p. 113 )

A short explanation using the analogy is given.

To believe in "incarnation" is non-biblical. Just reflect on following verses: "***God is a Spirit***" (John 4:24) "***...that which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.***" (John 3:6)

Therefore, if Christ is born of God, who is a spirit, then Christ's Sonship must be a spiritual Sonship, because that which is born of spirit is spirit!

**QUESTION 5: Do Baha'is believe in the Bible?**

♥ See Flipchart p. 31 & 32

**Typical answer**

Well, sort of, but we don't take it literally. It is a collection of stories written over thousands of years.

**Participants reflect:** (initiated by "evaluator") **Is this an effective answer? Explain why or why not? Any suggestions how to improve?**

**Observation:**

The Christian may interpret the answer "not take it literally" as meaning not taking it seriously, and may think that the Baha'i is are denying the divine inspiration of the Bible.

**Alternative answer:**

Definitely. The Baha'i teachings refer to both the Old and the New Testaments as "the Word of God" and state that "the divine inspiration of the Gospel is fully recognized". The Bible and its divine authority are glorified throughout the teachings of Baha'u'llah. Baha'is love Christ and the Bible. Baha'is take the Bible very seriously.

**Participants reflect:** (initiated by "evaluator") **Is this an effective answer? Explain why or why not? Any suggestions how to improve?**

## **QUESTION 6: Why do I need anyone else but my beloved Jesus?**

♥ See Flipchart p. 61 & 62

### **Typical answer**

Jesus time is finished now it is the time for Baha'u'llah

**Participants reflect:** (initiated by “evaluator”) **Is this an effective answer? Explain why or why not? Any suggestions how to improve?**

### **Observation:**

We are putting Jesus down in the Christian's eyes. It looks like we are saying that Jesus is not perfect and that Baha'u'llah came to correct the mistakes made by Jesus.

### **Alternative answer:**

This is a very good question. Our love for Jesus only increases when we understand the Baha'i teachings. It is only when we experience the spiritual reality of the Universal Christ that we will find that same reality reflected in Baha'u'llah. Of course, this takes time and therefore Baha'u'llah has asked everybody to investigate truth for himself. This same instruction is given by our beloved Christ when He says: *“Seek and ye shall find, knock and the door will be opened”* (Matt. 7:7) How can we not obey such an explicit teaching of Christ!

**Participants reflect:** (initiated by “evaluator”) **Is this an effective answer? Explain why or why not? Any suggestions how to improve?**

### **Comment:**

In speaking in this gentle way, with the needs of the receptive soul in mind, (not just thinking of our needs as a teacher to offload all the information we have), all we are doing is removing the barriers that prevent the Christian from coming to his true beloved in His new form. If the receptive soul inquires further and is actively seeking more information, then the way is opened to prescribe the correct remedy that is required by them from the ocean of Baha'u'llah's teachings.

### **Note:**

Always at the end of the dialogue, humbly ask for permission from the seeker to tell a little more about Baha'u'llah and His Teachings.

You can then explain that Baha'u'llah is indeed the Prince of Peace, foretold in Isaiah 9:6-7. In the time of Jesus people were not ready for world peace. It is the will of God that world peace will now be established, and therefore He sent Baha'u'llah to bring the people together, and establish the Kingdom of God on Earth. Isn't this what Christians have always been waiting for, and are praying for the last 2000 years?

*“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”* (Matt 6:10)

### **EXERCISE:**

To improve our skills to share the Message with Christians, you have read some role-play with prepared script. This is only a beginning as of course in real life many questions and answers are possible. (Many other questions as for example end of the world, false prophets etc are discussed in detail in Christianity Renewed Volume 1 -2 and 3 by Maxwell Alexander published by BPT of India or on the website [www.maxwellalexander.com](http://www.maxwellalexander.com) )

Practice is the key. To give you the opportunity to practice more, we would like you to answer the following questions with your own words. Whenever possible, use quotations from Sacred Writings in your reply. Never forget that the Word of God is the Master key to unlock the doors of the hearts of men. (see Book 6 page 26)

## UNIT 3: CHRISTIAN ISSUES

### PURPOSE:

- To discuss some of the most important Christian beliefs in the light of the Baha'i teachings.
- Differences are of terminology only.
- To learn to distinguish between teachings which Jesus gave and man-made ideas.
- To learn the necessary skills to give a presentation focusing on the oneness of Christianity and the Baha'i Faith.

### SECTION 1: Christian beliefs

There are more than 2.1 billion Christians in the world today and there are many variations in their beliefs. At present, the demarcations between the different denominations are slowly disappearing. The younger generation in particular is more attracted to the so-called trans-churches. They are called trans-churches as they "evangelize" through the media especially television and Christian bookstores.

#### Personal investigation of truth

As the Universal House of Justice says in its message "One Common Faith" p. 12: "***A reorientation occurring in all the major religious communities is the accelerating migration of believers from traditional branches of the parent faiths to sects that attach primary importance to the spiritual search and personal experiences of their members***" Some of these seekers know about the Baha'i Faith, but very few realize how their individual belief is often closer in spirit and substance to Bahá'u'lláh's teachings than they can imagine. By asking the seeker questions, by showing an interest in their beliefs, the Baha'i can then encourage him/her to start his personal investigation of truth. So don't be afraid to start. Look at the following list for openers to a conversation. By asking the seeker what do **you** think, you are asking about his/her personal opinion, not the official doctrine of the church.

- ❖ What do YOU think about Jesus title as Son of God?
- ❖ What do YOU think about the Bible?
- ❖ What do YOU think about the story of Adam and Eve?
- ❖ What do YOU think about the miracles of Moses?
- ❖ What do YOU think about Salvation, Heaven and Hell, the Ascension of Christ to heaven, the Return of Christ etc?

### SECTION 2: Man-made ideas

As Baha'is we believe in Christ but not the man-made ideas that have crept into the teachings of the churches. Shoghi Effendi wrote:

***"Our belief in Christ, as Baha'is, is so firm, so unshakable and so exalted in nature that very few Christians are to be found now-a-days who love Him and reverence Him and have the faith in Him that we have. It is only from the dogmas and creeds of the churches that we dissociate ourselves; not from the spirit of Christianity"*** (Lights of Guidance p.159)

Supply the missing words: "Our belief in \_\_\_\_\_ as \_\_\_\_\_ is so \_\_\_\_\_, so \_\_\_\_\_ and so \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ that very \_\_\_\_\_ are to be found now-a-days who \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in Him that we have. It is only from the \_\_\_\_\_ of the churches that we \_\_\_\_\_ ourselves; not from the \_\_\_\_\_ of Christianity"

1. What is our belief in Christ? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**What is a dogma?**

**“A dogma is a principle, tenet or teaching, especially an authoritative teaching, and in these senses it is apparent that the Faith has `dogmas’. The word is also used, however, to describe that body of rigid doctrines that have accumulated in a religion after the passing of the Founder; such man-made dogmas are entirely absent from the Baha’i Faith, nor can it ever acquire them”.** (Lights of Guidance p. 476)

1. What are the two meanings of the word “dogma”? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Does the Baha’i Faith have man-made dogma’s? \_\_\_\_\_

Abdu'l-Baha tells us why man-made dogma’s retard spiritual progress: **“They are universal Educators, and the fundamental principles they have laid down are the causes and factors of the advancement of nations. Forms and imitations which creep in afterward are not conducive to that progress. On the contrary, these are destroyers of human foundations established by the heavenly Educators. These are clouds which obscure the Sun of Reality. If you reflect upon the essential teachings of Jesus, you will realize that they are the light of the world. Nobody can question their truth. They are the very source of life and the cause of happiness to the human race. The forms and superstitions which appeared and obscured the light did not affect the reality of Christ”** (Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 86)

1. Why do Baha’is dissociate themselves from dogma’s (or doctrines) and creeds of the churches? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Which example from nature did the Master use to show the effect of dogma’s on the Reality of Christ? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Story about "the Wonder Lamp”**

*"In a far off land some pure hearted villagers found a beautiful radiant lamp which had the brightness of the sun. They loved the lamp very much and it became the center of their life. It was a time of light and happiness. One day a rich merchant came past the village. He saw the lamp and bought it saying that it needed a better place to show off its beauty. He took it to the town and decorated it to make it look more valuable. Initially thousands of people came to see the lamp. But the light seemed weaker, only half as bright. Then the King heard about the wonder lamp and He wanted it for his own, to be put on display in his palace. When he saw it, he said it was too humble for his grand palace and he told the goldsmiths to put precious jewels and gold around it.*

*Afterwards the light became much weaker, hidden behind all the ornaments covering it. Now very few people came to see the wonder lamp, because the attraction had been the wonderful light not the ornaments or veils that covered it. Then one night the light in the lamp went out. And there was darkness and unhappiness among the people until one day another wonder lamp appeared.”*

**Practice in pairs;** how you would use this story in your teaching work- explain, with wisdom, to your Christian friend about the addition of man-made ideas, or dogmas, to religion.

## SECTION 3: Jesus tells us “who He is”

### ♥ See Flipchart p. 3 & 4

In this section we will study “who is Jesus Christ”.

Baha’u’llah revealed in the Book of Certitude the dual nature of the Manifestations of God:

*“... since there can be no tie of direct intercourse to bind the one true God with His creation” God ordains that “in every age and dispensation a pure and stainless Soul be made manifest in the kingdoms of earth and heaven”. This “mysterious and ethereal Being”, the Manifestation of God, has a human nature which pertains to “the world of matter” and a spiritual nature “born of the substance of God Himself” (Baha’u’llah, The Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 233)*

1. Why did God ordain that in “every age and dispensation a pure and stainless Soul be made manifest in the kingdoms of earth and heaven?” \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What is the dual nature of the Manifestation of God? \_\_\_\_\_

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We will now give an example of how Abdu’l-Baha would answer questions using Christian terminology and such brilliant wisdom. During his visit to Paris, Abdu’l-Baha gave an interview for an audience composed of professors, clergy and theological students. To the questions regarding who is Christ, the beloved Master replied:

*“Our belief in regard to Christ is exactly what is recorded in the New Testament; however, we elucidate this matter and do not speak literally or in a manner based merely on blind belief.”*

(Abdu’l-Baha, Divine Philosophy, p. 147)

#### Exercise 1:

Supply the missing words or parts of words

In one sentence, Abdu’l-Baha explains:

- (a) that He is a believer in C \_\_\_\_\_
- (b) a believer in the N\_\_\_\_ T \_\_\_\_\_
- (c) that we do not speak \_\_\_\_\_ or in a \_\_\_\_\_ merely based on \_\_\_\_\_

#### Exercise 2:

**Purpose:** To learn to use the language of the Bible to explain the dual nature of God.

When we reflect upon the relationship between Jesus and God we must be aware that Jesus was born in the Jewish tradition. Religious Jews rarely mention the sacred word “God”.

Therefore Jesus refers to God as His Father.

Select from the following Bible verses where Jesus says that He is different from the Father or where he says that He is like the Father.

Verses from the New Testament	Son is different from father	Son is same as the father
1. <i>“The Son can do nothing of Himself but what He sees the Father do” (John 5:19)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. <i>“I go unto the Father for my Father is greater than I” (John 14: 28)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. <i>“The Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the work” (John 14:10)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. <i>"I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father"</i> (John 16:28)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. <i>"I and (my ) Father are one"</i> (John 10:30)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. <i>"...and the Father himself which hath sent me, hath born witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape"</i> (John 5:37)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. <i>"...he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father"</i> (John 14:9)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What is your conclusion? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Role-play:**

Form pairs. Two characters: Quddus.or Tahireh (Baha'i) and Joseph or Mary.(Christian)

**Purpose:** To become more familiar with the use of some biblical language in explaining the concept of the dual nature of Christ.

♥ **Use flipchart p. 3 &4**

**Scenario:**

Joseph: But Jesus says "I and the father are One" so how can you say that there is a difference between Jesus and God. They are the same.

Quddus: The Baha'i explains he believes "in Christ exactly as told in the New Testament" I have brought with me some verses in which Jesus tells us who He really is. Quddus uses drawing in flipchart (page 4) to explain in biblical language the dual nature of Jesus Christ.

**SECTION 4: Jesus, the Son of God**

♥ **Refer flipchart p. 5 &6**

What is the foundation of Christianity? The foundation of Christianity is the belief that "Christ is the Son of God". Most Christians are very familiar with the following text in which Jesus Himself asks his disciples who He is:

*"When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elias; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."*

*But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

*Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and death will not overcome it"* (Matt. 16:13-18)

Most denominations imagine that it their particular church which is built up the rock! However the Master explains that in this context "church" means "belief:"*and upon this rock I will build My church," meaning, thy belief that Christ is the Son of the living God will be the foundation of the Religion of God, and upon this belief the foundation of the church of God - which is the Law of God - shall be established"* ( Some Answered Questions, p. 135-137)

Also Paul says, **“For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ... “the rock was Christ.”** (1 Cor. 3:11 &10:4).

The Roman Catholic Church claims that Peter is the rock that the church is built on. They say that Peter is the first Pope who stands in the place of Christ.

Complete the following sentence:

"and upon \_\_\_\_\_ I will build \_\_\_\_\_," meaning, thy belief that \_\_\_\_\_ . will be the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Religion of God, and upon this belief the \_\_\_\_\_ of the church of God - which is \_\_\_\_\_ - shall be established."

One of the stumbling blocks in the dialogue with Christians is that some Baha'is are reluctant to use the title, "Son of God", when referring to Jesus. They fear that this could be taken in its physical meaning. However the Baha'i Writings ask us to fearlessly assert the "Sonship and Divinity of Jesus Christ."

***“As to the position of Christianity, let it be stated without any hesitation or equivocation that its Divine origin is unconditionally acknowledged, that the Sonship and Divinity of Jesus Christ are fearlessly asserted, that the Divine inspiration of the Gospel is fully recognized, that the reality of the mystery of the Immaculacy of the Virgin Mary is confessed, and the primacy of Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, is upheld and defended. The Founder of the Christian Faith is designated by Baha'u'llah as the 'Spirit of God', is proclaimed as the One Who 'appeared out of the breath of the Holy Ghost', and is even extolled as the 'Essence of the Spirit'. His mother is described as 'that veiled and immortal, that most beautiful countenance', and the station of her Son eulogized as a 'station which hath been exalted above the imaginings of all that dwell on earth,' whilst Peter is recognized as one whom God has caused 'the mysteries of wisdom and of utterance of flow out of his mouth'”***

(Shoghi Effendi: The Promised Day is Come, p. 113-114)

#### Exercises:

1. Fill in the missing words using above quote:

Shoghi Effendi asks the Baha'is:

- ✓ To acknowledge unconditionally \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ to fearlessly assert \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ to recognize fully \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ to confess the reality of the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_
- ✓ to uphold the \_\_\_\_\_ of Peter, the \_\_\_\_\_

We will later study in detail (level 2) the different concepts expressed within this important quotation from Shoghi Effendi. At present we will limit ourselves to the first few concepts:

2. Fill in the missing words using above quote:

“As to the position of \_\_\_\_\_ let it be stated without any \_\_\_\_\_ or equivocation that its \_\_\_\_\_ .. is \_\_\_\_\_ acknowledged, that the \_\_\_\_\_ ..... and \_\_\_\_\_ .....of Jesus Christ are \_\_\_\_\_ ..... , that the \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ is fully recognized...”

(Shoghi Effendi: Promised Day is Come, p. 109)

In this quote the beloved Guardian tells us that Baha'is should NOT HAVE ANY FEAR to use Jesus title: "Son of God". The danger is by denying Jesus Christ's title; Christians will often not continue the dialogue, as it confirms their initial suspicion that the Baha'i Faith is a false teaching, lowering the station of Christ! The title has now become a barrier for them to investigate the Faith. Terminology should not cause misunderstandings and separations!

Shoghi Effendi confirms that the “Sonship of Christ is a spiritual relationship”  
“...relationship of an almost corporeal nature, whereas Almighty God has no parents or offspring. What is meant by Christ, is His spirit's relation to the Infinite Spirit... It is in a sense attributable - this kind of Sonship - to all the Prophets.”

(Lights of Guidance, page 493)

*“It is true that Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of God, but this, as explained by Baha'u'llah in the Iqan, does not indicate any physical relationship whatever. It's meaning is entirely spiritual, and points out to the close relationship existing between Him and the Almighty God. Nor does it necessarily indicate any inherent superiority in the station of Jesus over other Prophets and Messengers. As far as their spiritual nature is concerned all Prophets can be regarded as Sons of God, as they all reflect His light, though not in an equal measure, and this difference in reflection is due to the conditions and circumstances under which they appear.”*

(Lights of Guidance, p.492)

### **Role-play on “titles”:**

Introduction: Often Baha'is say Jesus as a Prophet. Such a statement can be considered as an insult by many devout Christians as for them we are lowering the station of Christ as the Son of God to merely one of the Prophets.

The problem is the word “Prophet” has a different meaning in Islam than in Christianity. In Islam the word Prophet is an exalted title reserved for the Manifestation of God but in Christianity it is often used as “somebody who foretells the future”. There are many Prophets in the Bible, for example, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elias and Micah. The station of Christ, the Son of God is much higher than the station of the prophets in the Old Testament!

For this role-play five participants are needed - one Christian, three Baha'is and one evaluator.

### **Scenario 1:**

The Christian asks a question.

- Bahá'í A; gives an ineffective answer.
- Bahá'í B; gives an ineffective answer.
- Bahá'í C: gives an answer, “which could remove apprehensions”
- One person to evaluate the quality of the answers
- Participants write down their own evaluation

Christian: How do the Baha'is regard Jesus Christ?

Bahá'í A: He was a Manifestation, like Moses, Muhammad and Baha'u'llah.

Evaluator asks audience: This answer is correct, isn't it? What limits its effectiveness?

---

Christian: How do the Baha'is regard Jesus Christ?

Bahá'í B: He was a Prophet of God like Moses, Muhammad and Baha'u'llah.

Evaluator asks audience: This answer is correct, isn't it? What limits its effectiveness?

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Christian: How do the Baha'is regard Jesus Christ?

Bahá'í C: Baha'is believe in the “Sonship and Divinity” of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Process: Why is this answer more effective? \_\_\_\_\_

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Which names or titles did the beloved Master use for Jesus Christ?

The Master often used the language of the Bible using terms such as “Christ is the Word of God”, “the Father and the Son”, “the Lord Christ”, often He would use the title “Divine educator” or “Divine Messenger” The Master would rarely use the Baha’i term Manifestation of God when he was meeting with some seekers.

Christians are not familiar with the Baha’i term “Manifestation of God”. If you think it is not using wisdom to use this terminology for a Christian audience without a clear explanation, which words or titles would you use instead?

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## **SECTION 5: His name was Jesus but his spiritual title is Christ**

### **♥ Flipchart p. 5 & 6**

Many people are not aware that when they use the word Christ they are using a “spiritual title”. They believe that Jesus is like a surname and Christ is his family name. This is not true. His name was Jesus but his spiritual title is Christ, for example, when his mother Mary called her young son, Jesus she would never say: “Christ come here” because Christ is a spiritual title.

#### **The meaning of the spiritual title: Christ**

“Christ” comes from a Greek word “Christos” and means “anointed one” or “king” Messiah is the title for the “Promised One” All Jews were waiting for the Messiah to come. The meaning of “Messiah” is the “anointed one” “The anointed one” is the King who was “anointed” by pouring a fragrant oil on his head.

Originally, the first Jewish Christians accepted Jesus to be the Messiah and called him Jesus, the Messiah. Later his Greek title “Christos” was used in the early Christian church. As St John’s gospel was written around 100 AD the evangelist uses both titles for example, when the apostles discovered Jesus they expressed their joy as follows:

*“We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.”* (John 1:40)

Later when Christianity spread into the Greek and Latin world, the original Jewish meaning of “the Messiah” was lost and His name and title was Jesus the Christ.

A descriptive title like King or “Christ” can be carried over from one person to the other. This title can go from one person to another, just like the title King comes to a new person when the old King dies. The new King has the same responsibilities, the same power. It is as if the old King has returned. Of course it is a different body with a different name, at a different time and a different place, but the same spirit.

So the title “Christ” refers to the everlasting spirit through which God speaks to man on earth.

In the Gospels, Jesus of Nazareth had many titles; Messiah, Christ, the title “Son of Man”, and the “Son of God”. The Book of Revelation added another title: the “Word of God”. All those titles are interchangeable. They are familiar to Christians. The understanding of the different titles is well accepted by Christian theologians. Baha’is today use the title Manifestation of God which familiar to us, but not to the Christians. Although the terminology is different, the spiritual meaning is the same! But it is important to speak a language that is familiar when talking to Christians so as not to create a barrier for them to overcome.

Exercise: Learn to distinguish between name and spiritual title. Put cross in square(s) of your choice.

	Name	(Spiritual) Title
King	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jesus	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Messiah	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Christ	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Son of God	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spirit of God *	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

\* The danger for a misinterpretation of the word “Son of God” was well understood in Islam. Therefore in Islam, the title of the Spirit of God, is often used for Jesus. (Some Answered Questions, p. 95) Also Baha’u’llah would designate the title “the Spirit of God” for Jesus (Shoghi Effendi: The Promised Day is Come, p. 113-114)

## SECTION 6: The Trinity

♥ See Flipchart p 13 & 14

Most Christians believe in the Trinity. To understand, how a teaching (which was not directly proclaimed by Jesus) became so important for Christians. Read the following background in small groups and discuss its implications:

- The Trinity is a doctrine which proclaims: “God the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost”.
- This dogma was formulated in the general council of the church at NICEA in A.D. 325 AD. It was the Emperor Constantine, (not the Pope!) who called the Council together.
- The reason was that he wanted to end the fighting between Bishop Athanasius and Arius and their supporters who were quarrelling about the divine question: “Who is Christ and what is His relationship to God?”
- As a result of the Council, a compromise was reached during the Council called the dogma of the Trinity. Introduction of this man-made dogma would have great consequences. This dogma became the cornerstone of the orthodox (Greek language) or Catholic (Latin) church and was later taken over by most Protestant denominations.
- The dogma of the Trinity was also linked to another dogma: which determined that God was “incarnated” into Jesus by His birth. (incarnation comes from the word “carne” which means “flesh or incarnation meant “God became flesh”). Such a belief is against the eternal belief of the “Oneness of God” Jesus never taught this. For a more detailed explanation see Christianity Renewed Volume 1.

The belief in the oneness of God is a cornerstone in Judaism and Islam. It was in 622 AD that Muhammad would rise in the Middle East and proclaim again the eternal divine teaching of “the Oneness of God. This concept, so clear in Judaism and Islam, was blurred in Christianity into the trinity.

Exercise:

1. Form pairs and explain to each other the historical origin of the “trinity”
2. Read the following story told by Abdu’l-Baha about the Trinity. See Flipchart p. 14. Please note that John of Chrysostom was the Archbishop of Constantinople during the fourth century.

### How did Abdu'l-Baha explain the Trinity

When Abdu'l-Baha was asked about “the Trinity” or about the relationship between God and Jesus, He would often explain it in the following way:

***“The descent of that Lordly Reality into conditions and degrees would be equivalent to imperfection and contrary to perfection, and is, therefore, absolutely impossible”***( S.A.Q. p.113)

- First, the Master explained the eternal belief of the “Oneness of God.”, using reason. He explained that God’s reality cannot be divided or descend into human conditions which has limitations as this would mean imperfection which does not exist in the world of God.” (Otherwise God isn’t God anymore!)
- Then the Master explained the analogy of the sun and the mirror as this analogy shows that the Baha’i writings believe in “divine reflection”. (God manifesting Himself in the perfect mirror or the “Manifestation of God”).

This confirms what Paul wrote: ***“Christ is the image of the invisible God”*** (Col 1:13)  
This is very different from the present interpretation claiming a physical relationship between God and Jesus which is against the teachings of the Bible. It explicitly says: ***“God is a spirit”*** (John 4:24) and ***“that which is born of flesh is flesh and that which is born of the spirit is spirit”*** (John 3:6). Therefore if Jesus is the Son of God (who is a Spirit) then Christ must be a spiritual Son of God!

#### Exercises:

1. Why does the Master reject the belief that God descends into the conditions of this world. Explain why this is impossible.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Explain the following quotation from Abdu'l-Baha in your own words: ***“All that is mentioned of the Manifestations and Dawning-places of God signifies the divine reflection, and not a descent into the conditions of existence”*** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Using the two Bible verses mentioned above (John 4:24 and John 3:6) explain why Jesus Christ must be according to the Bible text the “spiritual” Son of God?  
\_\_\_\_\_

### How to explain “the Trinity” to Christians

#### ♥ See Flipchart p. 15 & 16

The purpose of this section is to learn to use the language of the Bible, when explaining the analogy of the Sun and the mirror. Most Baha’is are quite familiar with this analogy which explains:

- a) Relationship of God with His Manifestations
- b) The relationship between the Manifestation of God and mankind
- c) The relationships between the different Manifestations of God.

This understanding is a precious gift which we can offer to Christians. To use it in a more effective way, it is important to use Bible terminology as this is the only authority which they often accept. Therefore it would be advisable to memorize a few short Bible verses.

To help the participants to give a more efficient presentation, a drawing illustrating certain verses from the Bible is found on page 16.

### The sun

The Bible tells that God is “*dwelling in unapproachable light where no man has ever seen or even can see him*” (1 Timothy 6:16). Also the wise Solomon proclaimed: “*But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You.*” (1 Kings 8:27) (Useful verses to memorize!)

These Bible quotes show that we could compare God with the sun. The sun is the source of our physical life. In the same way the spiritual sun, that is God, gives us spiritual life. Without the light of God’s guidance, humanity would cease to exist.

We know that the physical sun doesn't come down to the earth, as its intense heat and light would destroy the earth completely, so too God does not come down to earth as He is immeasurably powerful.

### The rays

It is the rays of the sun, which have the same properties as the sun, such as heat, light, and energy which bring us life. As the rays of the Sun are streaming from the sun to give light and heat, so too are the rays of the Holy Spirit streaming out from God. You could also liken the rays to the divine Perfections. These rays are reflected into the mirror (the Divine Messenger) which then reflects it to humankind. As the Bible tells us: “**I will pour my Spirit upon all flesh**” (Acts 2:17).

### The mirror

The Bible tells us in the epistle of St Paul that:

“*Christ is the image of the invisible God*” (Col 1:15)

“*the express image of His person*” (Heb. 1:3)

Turning to Christ is the same as “*beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord*” (2 Cor. 3:18) The modern meaning of the ancient word “glass” is a “mirror” as in the times of Christ polished glass was used to see the reflection of a face. A mirror, when it is clear, pure and polished, gives a perfect reflection. The Messenger of God is like that mirror which receives and reflects the light of the sun. When the perfect mirror is turned towards the sun to reflect its image, we see it is completely filled with the brilliance of the sun. In a similar way, the Messenger of God receives, reflects or manifests brilliantly the Holy Spirit, the attributes or qualities of God. So when we look in the mirror we can say “I see the sun” When a person tells us: “I can see the sun in the mirror” it is like saying “I see the Father in the Son” this is the truth. But at the same time the sun is still in the sky. God in His exalted position does not descend to dwell in the mirror the reflection is an association only.

### Humankind

The Bible tells us that God created us in “His image”. “And God said: “*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness*” (Gen 1:26) (useful to memorize!)

When human beings follow the divine Teachings such as to love one another, and to live in unity, they then reflect the image of God in their lives. This is how the Christ promised Kingdom of God gradually appears on earth.

For example the meaning of the well-known Bible verse: “*I am the way the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me*” (John 14:6) can be explained as follows: This is the eternal Christ speaking. It means that humankind cannot understand God except through His Messengers. This has been the way of God down through the ages.

#### **Memorize the following quotes:**

To familiarize us with the relevant Bible verses, fill in blank spaces:

God is \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ Light where no man \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ can see him. (1 Timothy 6:16).

Christ is the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ God (Col 1:15)

Christ is the \_\_\_\_\_ image of His person (Heb. 1:3)

As beholding in a \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ of God. (2 Cor. 3:18)

♥ Now use Flipchart p. 15 & 16 in pair work to demonstrate a grasp of the topic.

## SECTION 7: Need for Renewal

Sometimes when Baha'is are teaching they move directly from the analogy of the perfect mirror of Jesus Christ to a similar analogy using several mirrors to explain progressive revelation from a Baha'i perspective introducing all the other Messengers. Often, this is too soon for the Christians, as in their mindset, Jesus is the only one. Indeed from a Christian point of view, the Revelation of Jesus is the final Revelation. (The Return is only considered as a time for final Judgment). Therefore, there is no need for "other mirrors" after Christ.

Abdu'l-Baha explained some of the reasons why religions are renewed. We can use these reasons in the teaching field to explain our Christian friends the need for renewal.

Other historical reasons as for example the "division in different denominations each claiming to be the true church" will be discussed later.

***"Again, consider how much the principles of the religion of Christ have been forgotten, and how many heresies have appeared. For example, Christ forbade revenge and transgression; furthermore, He commanded benevolence and mercy in return for injury and evil. ...It is then clear and evident that in the passage of time religions become entirely changed and altered. Therefore, they are renewed."*** (S.A.Q., p. 166)

Abdu'l-Baha also explains the difference between spiritual laws which indeed doesn't change and the social teachings which change according to the needs of time:

***It is therefore evident that whilst the spiritual law never alters, the practical rules must change their application with the necessities of the time. The spiritual aspect of religion is the greater, the more important of the two, and this is the same for all time, it never changes! It is the same, yesterday, today, and for ever!*** (Abdu'l-Baha, Paris Talks, p. 142).

For example "to pray or worship God" is a spiritual law. How to put this law into practice, changes. In Baha'u'llah's Revelation ***"the concepts of the past are brought to a new level of understanding, and the social laws, changed to suit the age now dawning, are designed to carry humanity forward into a world civilization the splendors of which can as yet be scarcely imagined."*** (Baha'u'llah, The Kitab-i-Aqdas, p.1)

For example: Jesus tells us "to love you neighbour" and Baha'u'llah tells us "to love mankind". (For more information see Christianity Renewed Volume 2)

### ♥ Exercise using flipchart: p.17 & 18

Purpose: Participants learn to use Bible verses in their presentation why religions are renewed. The drawing shows three trees. The first tree gives abundant fruit, the second tree is full of weeds and gives less and less fruit and the third drawing shows the tree is now only useful as firewood.

Activity: Again work in pairs. First have a look at picture. Read text, answer questions and then the Baha'i explains to his/her Christian friend the meaning of the drawing. Reverse roles afterwards. Participants learn to use Bible verses in their presentation about why religions are renewed.

The tree is a symbol for the Religion of God.

1. The first tree (full of fruit) shows how at the beginning of a new Revelation of God people received the pure word of God through the new Messenger of God and the pure word heals the people from their spiritual ills. The new teachings bring unity, love and joy and other ***"fruits of the spirit"*** (Galatians 5:22,23) (The spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, self-control)

2. The second tree has few fruits as it is infested with weeds. The weeds are the man-

made doctrines which Jesus called the commandments of man. Jesus said about the Jewish priests: *“But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”*(Matthew 5:9)

3. The third tree doesn't give any more fruit. People are divided because of religion! Religion becomes the source of conflict and even wars.

We could compare Jesus with a gardener. He planted a garden with beautiful fruit. The first Christians, who forgave their enemies, loved each other and gave their lives for Jesus, were the beautiful fruits of the garden. Soon man-made ideas were introduced into the religion of Jesus. These ideas were like weeds, which slowly covered the garden of Jesus. Gradually, the garden gives less and less fruit. The time has come to plant a new tree!

Answer questions:

1. What does “the tree” represent? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What do “the weeds “represent? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What does “the tree who gives no more fruit” represent? \_\_\_\_\_

### ♥ Flipchart: Progressive Revelation in Bible p. 19 & 20

**Purpose:** Participants learn to explain the different stages in the development of the growth of a tree. This development is compared with the coming of the Divine Educators. This analogy is very useful as it is simple and shows in a positive way how all Divine Educators are important, equal and working for the same Cause.

#### **Description:**

In this drawing we are showing the different stages of the growth of a tree, from seed until the fruit. In the teaching of Abraham we see the ‘seed’, in that of Moses the ‘trunk’, in that of Jesus the ‘flower’ and in that of Baha’u’llah the ‘fruit’.

#### **Discussion of drawing:**

Which is greater, the seed or the flower? The answer is - neither. All are different but all are important and all are “perfect”. If there is no seed, there is no flower. If there is no flower, there is no fruit. In the same way, the Founders are united in love but the followers are often divided, even hating each other. One Messenger is not greater than another. All are necessary. Each stage is the fulfillment of the one that went before. No step is exclusive, no stage is final, not even the stage of the fruit. The fruit is the fulfillment of the seed, it is the end of a period, but from that fruit another seed will come of another period or cycle. Indeed God will never leave mankind without guidance.

### ♥ Exercise using flipchart: p. 21 & 22 Oneness of Mankind

Read in pairs and do teaching role-play. Memorize quotations below.

*“Regard men as a flock of sheep that need a shepherd for their protection. This, verily, is the truth, the certain truth.”*  
(Baha'u'llah, The Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 63)

*“It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens”.*

(Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 250 )

Shoghi Effendi explains:

*“The next step in Man's evolution -- the unification of the human race as one family inhabiting this planet.”*  
(The Compilation of Compilations vol. II, p.433)

## ♥ Flipchart p. 23 & 24 Spiritual Steps for Mankind

Read in pairs and do the following role-play. One Christian, one Baha'i. (change roles later)

**Scenario:** The Christian says that Jesus Christ is much greater than all the other Messengers of God. How would you respond as a Baha'i?. Explain that each Messenger of God has his specific role and all are important.

Note; Instead of using an example from Nature, some Baha'is prefer to use the example of the school and the teachers.

The following example is often used in a teaching situation to help understand the relationship between God, His Messengers and mankind. The Divine Messengers can be likened to teachers in a school. God can be likened to the headmaster and the people the students in that school. As a child grows up he progresses from grade one, to grade two, to grade three, and so on. In each grade he has a different teacher who teaches new things, but always builds upon what the previous teacher taught. The teacher of grade six is not better than the teacher of grade one.

They are equal in knowledge, but each teaches according to the needs and capacity of the child. For example; a teacher in first grade will teach numbers; and when the capacity of the child to learn things increases, the child will understand how to make sums. In the third year the student will learn multiplication, and later on how to do divisions. Step by step, progressively the child will learn more. Both the teacher from grade one and from grade six are necessary for the child to be educated.

In the same way, all the Divine Messengers are necessary for mankind's progressive Divine education. Baha'is call this gradual divine education which started in the past, runs through the present and continues into the future - PROGRESSIVE REVELATION.

## ♥ Exercise using flipchart page 25-26

First have a look at pictures on page 25, showing different light sources: candles, oil lamps, and electric light Pair-work. Explain in your own words how the drawings on page 25 relate to the idea of progressive revelation.

## ♥ Exercise using flipchart page 27-28

Work together in pairs and explain the lineage of the three wives of Abraham, and how Baha'u'llah is descended both from Katurah and also from Sarah. Note: it is important to also mention Sarah as many Christians think only Sarah is important as the first wife of Abraham.

## SECTION 8: The Divine Messengers

Once your Christian friend has understood the need for renewal of religion, it is time to introduce the next concept. The Word of God has always existed and has been spoken through several Messengers. The Master explains the fundamental reason why several different divine Messengers have appeared in this world at different times and in different places fulfilling the purpose of the existence of creation: ***“Time and place doesn't exist in the world of God. If man did not exist, the universe would be without result, for the object of existence is the appearance of the perfections of God. So how are those perfections of God manifested in this world? Through His Messengers”*** (S.A.Q.,p.196)

The Master explains that it is impossible to have a Creator without a creation, and as the Creator is eternal, there will always be a creation. Man will always need the guidance of God and God promises to provide eternal guidance. This is the eternal covenant between man and God.

***“These mirrors are the Messengers of God Who tell the story of Divinity, just as the material mirror reflects the light and disc of the outer sun in the skies. In this way the image and effulgence of the Sun of Reality appear in the mirrors of the Manifestations of God.***

(Abdu'l-Baha, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p.1)

Conclusion: Because we are living in a world of limitations where there is change of conditions, time and place, the spiritual reality must appear in several different divine Messengers.

Exercise: Fill in the missing words:

“\_\_\_\_\_ doesn’t exist in the world of God. “If man \_\_\_\_\_ exist, the \_\_\_\_\_ would be \_\_\_\_\_, for the object of existence is \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ of God. So how are those \_\_\_\_\_ manifested in this world? “Through \_\_\_\_\_”

The Master used several analogies to explain above concepts:

### 1. The Sun has different dawning places:

*For example, once the Sun of Reality poured forth its rays from the sign of Abraham, and then it dawned from the sign of Moses and illuminated the horizon. Afterward it rose with the greatest power and brilliancy from the sign of Christ. Those who were the seekers of Reality worshiped that Reality wherever they saw it, but those who were attached to Abraham were deprived of its influences when it shone upon Sinai and illuminated the reality of Moses. Those who held fast to Moses, when the Sun of Reality shone from Christ with the utmost radiance and lordly splendor, were also veiled; and so forth.*  
(Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 76)

### 2. The ocean and the rain:

*Among the bounties of God is revelation. Hence revelation is progressive and continuous. It never ceases. It is necessary that the reality of Divinity with all its perfections and attributes should become resplendent in the human world. The reality of Divinity is like an endless ocean. Revelation may be likened to the rain. Can you imagine the cessation of rain? Ever on the face of the earth somewhere rain is pouring down. Briefly, the world of existence is progressive. It is subject to development and growth.*

(Abdu'l-Baha, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 378)

### ♥ Exercise using flipchart page 29 & 30

In this drawing we have three mirrors. On the top of the mirror is written the name of a Manifestation of God and at the bottom is written a day of the week. Imagine a person is sitting in front of those three mirrors, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday. If he looks in the mirrors, he sees an identical sun shining in each one. Each mirror shows a perfect reflection of the Sun.

Now we have to reflect to find the truth. Which mirror do you prefer? The mirror named Saturday (Moses) or the mirror named Sunday (Jesus) or the mirror called, Monday (Bahá'u'lláh) The answer is simple. All three mirrors are equal. The same light of the same sun shines in each of them. There is no difference between the sun of Saturday, Sunday or Monday.

It is the same Sun! Which mirror, with its reflected sunlight, do you appreciate, respect and love the most? They are the same, just a different name and time of appearance. All the Manifestations of God are like pure Mirrors reflecting God's love, power and wisdom. All are one in the Holy Spirit. God is like the sun, and Moses, Jesus and Bahá'u'llah, as well as the other Manifestations of God, are like Mirrors reflecting that sun of Truth.

Three thousand five hundred years ago, the teachings of Moses were the way to God. Two thousand years ago, Jesus was the way to God. Today, Bahá'u'lláh, the Promised One, is showing again the same way leading to the knowledge of God!

### Role-play:

Form pairs	One Christian, the other is Baha'i.
Christian	What is the relationship of Jesus and Baha'u'llah with God?
Baha'i	Explain using the flipchart.

## **SECTION 9: Why are there so many Denominations?**

### **♥ See flipchart pages 1 & 2**

Many people are asking the question: There is only one Jesus and there is only one religion founded by Him, called Christianity. Why did so many different churches branch out from the original teachings of Jesus?

Indeed, the most important commandment of Jesus in John 15:17 is: *"These things I command you, that ye love one another."* Jesus even said that His true disciples would be recognized by the love they show to each other. But now, 2000 years later, we see that the original church of Jesus is split into more than 2000 denominations. Unfortunately, though the differences between the denominations are very small, they have often caused disunity, even hatred, amongst the followers of Jesus. Why is there fighting in the name of Jesus who only taught love? What is the reason?

Abdu'l-Baha explains: *"After the departure of Christ many appeared who were instrumental in creating factions, schisms and discussions. It became difficult to know which one was following the right path.... In brief, divisions were created in the religion of God, and it was not known which was pursuing the right pathway because there was no appointed center to whom Christ referred everyone, no successor whose word was a gateway to the truth. If Christ had revealed a Covenant with some soul, commanding all to cling to his word and interpretation as correct, it would have been evident which belief and statement was valid and true.*

*Inasmuch as there was no appointed explainer of the Book of Christ, everyone made the claim to authority, saying, This is the true pathway and others are not.*

*To ward off such dissensions as these and prevent any person from creating a division or sect the Blessed Perfection, Baha'u'llah, appointed a central authoritative Personage, declaring Him to be the expounder of the Book"* (The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 381)

**Activity:** Put the above quotations into your own words - and practice explaining to a Christian why there are many denominations.

### **The Primacy of Peter**

Many Christians believe that Peter was appointed by Christ to take over the leadership of the Church. Indeed Baha'is believe in the primacy of Peter as the prince of the Apostles but Shoghi

Effendi explains:

*"Now with regard to your questions. First concerning the statement of Jesus Christ "Thou art Peter and upon this rock..." This saying of Jesus establishes beyond any doubt the primacy of Peter and also the principle of succession, but is not explicit enough regarding the nature and functioning of the Church itself. The Catholics have read too much into that statement, and derived from it certain conclusions which are quite unjustifiable."*

(Lights of guidance, p.492)

Shoghi Effendi further explained about the churches:

*"...They [reformists] argued with force and justification that the canons promulgated by the Councils of the Church were not divinely-appointed laws, but were merely human devices which did not even rest upon the actual utterances of Jesus. Their contention centered around the fact that the vague and inconclusive words, addressed by Christ to Peter, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church," could never justify the extreme measures, the elaborate ceremonials, the fettering creeds and dogmas, with which His successors have gradually burdened and obscured His Faith."*

(World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 20)

Abdu'l-Baha speaks about the Popes: "*Christ hurt no one, but some of the Popes killed innocent people: refer to history. ...How much blood the Popes have shed merely to retain temporal power! ... Consider: is there any resemblance between the instructions of Christ and the manner of government of the Popes? We do not like to criticize, but the history of the Vatican is very extraordinary. The purport of our argument is this, that the instructions of Christ are one thing, and the manner of the Papal government is quite another; they do not agree. ...Can any of the sweet fragrances of Christ be detected in these actions? No! in the name of God!*"

(S.A.Q. p. 136)

If Jesus were to return today, what would He think about the large variety of rituals, dogmas, and sacraments, which are used in all the different churches? Which church would He enter? Which church can claim to be the true one? When did the changes occur?

The differences between the original teachings of Jesus and the present practices in the Christian churches evolved over 2000 years of history. From the beginning there were many differences of opinion. More and more man-made ideas were introduced into the Church. The Greek, Roman, and later European customs were woven into the Church practices, and gradually the veils of man-made ideas dimmed the light of the original pure teachings of Jesus.

The Universal House of Justice wrote: "*It is indisputable, however, that many erroneous teachings have entered into Christianity, obscured the pure Gospel and caused disunity and schism....*"  
(Letters of The Universal House of Justice, 1998 Feb 22)

### ♥ **Group activity: Use flipchart page 33 -34.**

- Study the simplified chart which indicates when and how some of the divisions occurred.
- Read text then give a presentation for your group using the attached drawing. Emphasize that it is not your purpose to criticize but to learn valuable lessons from history to be applied now and for the future. (History of Christianity is discussed in detail in Christianity Renewed Volume 1 by Maxwell Alexander published by BPT of India or on the website [www.maxwellalexander.com](http://www.maxwellalexander.com) )

### **Background text:**

Historically, Christianity started as a movement within Judaism. Therefore it is important to have an idea of this Jewish environment to help with providing a background when talking to Christians.

#### **A. Tensions with Judaism**

The apostles Peter and James, the brother of Jesus, were the pillars of the early "church of Jerusalem". At that time, Christianity was regarded as "the sect of the Nazarene", a sect within Judaism (Jesus came from Nazareth). The early apostles fulfilled all their religious Jewish duties and used the synagogues for discussions about the Torah trying to prove to the skeptical Jews that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. Some of this early conflict between these two groups is reflected in the Gospels which were written much later.

#### **Disagreement between Peter and Paul**

There was also disagreement between Peter and Paul. To solve this internal conflict Peter became the Apostle to the Jews and Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles.

When Paul, started to teach more the Romans and Greeks the balance shifted. The original foundation of Christianity - the fact that Jesus was indeed the Messiah who fulfilled the prophecies from the Torah - and also the historical life of Jesus who died 30 years earlier - all this was not considered important anymore. What became important was the promise of salvation through the risen Christ. This concept of salvation became a focus in the Gospels which were written in the Greek language after the martyrdom of Paul in Rome.

When Paul started to teach the Romans and Greeks, the balance shifted.

#### **Disagreements between the disciples spreading the Message**

Already during the first century there were false teachers. The book of Acts warns about false teachers spreading a false Gospel. Around 100 AD. John introduced a special term for those teachers who didn't believe Jesus is Son of God. He called them "the Anti-Christ's"

## **Conflict with Romans**

At the same time when Jesus teachings were being spread a ferocious war was being fought in Israel between the Jews and the Romans. The Roman army won the war. The temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews were scattered. Jews were persecuted throughout the Roman Empire.

When the first two gospels were written, Jerusalem has already been destroyed and the temple was burned down. The original Jewish church lost all influence which meant that Christianity had lost its Jewish roots. The church started to grow in mighty Rome and Constantinople and started to absorb more Roman, Greek and later European customs.

## **Internal conflicts**

Soon discussions, debates and even conflicts and fights started about the nature of Jesus. Debate groups crystallized into sects and various different denominations. It was at that time that the church fathers<sup>i</sup> formulated a number of new man-made teachings which couldn't stop the disintegration of Christianity.

The Guardian confirmed why the unity of the church was destroyed: *"... None, I feel, will question the fact that the fundamental reason why the unity of the Church of Christ was irretrievably shattered, and its influence was in the course of time undermined, was that the Edifice which the Fathers of the Church<sup>ii</sup> reared after the passing of His First Apostle was an Edifice that rested in nowise upon the explicit directions of Christ Himself. ...*

(The World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 20)

## **♥ Group activity: Use flipchart page 35 -36**

- Study the simplified chart which explain the reason for those three major splits (1056 AD: power-struggle; 1550 AD different interpretation; 1844: Return of Christ
- Read the text on page 35 then give a presentation for your group using the diagram in your flipchart.

Note: As Shoghi Effendi tells us that the Fathers of the Church are the fundamental reason for division it is important for us to know who the Church fathers are

The Fathers of the church considered themselves as the protectors of the Christian church against the numerous groups of so called heretics. They mainly lived from second to fifth century after Christ. They decided which were the true Christian teachings. Indeed at that time there were so many different sects. It was in that climate of conflict that the church fathers created a blueprint for the One, holy orthodox (Catholic) and Apostolic Church. Augustine, the most wellknown Father of the church wrote in "the City of God" that the church is the true body of Christ . It was Augustine who created a new dogma called the "original sin".

Whilst Jesus had preached universal salvation for those who loved their neighbor, the church fathers narrowed it down. Obedience to the Catholic bishops and priests and belief in Sacraments became the only way to God. Once clear definitions were made and absolute standards of belief were introduced it became easy to determine who was a "heretic" which was punishable by death. In that way, the authority of the [Church](#) was converted into a religious power.

## **Extra curricular activity**

The exercise is to conduct a short survey in your area, interviewing approx 5 -10 of your Christian friends. Take into account that you

- First ask permission from your Local Spiritual Assembly as some areas could be too sensitive.
  - Only do this survey if you feel comfortable to do so.
  - Always conduct the survey full of respect for the people you are interviewing.
  - Do not interrupt as you could influence the person who is answering the questions.
- First make photocopies of survey document and explain the reason why you doing this survey as a participant of a study circle.

Bring the results of your survey to the next study cycle and discuss your observations.

<b>QUESTIONS</b>
Are you a Christian? Why?
Do you believe Jesus is God? Why?
Did you ever open a Bible? When?
Do you own a Bible?
Which Bible do you use?
Do you belong to a church?
Which church do you belong to? Why?
Do you attend church regularly?
Do you believe that only baptized Christians go to heaven
Do you believe in heaven? What is your concept about heaven?
Do you believe in a physical hell?
Do you believe the Bible is literally true?
Do you believe in the story about creation?
Do you believe the story about Adam and Eve is literal true?
Do you believe that Elias (or Elias) literally ascended to heaven?
Do you believe that during the “the transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor” the physical body of Moses and Elias was present?
Do you believe that Jesus ascended with his physical body to heaven?
Do you believe in the end of the world? What will happen?
Do you believe there will be a literal final Judgment Day in which Jesus will literally come back on the clouds?
Why do you think there are many denominations?

## **Section 10: The Holy Bible**

### **♥ Use flipchart p. 31 &32**

Activity:

Imagine, you have been invited to give a presentation in a church and afterwards, the local priest gives you his Bible and asks you to write a few words in his Bible to show your appreciation and belief in the Bible. What would you write?

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After short discussion (not more than 3 minutes) read the translation of the inscription which Abdu'l-Baha wrote in Persian in the old Bible which had been used by generations of preachers in City Temple in London, England:

***“This book is the Holy Book of God, of celestial Inspiration. It is the Bible of Salvation, the Noble Gospel. It is the mystery of the Kingdom and its light. It is the Divine Bounty, the sign of the guidance of God.”*** (Abdu'l-Baha, Abdu'l-Baha in London, p. 17)

Baha'u'llah wrote regarding the verses in the Bible:

***Reflect: the words of the verses themselves eloquently testify to the truth that they are of God.***  
(Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 84)

**Note:**

Often Baha'is tell their Christian friends that they believe in the Bible but only symbolically. The word "symbolically" is correct and used in the Baha'i Writings. Unfortunately nowadays symbolically usually infers that it didn't happen. Also, when we say that we believe it has a spiritual meaning, in our materialistic society those words imply a similar meaning.

As this can lead to misunderstandings and is therefore is not helpful in the dialogue with Christians, we suggest to tell our Christian friends that as Baha'is we take the Bible very seriously, following the example of our beloved Master.

When Abdu'l-Baha addressed a Bible Class in New York, he told them:

***"The divine Words are not to be taken according to their outer sense. They are symbolical and contain realities of spiritual meaning.... In the same way the Revelations of St. John are not to be taken literally, but spiritually. These are the mysteries of God. It is not the reading of the words that profits you; it is the understanding of their meanings.[underline added] Therefore, pray God that you may be enabled to comprehend the mysteries of the divine Testaments."***

(Abdu'l-Baha: PUP p. 459)

This statement of Abdu'l-Baha is in accordance with the Holy Bible:

***"This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words"*** (1 Cor. 2:13-14) [NIV]

Abdu'l-Baha explains: ***"...human knowledge is of two kinds. One is the knowledge of things perceptible to the senses -- that is to say, things which the eye, or ear, or smell, or taste, or touch can perceive, which are called objective or sensible. So the sun, because it can be seen, is said to be objective; and in the same way sounds are sensible because the ear hears them; perfumes are sensible because they can be inhaled and the sense of smell perceives them; foods are sensible because the palate perceives their sweetness, sourness or saltiness; heat and cold are sensible because the feelings perceive them. These are said to be sensible realities.***

***The other kind of human knowledge is intellectual -- that is to say, it is a reality of the intellect; it has no outward form and no place and is not perceptible to the senses. For example, the power of intellect is not sensible; none of the inner qualities of man is a sensible thing; on the contrary, they are intellectual realities. So love is a mental reality and not sensible; for this reality the ear does not hear, the eye does not see, the smell does not perceive, the taste does not discern, the touch does not feel. ... Another example: you say, "such an individual made great progress," though he is remaining in the same place; or again, "such a one's position was exalted," although, like everyone else, he walks upon the earth. This exaltation and this progress are spiritual states and intellectual realities, but to explain them you are obliged to have recourse to sensible figures because in the exterior world there is nothing that is not sensible."***

(Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 84 - 85)

Abdu'l-Baha gave many examples to explain how this principle applies to the Holy Writings: Read the quotes in pairs as a preparation for the exercise:

***"Then it is evident that the dove which descended upon Christ was not a material dove, but it was a spiritual state, which, that it might be comprehensible, was expressed by a sensible figure. Thus in the Old Testament it is said that God appeared as a pillar of fire: this does not signify the material form; it is an intellectual reality which is expressed by a sensible image."***

***"Christ says: The Father is in the Son, and the Son is in the Father." Was Christ within God, or God within Christ? No, in the name of God! On the contrary, this is an intellectual state which is expressed in a sensible figure.*** (Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 84)

***"We Baha'is do not believe in Genesis literally. We know this world was not created in seven***

*days, or six, or eight, but evolved gradually over a period of millions of years, as science, has proved ...."*

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, October 28, 1949)

*"Therefore, this story of Adam and Eve who ate from the tree, and their expulsion from Paradise, must be thought of simply as a symbol."* (Abdu'l-Baha, S AQ, p.123)

*"Unless we perceive reality, we cannot understand the meanings of the Holy Books, for these meanings are symbolical and spiritual -- such as, for instance, the raising of Lazarus, which has spiritual interpretation. We must first establish the fact that the power of God is infinite, unlimited, and that it is within that power to accomplish anything".*

(Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 245)

*"Thou didst ask as to the transfiguration of Jesus, with Moses and Elias and the Heavenly Father on Mount Tabor, as referred to in the Bible. This occurrence was perceived by the disciples with their inner eye, wherefore it was a secret hidden away, and was a spiritual discovery of theirs. Otherwise, if the intent be that they witnessed physical forms, that is, witnessed that transfiguration with their outward eyes, then there were many others at hand on that plain and mountain, and why did they fail to behold it? And why did the Lord charge them that they should tell no man? It is clear that this was a spiritual vision and a scene of the Kingdom. Wherefore did the Messiah bid them to keep this hidden, 'till the Son of Man were risen from the dead,'[1] -- that is, until the Cause of God should be exalted, and the Word of God prevail, and the reality of Christ rise up..[1 Matthew 17:1-19; Mark 9:2-9; Luke 9:28-36 ]*

(Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 162)

### **Exercise: Inward and outward meanings**

The purpose of this exercise is to learn to distinguish between inward (spiritual) or outward (literal) meanings within the Bible. In this sense, literal means taking the words in their usual or most basic sense without metaphor or allegory, **and** spiritual means to relate to the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things.

Whenever we tell Christians that some verses in the Bible can only be understood spiritually, it is important to give a few examples.

Form pairs, read quotation underneath and decide if this verse should be understood literally or spiritually (opinions will differ amongst participants!) and discuss briefly the reason for your decision.

#### **OLD TESTAMENT:**

*"And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made".(Genesis 2:2)* (outward or inward meaning ?)

**So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.** (Genesis 1:27) (outward or inward meaning ?)

*Then Joshua spoke to the Lord...: "Sun, stand still over Gibeon; And Moon, in the Valley of Aijalon.". So the sun stood still, And the moon stopped, till the people had revenge upon their enemies.* (Joshua: 10:12,13) (outward or inward meaning?)

*So it was, when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, that God gave him another heart; and all those signs came to pass that day.* (1 Samuel 10:9) (outward or inward meaning?)

God calls Solomon His son:

**"I will be his Father, and he shall be My son.** (2 Sam 7:14) (outward or inward meaning?)

**"Then the Lord came down in the cloud, and spoke to him[ Moses], and took of the Spirit that was upon him, and placed the same upon the seventy elders; and it happened, when the Spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied, although they never did so again."** (Numbers 11:25)  
(outward or inward meaning?)

(Please note similarities with the story of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descends on the Apostles and they prophesize the coming of the Messiah and perform miracles. `Abdu'l-Baha explains this subject further in Some Answered Questions)

**"The burden of Egypt. Behold, the LORD rideth upon a swift cloud and shall come into Egypt"** (Isaiah 19:1) (outward or inward meaning?)

**"So when the Syrians came down to him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, and said, "Strike this people, I pray, with blindness." And He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha... Elisha said, "Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see." And the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw...."** (II Kings 6:18-20) (outward or inward meaning?)

**"But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face"** (Deuteronomy 34 34:10) (outward or inward meaning?)

#### NEW TESTAMENT:

**"For judgment, I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind."** (John 9:39). Did Jesus make people blind. No, therefore blindness has an inward meaning!

**"And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."** (Luke 3:22)  
(outward or inward meaning?)

**"He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."** (John 7:38)  
(outward or inward meaning?)

**"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing".** (John 15:5) (outward or inward meaning?)

**"If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell."** (Matthew 5:29)  
(outward or inward meaning?)

**"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart"**(Matthew 5:27-28)  
(outward or inward meaning?)

**"Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. 9:3 His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. 9:4 And Elias appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. 9:5 Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elias"9:6 because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid. 9:7 And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the**

*cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him! "Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves".* (Matthew 9:2-7)

(outward or inward meaning?)

The following story is only told in the Gospel of St John:

*"Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus .... cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."* (John 11:41-44)

(outward or inward meaning?)

*"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me"* (Revelation 3:20)

(outward or inward meaning?)

John the Baptist gave the following sign which was fulfilled with the coming of the Messiah: *"Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low".* (Luke 3:5)

(outward or inward meaning?)

Conclusion: Any visitor to Israel will tell you that Israel isn't a flat country.

: *"Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not?"* (Mark 8:18). When Jesus came and the people failed to recognise him as their Messiah, He appealed to the people to think in a spiritual way by saying: *"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."* (Matt. 11:15) and *"...because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not...."* (Matt. 13:13)

(outward or inward meaning?)

Conclusion: Jesus didn't mean that those people had lost their eyesight and hearing in a physical sense. They could still see, they were perfectly healthy, but they were spiritually blind and spiritually deaf to His message.

With statements of this type that seem difficult to understand, Jesus is teaching that His Words have hidden meanings. Therefore, we must continually search the Holy Bible to discover its hidden spiritual meanings.

Many texts in Holy Bible have spiritual meaning. All Christians, even evangelical Christians will agree that it is impossible to explain every statement in the Bible in a literal way.

### **Differences between the Baha'i Holy Writings and the Bible**

Reflect on the following quotations as they tell us which attitude we should have as Baha'is towards the Holy Scriptures.

*"The Bahá'ís believe that God's Revelation is under His care and protection and that the essence, or essential elements, of what His Manifestations intended to convey has been recorded and preserved in Their Holy Books. However, as the sayings of the ancient Prophets were written down some time later, we cannot categorically state, as we do in the case of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, that the words and phrases attributed to Them are Their exact words."*

(Letters of The Universal House of Justice, 9 August 1984)

With particular regard to the Bible, the Universal House of Justice outlines two principles to be observed:

*"In studying the Bible Baha'is must bear two principles in mind. The first is that many passages in Sacred Scripture are intended to be taken metaphorically, not literally, and some of the paradoxes and apparent contradictions which appear are intended to indicate this. The second is the fact that the text of the early Scriptures, such as the Bible, is not wholly authentic."*

(Letters of The Universal House of Justice, Sept 14, 1987)

Also Shoghi Effendi explains:

*"When 'Abdu'l-Bahá states we believe what is in the Bible, He means in substance. Not that we believe every word of it to be taken literally or that every word is the authentic saying of the Prophet."*  
(Compilations, Lights of Guidance, p. 494)

*"...we cannot be sure how much or how little of the four Gospels are accurate and include the words of Christ and His undiluted teachings, all we can be sure of, as Bahá'is, is that what has been quoted by Bahá'u'lláh and the Master must be absolutely authentic. As many times passages in the Gospel of St. John are quoted we may assume that it is his Gospel and much of it accurate."*  
(23 January 1944 to an individual believer)

*"We cannot be sure of the authenticity of any of the phrases in the Old or the New Testament. What we can be sure of is when such references or words are cited or quoted in either the Quran or the Bahá'í writings."*  
(4 July 1947 to an individual believer)

*"Except for what has been explained by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, we have no way of knowing what various symbolic allusions in the Bible mean."*  
(31 January 1955 to an individual believer)

*"that the divine inspiration of the Gospel is fully recognized"*

(The Promised Day is Come, p 109)

*"The Bible is not wholly authentic, and in this respect is not to be compared with the Qur'an, and should be wholly subordinated to the authentic writings of Baha'u'llah"*

(Compilations, Lights of Guidance)

Of course in our contact with Christians Baha'is should avoid criticizing the Bible. `Abdu'l-Baha never did this. Such an attitude would also discourage devout Christians from studying the proofs based on the Bible.

The two last statements confirm that although the Bible is "divinely inspired" and faithfully convey the essential Divine Message, it is a selection of varied texts, often written down well after the events it describes, told mouth by mouth (oral tradition) and then written down by a devout believer.

Most Bible scholars believe that (as a simplified rule), the events surrounding Abraham were written down one thousand years afterwards it happened; the events in the life of Moses 300 years later; and Jesus life about 40 till 70 years after His crucifixion. In contrast, the Writings of Baha'u'llah were written down by his own pen or dictated and sealed by Him and the original copies are kept in the Archives in Haifa, Israel.

### **Exercise 1: To improve our attitude towards the Bible:**

- I believe in the divine inspiration of the Bible (Yes/No)
- I show great respect to the Bible (Yes/No)
- I always tell the Christians that the Bible is a collection of stories (Yes/No)
- I always tell my devout Christian friends that he Bible is .to be understood symbolically and not literally (Yes/No)
- I constantly bring to the attention of Christians that there are many errors in the Bible which makes a discussion using Bible verses pointless as we never know if they were the exact words of Jesus. (Yes/No)
- When sharing the message with Christians, I include in a natural way some Bible verses without losing the focus of my explanations of the important concepts which I want to convey to the seeker. (Yes/No)

Note: Although this exercise is fairly simple, it is important to remember the above points during often very emotional discussions with Christians. This can only be achieved through adopting the correct attitude and through repeated practice. Sometimes in teaching situations Baha'is try to

persuade the Christian by discrediting certain texts in the Bible, but in the process they do not show an unquestionable loyalty to the Bible which is always exemplified by Baha'u'llah, Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice. A devout Christian seeker will most likely forget what was said, but will not forget the attitude displayed towards the Holy Bible!

### **Exercise 2:**

1. Outline why the Writings of Baha'u'llah are fully authentic? \_\_\_\_\_
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### **Story of the origin of the Gospels:**

#### **♥ Use flipchart p. 31 &32**

The study of the Bible is extremely complicated. Christian scholars have many different opinions regarding who wrote the texts, how they wrote it, and why they selected certain events to convey to the reader the greatness of the Divine Messenger. It is now generally accepted even amongst the conservative bible scholars that the gospels were developed in the following four stages:

- (1) The oral tradition: Indeed the words that Jesus spoke in Aramaic 2,000 years ago are the words of God Himself! But of course Jesus didn't write anything (except once on sand) We have to rely on the Gospels.
- (2) Development of "periscopes" or "short stories" then compilation of those periscopes into the gospel.
- (3) The "short stories" were compiled into the gospels which were mainly intended as a proclamation not as a historical document or biography of Jesus Christ.
- (4) It took until the year 365 AD before a Catholic Bishop Athanasius made a list of the 27 documents which were selected to become part of the New Testament.

Most historians believe that the first Gospel to be written was the Gospel of Mark. The author Mark was not one of the twelve apostles, but a citizen of Rome. Mark's gospel was written in Rome about the year AD 70. It is very short and ended with the crucifixion. Later, additions were made to make it more similar to other gospels.

The gospels of Matthew, and Luke were written later. Neither Mathew nor Luke was a witness to the events, which they described. (Luke was a helper of Paul, the preacher). The Gospel of John was written about AD 110, is very spiritual, and is very different from the other three Gospels. John, the Evangelist lived at a time when Christianity had already been influenced by the Roman and Greek traditions presenting Jesus more as God than as a man. Jesus is portrayed as the divine Christ, the Word of God, from the beginning of the Gospel.

#### **Do we possess the original Gospels?**

#### **♥ See flipchart p. 31 & 32**

We do not have the original documents written by Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. At that time people did not write on paper but they wrote on papyrus. Papyrus is a fiber extracted from the papyrus plant. Papyrus rots very quickly. It was impossible to keep the original Gospels. Printed books did not exist. Therefore it was necessary to transcribe the gospels. Today, we possess only copies of the old transcripts. The flipchart p. 32 shows a page from the oldest transcript of the Gospels, which we possess today. This transcript was written in the Greek language, 350-400 years after the crucifixion of Jesus. It was discovered in a desert in the year 1844.

Role-play:

Form groups of three. One person is Christian, the others are Baha'is.

Mary: *Do you accept the Bible as the Word of God?*

Quddus: : *Well, we know it has been inspired but it is corrupted and edited. Therefore we believe the Holy Bible is a Holy Book for the past age. We follow the Baha'i Writings which are for this day.*

Tahirih: *Baha'is fully recognize the divine inspiration of the Bible and understand it to be the Bible of Salvation.*

Reflect: Which Baha'i gave the most efficient answer? Which Baha'i do you think would the Christian Mary most likely trust and ask more questions.

## SECTION 11: Adam and Eve

The story is known by most people of Christian background.

`Abdu'l-Baha explains in detail the universal significance of the story of Adam and Eve in "Some Answered Questions" as a reply to the question: ***"What is the truth of the story of Adam, and His eating of the fruit of the tree?"***

First `Abdu'l-Baha tells the story according to the Book of Genesis. Then he elaborates on the greatness of God and concludes this story must have a symbolic meaning. Then He explains the meaning of the symbols used. Finally He encourages the reader to take personal initiative in unraveling divine mysteries. As the answer is very long, we have only selected a few paragraphs.

### ***THE STORY:***

- a) God puts Adam in the Garden of Eden.
- b) The Bible mentions two "special" trees in garden; the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.
- b) God said: ***"And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: 2:17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."***  
(King James Bible, Genesis 2:15)  
***"Eat of every tree of the garden except the tree of good and evil, for if you eat of that, you will die.***  
(Genesis)
- c) God created woman.
- d) The serpent induced the woman to eat of the tree, saying: ***"God has forbidden you to eat of the tree in order that your eyes may not be opened, and that you may not know good from evil."***
- e) Eve eats the fruit and gives the fruit to Adam.
- f) God is angry with Eve, Adam and the serpent.
- g) ***And God said: "The man is become like unto Us, knowing good and evil, and perhaps He will eat of the tree of life and live forever." So God guarded the tree of life.***

`Abdu'l-Baha explains:

***"If we take this story in its apparent meaning, according to the interpretation of the masses, it is indeed extraordinary. The intelligence cannot accept it, affirm it, or imagine it; for such arrangements, such details, such speeches and reproaches are far from being those of an intelligent man, how much less of the Divinity -- that Divinity Who has organized this infinite universe in the most perfect form, and its innumerable inhabitants with absolute system, strength and perfection.***

*We must reflect a little: if the literal meaning of this story were attributed to a wise man, certainly all would logically deny that this arrangement, this invention, could have emanated from an intelligent being. Therefore, this story of Adam and Eve who ate from the tree, and their expulsion from Paradise, must be thought of simply as a symbol. It contains divine mysteries and universal meanings, and it is capable of marvelous explanations. Only those who are initiated into mysteries, and those who are near the Court of the All-Powerful, are aware of these secrets. Hence these verses of the Bible have numerous meanings.” (S.A.Q. p. 126)*

**Explanation of Symbols:**

**Adam:** signifies the heavenly spirit of Adam, and **Eve** His human soul.

**The tree of good and evil:** signifies the human world; for the spiritual and divine world is purely good and absolutely luminous, but in the human world light and darkness, good and evil, exist as opposite conditions.

**The meaning of the serpent:** is attachment to the human world.

**The sin is:** The act of attachment of the soul and spirit to the human world.

**Tree of Life:** is the highest degree of the world of existence: the position of the Word of God, and the supreme Manifestation.

Meaning of the story

*“...This attachment of the spirit to the human world led the soul and spirit of Adam from the world of freedom to the world of bondage and caused Him to turn from the Kingdom of Unity to the human world. When the soul and spirit of Adam entered the human world, He came out from the paradise of freedom and fell into the world of bondage. From the height of purity and absolute goodness, He entered into the world of good and evil”*

The meaning of the tree of life:

*“Therefore, that position has been preserved; and, at the appearance of the most noble supreme Manifestation, it became apparent and clear. For the position of Adam, with regard to the appearance and manifestation of the divine perfections, was in the embryonic condition; the position of Christ was the condition of maturity and the age of reason; and the rising of the Greatest Luminary [Bahá'u'lláh ] was the condition of the perfection of the essence and of the qualities. This is why in the supreme Paradise the tree of life is the expression for the center of absolutely pure sanctity -- that is to say, of the divine supreme Manifestation.*

*From the days of Adam until the days of Christ, They spoke little of eternal life and the heavenly universal perfections. This tree of life was the position of the Reality of Christ; through His manifestation it was planted and adorned with everlasting fruits.”*

What is the meaning of Adam? \_\_\_\_\_

Why does the Master tell us that this story must be understood symbolically? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the meaning of Eve? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the meaning of the serpent? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the meaning of the tree of good and evil? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the meaning of the tree of life? \_\_\_\_\_

After committing sin, God banned Adam and Eve from the paradise. What is the meaning?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Fill in the blanks:**

“For the position of Adam, with regard to \_\_\_\_\_ of the divine perfections, was in

the \_\_\_\_\_ condition; the position of Christ was the condition of \_\_\_\_\_; and the rising of the Greatest Luminary [Bahá'u'lláh ] was the condition of the \_\_\_\_\_”

Why did Abraham and Moses and Jesus speak little about “*eternal life and the heavenly universal perfections*”? \_\_\_\_\_

Which teachings should we share with our Christian friends? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Role play:**

Work in small groups.

Scenario: Joseph asks: “Do you Baha’is believe in the story of Adam and Eve?”

Quddus explains the Baha’i understanding of the story of Adam and Eve. Then he explains that only by eating of “the tree of life” we can be “saved”.

### **Proposed extra curricular activity:**

The participants are advised first to read the story in the Bible (Book of Genesis) and then to read the complete answer of `Abdu’l-Baha in “Some Answered Questions” so that they will be able to convey the Baha’i understanding of this story in its pure form.

Then they should share the universal significance of the story of Adam and Eve (Using the same steps which `Abdu’l-Baha uses) with their Christian friends and report the results back to the next study circle)

## **SECTION 12: ORIGINAL SIN**

Most Christians believe that sin came into the world through the disobedience of our first parents Adam and Eve who ate the forbidden fruit, tricked by the evil snake which is the devil.

Jesus never mentioned this story. In his parables, he showed how God is a forgiving God and how we have to forgive the sins of others. He told Peter not to forgive somebody’s sins seven times but seventy times seven! (Matthew 18:21)

(In the Lord’s prayer, (Matthew 6:9) Jesus tells us “*Forgive us our sins as we forgive the sins of others*”).

The Apostle Paul who was mainly converting the Gentile put much more importance on “sin”. (In one letter, to the Romans, he used the word sin “37 times”!)

“*Everyone has sinned and is far away from God’s saving presence*” (Romans 3:23)

(Catholics call it the dogma of the original sin)

“*Wherefore, as by one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned*” (Romans 5:12

)  
The Master explained why Adam is “**death**”

“*...Adam was the cause of physical life, and as the physical world of man is the world of imperfections, and imperfections are the equivalent of death, Paul compared the physical imperfections to death...*(Abdu’l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 119)

Exercise: Form pairs: Discuss: what do you think about “the doctrine of the original sin” then read ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s explanation.

`Abdu’l-Baha rejects “the dogma of original sin” when he said:

“*.. the mass of the Christians believe that, as Adam ate of the forbidden tree, He sinned in that He disobeyed, and that the disastrous consequences of this disobedience have been transmitted as a heritage and have remained among His descendants. Hence Adam became the cause of*

*the death of humanity. This explanation is unreasonable and evidently wrong, for it means that all men, even the Prophets and the Messengers of God, without committing any sin or fault, but simply because they are the posterity of Adam, have become without reason guilty sinners, and until the day of the sacrifice of Christ were held captive in hell in painful torment. This is far from the justice of God. If Adam was a sinner, what is the sin of Abraham? What is the fault of Isaac, or of Joseph? Of what is Moses guilty?"* (Abdu'l-Baha, S.A.Q. p. 120)

Does the Master believe that Adam's sin is carried over unto his descendants? \_\_\_\_\_

Why does Abdu'l-Baha not support the Christian belief in the original sin? \_\_\_\_\_

## **SECTION 13: JESUS DIED TO SAVE US FROM OUR SINS**

Most Christians when Jesus came, He died as a sacrifice for our sins. Through his death on the cross he freed us from the power of sin and brought mankind back to God. This belief that Christ died for our sins is often called the "atonement".

It is important to know more about Judaism and why they sacrificed animals in the temple.

St Paul was a Jewish priest (Pharisee) before becoming a Christian. He was very familiar with the ritual of animal sacrifice.

In Judaism the shedding of blood is important: *"and almost all things came by the law, purged by blood and without shedding of blood is no remission"* (Hebrews 9:22)

In Judaism, once a year the high priest offered blood *"for himself and the errors of others."* For St Paul, Jesus was like that high priest offering His blood: Jesus *"...but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself"*. (Hebrews 9:26)

(Please note how St Paul correlates Jesus crucifixion with the end of the world or end of an era) *or "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of man and unto them that look for him shall he appear a second time without sin unto salvation.* (Hebrews 9:28)

For Jewish people, such an analogy using blood as sacrifice was easy to understand. But in the 21st century where bloody animal sacrifices are not practiced anymore, St Paul's explanation is not satisfactory and makes less sense. However in the light of the Baha'i teachings this belief can be easily and logically understood.

### **Exercise:**

Form pairs. Discuss what do you believe was the purpose of Jesus dying on the cross?

After your discussion read the different quotations from the Baha'i Writings.

The Bahá'í writings confirm that it is true that Jesus sacrificed Himself for our sake.

Bahá'u'lláh wrote that Jesus was sacrificed *"as a ransom for the sins and iniquities of all the people of the earth"* (Gleanings p. 75)

*"He gave His blood in order to guide the world of humankind"* (PUP p.450)

Abdu'l-Baha explained: *"But Christ, Who is the Word of God, sacrificed Himself. This has two meanings, an apparent and an esoteric [inward] meaning. The outward meaning is this: Christ's intention was to represent and promote a Cause which was to educate the human world, to quicken the children of Adam, and to enlighten all mankind; and since to represent such a great Cause -- a Cause which was antagonistic to all the people of the world and all the nations and kingdoms -- meant that He would be killed and crucified, so Christ in proclaiming His mission sacrificed His life.*

*The second meaning of sacrifice is this: Christ was like a seed, and this seed sacrificed its own form so that the tree might grow and develop. Although the form of the seed was destroyed, its reality became apparent in perfect majesty and beauty in the form of a tree. The form of the seed was sacrificed for the tree, but its perfections, because of this sacrifice, became evident and apparent -- the tree, the branches, the leaves and the blossoms being concealed in the seed. When the form of the seed was sacrificed, its perfections appeared in the perfect form of leaves, blossoms and fruits".* (Abdu'l-Baha, S. A. Q., p. 120)

Abdu'l-Baha referred to the words of St John [2 Cf. John 6:51] as follows:

*This is the meaning of the words of Christ, "I gave My blood for the life of the world" - that is to say, I have chosen all these troubles, these sufferings, calamities, and even the greatest martyrdom, to attain this object, the remission of sins (that is, the detachment of spirits from the human world, and their attraction to the divine world) in order that souls may arise who will be the very essence of the guidance of mankind, and the manifestations of the perfections of the Supreme Kingdom.*" (Abdu'l-Baha, S. A. Q., p. 122)

The Master tells us that Jesus sacrifice was to set mankind free from the sins of strife, war and bloodshed: "...*Through His death [Jesus] and teachings we have entered into His Kingdom. His essential teaching was the unity of mankind and the attainment of supreme human virtues through love. He came to establish the Kingdom of peace and everlasting life. Can you find in His words any justification for discord and enmity? The purpose of His life and the glory of His death were to set mankind free from the sins of strife, war and bloodshed.*" (Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 5)

In fact all the Messengers were persecuted and suffered for our sakes:

*"Moses was persecuted and driven out into the desert, Abraham was banished, Muhammad took refuge in caves, the Bab was killed and Baha'u'llah was exiled and imprisoned forty years. Yet all of Them desired fellowship and love among men. They endured hardships, suffered persecution and death for our sakes that we might be taught to love one another and be united and affiliated instead of discordant and at variance."*

(Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 234)

## SECTION 14: SALVATION

Many Christians think that only those people who believe that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God will be taken into heaven. The others, the non-Christians will suffer in hell for eternity.

Therefore many Christians do not mind associating with members of some other Christian denominations. They just have different rituals and a different interpretation of the Bible but they are also saved because they share a similar belief in Christ, the Son of God.

Devout Christians are very suspicious and even fearful when encountering non-Christians. They sometimes fear that even to listen to members of a "non-Christian religion", they will lose their opportunity "to be saved".

Abdu'l-Baha when teaching in the West always removed these apprehensions or fear first. He exalted Christ before he spoke about His Father, Baha'u'llah. As Baha'is we have to be sensitive too and remove apprehensions first.

Shoghi Effendi asks us to "fearlessly assert the Sonship and Divinity of Jesus Christ".

By removing this "apprehension" or fear, we will create a Christian-friendly environment.

**Exercise:** Consider the following teaching situation. In the first case, the Baha'i just gives his favorite answer without listening to the Christian. In the second case the Baha'i removes the apprehension first before explaining further.

### A teaching situation

Quddus : *I am a Baha'i.*

Mary: *Nice to hear but are you also a Christian?*

Quddus : *No, the Baha'i faith is an independent world religion, with his own founder, Baha'u'llah, his own holy Books and his own administration. We are not Christians. We do not belong to Christianity.*

Mary: *Sounds like we are in different camps. I am very happy that I am a Christian and I will pray for you.*

Quddus: *But Baha'u'llah is the Return of Christ. I can prove it to you from the Bible.*

Mary *I can also prove from the Bible that in the latter days lots of false prophets would arise. May-be you better start reading the Bible before it is too late. .*

Reflection: What is Mary interested in? Is the information Quddus conveys correct? Is this the information the Christian wants to hear. What went wrong?

Note; This is only an example and of course every person is different and therefore every response is different. It is possible that Mary is a person who is seeking an answer to his questions outside of traditional Christianity! Therefore asking questions to the seeker is the only way to find out what they really believe.

**Exercise:** Form pairs:

Scenario: Again Mary asks: *Are you a Christian?* Construct a similar dialogue first removing any apprehensions which explaining your belief in Jesus, the Son of God and using if possible some Baha'i quotations and Bible verses which we used earlier. But this time we should have a happy ending and Mary becomes interested in the Faith.

The Christian asks a Baha'i: *Are you a Christian?*

This time the Baha'i responds in a different way for example: *We believe in \_\_\_\_\_*

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This time the Christian says: \_\_\_\_\_

### What are Jesus teachings about salvation?

***“Jesus accused the religious leaders; “Woe to you ...You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces” (Matt 23:13)***

Indeed, religious leaders who tell you “Belief is sufficient” ignore the Message of the Bible. Jesus taught in many parables that man has to perform good and righteous deeds to be saved by God.

For example, the parable of the master and the servant: The person who had only one talent used it, worked hard and was blessed by his master. The person who had 100 talents but didn't work was punished. Another example is the analogy of the harvest. Only if you work hard, you will rejoice at the time of harvest.

Let's study in more detail what Jesus tells us about “the day of Judgment”. This isn't a parable as some Christians believe but a sequence of events explained in highly symbolic language.

### ♥ Use Flipchart 43 & 44

This drawing illustrates what Jesus told us about the final judgment of God. Jesus explains in this parable that the judgment is based on “the love that we show each other”. The Day of Judgment is not based, as some church leaders teach today, on worshipping God on Sundays, performing Holy Communion or by witnessing “I am a believer”. Salvation is based on a life lived according to the Commandment to love God and one another.

What do the Baha'i Writings tell us about Salvation?

Also Baha'u'llah warns us: ***“Leaders of religion, in every age have hindered their people from attaining the shores of eternal salvation.”*** (Bahá'u'lláh: The Book of Certitude p. 15)

## What is the Baha'i understanding about salvation?

Baha'is believe in the Oneness of Mankind and the Oneness of Religion. Therefore salvation is available for the followers of all religions. Both the knowledge of God (through the Manifestations of God) and righteous deeds are important. Man's acceptance or rejection of the Message of God is a matter of great import. As in Christianity both Faith and deeds are necessary conditions for salvation.

Baha'u'llah revealed: *"The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed. It behoveth every one who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Source of Divine inspiration."* (The Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 19)

Abdu'l-Baha explained the meaning of above verse further:

*"This blessed verse means that the foundation of success and salvation is the knowledge of God, and that the results of the knowledge of God are the good actions which are the fruits of faith..."*

*If man has not this knowledge, he will be separated from God, and when this separation exists, good actions have not complete effect. This verse does not mean that the souls separated from God are equal, whether they perform good or bad actions. It signifies only that the foundation is to know God, and the good actions result from this knowledge. Nevertheless, it is certain that between the good, the sinners and the wicked who are veiled from God there is a difference. For the veiled one who has good principles and character deserves the pardon of God, while he who is a sinner, and has bad qualities and character, is deprived of the bounties and blessings of God. Herein lies the difference....*

*Therefore, the blessed verse means that good actions alone, without the knowledge of God, cannot be the cause of eternal salvation, everlasting success, and prosperity, and entrance into the Kingdom of God.* (Abdu'l-Baha, S.A.Q. p. 238)

### Questions:

1. What is the first duty? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is the second duty? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is the meaning of the blessed verse "...whoso is deprived thereof, hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed." \_\_\_\_\_

**Exercise: Purpose:** Most of the time, we avoid to use many Bible proofs as it could lead to controversy and dispute. But try the following approach seeking mutual agreement.

**Christian:** *I believe that because I am a Christian I will go directly to heaven when I die!*

**Baha'i:** *Very good. I am very happy to hear that you are very concerned about your soul and life after death. It is very important to reflect on eternity. As the Bible tells us "it is better to lose the world than your soul". We as Baha'is also believe in the divinity and the Sonship of Christ. It is impossible to be a Baha'i if we do not believe in Jesus Christ.*

**Christian:** *Yes, but you do not believe in the same Christ I believe in!*

**Baha'i:** *There is only one Christ. For us Christ has always existed exactly as the Bible teaches us.*

**Joseph:** *I always heard that Baha'is are non-Christian. Do you believe in heaven?*  
**Baha'i:** *(explains concepts of life after death)*

Another example but this time the Christian is a fundamentalist Christian who only accepts the authority of the Bible. In such a case the Baha'i has to use a few verses of the Bible to demonstrate the parallel Baha'i point of view.

**Mary:** *Only Christians belonging to the true church are saved. This is in the Bible.*

**Quddus:** *The Bible tells us: “Judge not that ye be not judged” (Matthew 7:1-27)  
And “Not every one that said Lord, Lord shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven  
but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven “(Matthew 7:27)*

**Christian:** *The Bible tells us that we will be saved by Faith only. Deeds are not important.*

**Baha'i:** *The Bible tells us that both, faith and deeds are important. It is written.  
“Even so faith, by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (James 2:17)  
This belief is also confirmed in the Baha'i Writings*

**Christian:** *But Baha'i is not in the Bible.*

**Baha'i:** *The founder of the Baha'i Faith is Baha'u'llah which means the Glory of God and his name is mentioned many times in the Bible If you like I can show you using my flipchart and I will tell you something more about Baha'u'llah.*

## SECTION 16: BAPTISM

### ♥ See Flipchart p. 37 & 38

Baptism is considered in the Christian churches as a very important issue. To become a member of a Christian church, you must be baptized. Some churches claim that only if you are baptized in their church will you be saved and go to heaven. Other churches linked Baptism with “being reborn”. Some churches see baptism as a form of “exorcism” in which the “devil” is driven out by using the “magic” baptism water. All those rituals have nothing to do with real baptism as a study of the Holy Scriptures will make clear!

Originally only adults who testified, who repented their sins and declared that they believed in Christ were baptized.

The well known Father of the church, St Augustine, Bishop of Carthage (354-450 AD) developed a Christian view of history which led to the doctrine of the original sin. He also wrote a book called “The city of God.” “The city of God” is the Catholic Apostolic church, which gives its followers (Catholics) salvation through the sacraments and the rituals of the church.

All these man-made doctrines and ideas consolidated the power of the Catholic Church but divided the Christians into two groups, orthodox (straight thinking) Christians and heterodox or heretics. The Church claimed salvation for the orthodox Christians (Catholics) but condemned the heterodox Christians to eternal damnation or hell fire.

To escape hell fire you had to become a member of the church. Therefore you had to be baptized. Baptism became the sacrament of salvation.

As a consequence, the original inward truth of baptism has been lost and has now been replaced by an acceptance of an outward form. Baptism has become a “ritual”.

Also by removing the two prior steps, to repent sins and believe in Christ, baptism had become very illogical for people living in this century of science and reason. We can argue that for example if you take a thief who doesn't repent or ask for forgiveness for his sins, immerse him in water, then he is still a thief. The baptized thief who didn't show any sincere remorse for his bad deeds, will still be punished for stealing, either in this life or in the next. This is only justice!!

The Baha'i Faith explains again the original meaning of Baptism. Baha'u'llah confirms the words of Jesus; ***“Even as Jesus said: ‘Ye must be born again.’ [1] Again He saith: ‘Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.’ [2]***

(Baha'u'llah, The Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 118)

Baha'u'llah refers here to the discussion held between Nicodemus, a leader amongst the Pharisees and Jesus. ***..”Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”*** (John 3 :5)

Abdu'l-Baha explained in Some Answered Questions that when Jesus talks about water, He doesn't mean material water! He speaks about symbolical water which is the water of knowledge and belief in God! (As the answer of Abdu'l-Baha is very long we have divided it into several paragraphs interspaced with some comments to facilitate understanding)

***“However, afterward He said the true baptism is not with material water, but it must be with spirit and with water. In this case water does not signify material water, for elsewhere it is explicitly said baptism is with spirit and with fire, from which it is clear that the reference is not to material fire and material water, for baptism with fire is impossible.”***

Abdu'l-Baha refers here to an explicit text in the Bible which says that Jesus will baptize with Holy Ghost and with fire. In Luke 3:16, John the Baptist said:

***“I indeed baptize you with water...but He (Jesus) will baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire”.*** (Luke 3:16)

How could Jesus baptize with fire? Would He burn a person to show they were baptized? Yet this is what this passage says. If the bible is taken literally as it often is, then Jesus would have used fire. These words should not be taken literally as they have a spiritual meaning. In Luke 3:16, John the Baptist said: ***“I indeed baptize you with water...but He (Jesus) will baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire”.***

Of course fire is not “real fire” as Abdu'l-Baha explains:

***“Therefore, the spirit is the bounty of God, the water is knowledge and life, and the fire is the love of God. For material water does not purify the heart of man; no, it cleanses his body. But the heavenly water and spirit, which are knowledge and life, make the human heart good and pure; the heart which receives a portion of the bounty of the Spirit becomes sanctified, good and pure - - that is to say, the reality of man becomes purified and sanctified from the impurities of the world of nature. These natural impurities are evil qualities: anger, lust, worldliness, pride, lying, hypocrisy, fraud, self-love, etc.”***

Abdu'l-Baha explains:

- Heavenly water is knowledge and life
- Heavenly fire is the love of God
- The Holy Ghost is the bounty of God

Abdu'l-Baha continues: ***“Man cannot free himself from the rage of the carnal passions except by the help of the Holy Spirit. That is why He says baptism with the spirit, with water and with fire is necessary, and that it is essential -- that is to say, the spirit of divine bounty, the water of knowledge and life, and the fire of the love of God. Man must be baptized with this spirit, this water and this fire so as to become filled with the eternal bounty. Otherwise, what is the use of baptizing with material water? No, this baptism with water was a symbol of repentance, and of seeking forgiveness of sins.”***

and ***“But in the cycle of Baha'u'llah there is no longer need of this symbol; for its reality, which is to be baptized with the spirit and love of God, is understood and established.”***

## **Belief has to come before baptism!!**

As previously explained, true baptism is the process of internal transformation, starting with the repentance of sins. True baptism is not with material water but with heavenly water. Jesus and the disciples of Jesus taught that for true baptism belief had to come first! Belief is most important. Indeed, faith should come first and baptism is only of secondary importance. Baptism should be the outward confirmation of an inward belief. Therefore baptizing a baby is totally meaningless as the child is too young to have belief! Baptism of children was never practiced in the early church but was introduced much later.

The early disciples knew that first they had to teach before baptizing. Paul understood that principle and wrote: ***“For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel”***.( 1 Corinthians)

There are several other examples in the Bible which show that the early Christians understood that belief had to come first. For example, in the book of Acts, we find a story about a man who asked to be baptized. Philip, the Christian missionary told him that first, he must believe. ***“And the eunuch said; see there is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe ... and he (Philip) baptized him.”*** (Acts 8:36-37)

(Everybody knows the story about the thief who was crucified with Jesus. Although he was not baptized, Jesus told him: *“Today, shalt thou be with me in Paradise”* (Luke 23:43) This shows that this man was saved by Jesus although he had not been baptized. Therefore salvation is not dependent on the ritual of baptism. We can also consider that this is a proof that Jesus was taken up to heaven immediately after he died on the cross)

## **The Spiritual Meaning of Baptism**

If our body is dirty it can be cleaned by washing with water. But if we do something evil, it affects the development of our soul. This cannot be washed away by water.

The spiritual meaning of baptism is to believe. The symbol used in baptism is water. This spiritual meaning of water is mentioned by Jesus when He said; ***“He that believeth in me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living waters.”*** (John 7:38)

Have you ever seen a river of water coming out of the stomach of a person? The term `water' must have a hidden spiritual meaning. The symbolic meaning of water is knowledge of God. ***“For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”*** (Habakkuk 2:14)

Here it is clear that water(s) means knowledge of God.

Another time Jesus cried out, saying: ***“If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.”*** (John 7:37). In this case Jesus is not talking about drinking water, but he speaks about people who thirst for the knowledge of God.

Therefore instead of a physical ritual of baptism, wouldn't it be better to say every day whilst we bathe; “as my body is washed from impurities, in the same way, let my spirit be cleansed and purified with the knowledge of God as given to mankind by His Messenger”

### **♥ See Flipchart p. 37 & 38**

The drawing shows a person symbolized by a heart which is full of lust, anger, deceit and pride. When this heart receives the water of the knowledge of God and the fire of the love of God it is transformed into a virtuous “heart”. Hate is changed into love, lying into honesty and pride into humility.

## **Is there baptism in Baha'i Faith?**

Yes, but not with physical water. Baha'is receive the “living water” which is nothing else than “the knowledge of God”. True salvation is the knowledge of God.

**Questions:**

1. **“Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.”**(John 3:5)

What is the biblical meaning of to be “born of water and the Spirit”?

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2. How is baptism a symbol of repentance from all sin?

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3. Christ has said baptism must be with Spirit and with water. He has also said baptism is with spirit and fire.

spirit means: \_\_\_\_\_

water means: \_\_\_\_\_

fire means: \_\_\_\_\_

Use the flipchart to explain the meaning of Baptism.

Imagine a Christian comes to you and tells you, because you are not baptised you will not be saved. How would you turn this challenge into a teaching situation?

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Why is baptism with real water not used in the Baha’i Faith?

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**Section 16: The Eucharist or the Holy Communion**

♥ Use flipchart p. 39 & 40

The Eucharist has always formed a central rite of Christian worship. However Christian denominations have different interpretations about its meaning.

Different names are used. Catholics often speak about the Holy Communion or Eucharist. Other denominations call it the last supper.

It is an important ritual in which Christians are remembering the action of Jesus during the night before His crucifixion, when he told them: **“And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you. (Luke 22:19-20) (See also Matt. 26:26–28; Mark 14:22)**

According to the Roman Catholic Church, the elements of bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Catholics believe that is the priest who transforms the

bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. Only priests have been given the special power to do this. This interpretation is mainly based on the literal interpretation of some words from Jesus as found in the gospel of St John:

*"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. "I am the bread of life. "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead." This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die.*

*"I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world".*

*The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?"*

*Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you".*

*"Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. "For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.6:56" He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him". (John 6:47-56)*

Christians are divided about the true meaning of the “bread and the wine”

Abdu'l-Baha explains:

*“...Reflect how clear it is that what Christ meant by the heavenly bread was His spirit, His bounties, His perfections and His teachings; for it is said in the 63rd verse: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing.".... In the same way, reflect that when Christ blessed the bread and gave it to His disciples, saying, "This is My body," [Matt. 26:26] and gave grace to them, He was with them in person, in presence, and form. He was not transformed into bread and wine; if He had been turned into bread and wine, He could not have remained with the disciples in body, in person and in presence. Then it is clear that the bread and wine were symbols which signified: I have given you My bounties and perfections, and when you have received this bounty, you have gained eternal life and have partaken of your share and your portion of the heavenly nourishment.” (Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 96)*

### **Questions:**

1. Which two verses of the Bible form the basis of the practice of the Holy Communion?

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2. What is Jesus' reply as quoted by the Master when the Jews muttered: **“How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”** (John 6:52)

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3. Why does the Master say that the belief that the bread changed into body of Christ is illogical?

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4. What is the spiritual meaning of the bread and the wine?

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### **ROLE PLAY:**

Christian: Do you believe in the Holy Communion?

Baha'i: The Holy Communion is a ritual in the church and it is important to reflect on its true meaning, especially as Christians are divided about the meaning of the Holy Communion. Therefore I brought with me a drawing which explains this further.

## ♥ Use flipchart p. 39 & 40

Jesus says: "...*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God*". This means that the body needs food but the spirit or soul needs the Word of God.

Jesus also explains that the most important is the spirit and the spirit of man is quickened or becomes alive through the Word of God.

This shows that when Jesus Christ says: "*I am the living bread*", he is not speaking about the bread that we eat but he is talking about His Words, His teachings.

In a similar way, one time Jesus said to the disciples:

*"But He said to them, 'I have food to eat of which you do not know.' Therefore the disciples said to one another, 'Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.'" (John 32-34)*

This means that bread, food are symbols for his Teachings. When people follow His Will they will have eternal life.

That Jesus used the terms, food, bread or leaven of bread (also called yeast used in bread) is clear when he told His disciples the following:

Then Jesus said to them, "*Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.*". *And they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'It is because we have taken no bread.'*" (Matthew 16:6)

*"How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? - but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."*

*"Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees."* (Matthew 16:11-12)

When you reflect on the Bible, the meaning of bread, my body, my flesh is very clear. Jesus speaks about his qualities, His teachings which we must bring into our life.

Unfortunately the Catholic Church, influenced by the manmade interpretations of the church fathers, linked a literal interpretation of the word "bread" with the concept of salvation which resulted in a man made ritual called the Holy Communion.

The Baha'i Writings tell us:

*"Therefore, it is evident that the spirit of Christ is a heavenly grace which descends from heaven; whosoever receives light from that spirit in abundance -- that is to say, the heavenly teachings -- finds everlasting life. That is why it is said in the 35th verse: 'And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst.'*

## SECTION 17: Heaven and Hell

Whenever a Christian is speaking about heaven and hell, a great teaching opportunity is created to discuss Baha'i teachings of life after death.

Often Christians believe that heaven and hell are physical places. Some believe that Heaven is for those people who believe in Christ, the Son of God and Hell or eternal punishment for those people who did not accept Christ as their personal Savior.

Many Christians believe that heaven is the place with God in charge and hell is the place with the devil in charge. This would be a duality of authority and would mean that the oneness and perfection of God would be destroyed, which is, of course, impossible.

Other Christians see heaven as the place for those people who performed good deeds in this life and hell for those people who did bad deeds.

The concept of heaven and hell doesn't come directly from the Manifestations of God. Abraham or Moses doesn't speak about life after death. The ancient Jews believed in punishment in this life not in a next life. Belief in an afterlife developed very gradually.

In the time of Jesus there was still little understanding of the world. For them, the world consisted of three levels. The earth could be compared with a flat table with four corners, supported by the pillars of the earth and surrounded by water. The forces of evil or bad spirits, demons and devils lived in the waters under the earth, and over the earth stood a gigantic dome called the heavens. The stars were like oil-lamps hung up in the sky. God's throne was above the heavens. In this ancient worldview there was not the slightest doubt that God was "up there" and the devil "down there"

The Jews believed in 'Sheol' which means "state of the death" or "world of shadows". It was thought that in the world of shadows the spirit of man lived a limited existence. In a later development, heaven and hell were considered to be part of that underworld.

Most Jews believed that the body was essential to be able to fully exist after death. They believed that after death all spirits went to the same place. They thought that for three days after death the spirit stayed close to the dead body. Then a sad separation began in which the handicapped soul which had now lost its body started a journey to the underworld and continued barely existing in an unreal region of shadows, misery and futility. This underworld, called Sheol, was the place where all the spirits good or bad would remain until the Day of Judgment when they would again receive their body. They believed that nobody was very happy after death. True happiness would only start on the "Day of Judgment" when the dead receive their body again.

Jesus spoke as a man of his time and place. He used the language and the culture of his time to explain certain concepts. For example, Jesus said: ***"And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven."*** (John 3:13).

Even though on earth, yet His spirit was in heaven, close to God.

Baha'u'llah explained this concept in plain language: ***"Whilst walking amongst mortals, they [Manifestations of God] soar in the heaven of the divine presence. Without feet they tread the path of the spirit, and without wings they rise unto the exalted heights of divine unity. With every fleeting breath they cover the immensity of space, and at every moment traverse the kingdoms of the visible and the invisible."*** (Baha'u'llah: The Kitab-i-Iqan, Page: 67)

Abdu'l-Baha explains that above statement of Jesus shows that heaven is not a place but a condition of the spirit.

***"Even as He Himself hath said, 'I came down from heaven [John 6:38 ] and again, 'The Son of Man is in heaven.' [John 3:13] Hence it is clear that His heaven is beyond all directional points; it encircleth all existence, and is raised up for those who worship God. Beg and implore thy Lord to lift thee up into that heaven, and give thee to eat of its food, in this age of majesty and might."*** (Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 16)

Heaven or Hell are not physical places but they are conditions which can be experienced in this life. Heaven is the condition of being close to God.(nearness is likeness)

As this concept is difficult to comprehend, let us think of a man and a woman who fall into love. Their love is so great that their entire life revolved around each other. Their thoughts, their actions are all related to "the loved one". They walk on this earth but they feel in heaven.

Also Baha'u'llah revealed: ***"They say: Where is Paradise and where is Hell. Say; the one is reunion with Me; the other is thine own self"*** (Baha'u'llah, Epistle to the son of the wolf)

Heaven means a condition of perfection, and hell, that of imperfection. Heaven is harmony with the will of God and with our fellow beings; hell is the want of such harmony. Heaven is the condition of spiritual life; hell is spiritual death. A man may be either in heaven or

hell while still in the body. The joys of heaven are spiritual joys and the pains of hell are the total lack of such joys.

**Role-play:**

**QUESTION :** Does this mean Baha'is believe in heaven and hell ?

**Typical answer**

“No, heaven is not a physical place situated above the clouds, neither does hell exist ”

**Participants reflect:** (initiated by “evaluator”) Is this an effective answer? Explain why or why not? Any suggestions how to improve?

**Observation:**

A “no” answer without further explanation closes doors. Visions about heaven and hell as places are a part of the Christian education from childhood. Many Christians live in fear of the hell. They feel offended and that it is the work of the devil when people tell them that the Hell doesn't exist.

**Alternative answer:**

Yes, of course. This world can be compared to the womb of the mother, a place of preparation for the next stage of existence. If the fetus does not grow properly in the womb, it will come out handicapped in this life. In the same way if we do not develop spiritual qualities in this life we will be spiritually handicapped in the next world.

Baha'is believe in the soul. The soul progresses towards God. With this understanding, Heaven is getting closer to God, while going further away from God is like hell. This means that heaven is a spiritual condition, and not physical place.

In the same way, when we are far away from God, our soul, which was created in the image of God, suffers. We feel remorse for our bad deeds, the things we didn't do, and the missed opportunities. This is like being in hell.

**Participants reflect:** (initiated by “evaluator”) Is this an effective answer? Explain why or why not? Any suggestions how to improve?

**Comments:** Many modern Christians hold views of life after death similar to those found in the Baha'i Teachings. If time permits Baha'i can explain that thanks to modern medicine many people who were clinically dead were brought back to life. They bring back stories about their experiences, which are very similar to Baha'i concepts. For example, read "life after life studies" of Dr. John Moody or check websites on NDE (near death experience).

**Extra curricular activity:**

1. First refresh your memory about Baha'i teachings of life after death. (This topic is discussed in detail in Book 1 of the study circle curriculum)
2. Second ask some of your Christian friends what they believe happened after death.
3. Share with them the Baha'i explanation.
4. Report results back to your study circle.

## SECTION 18: Devil

*"... the concept of Satan or the Devil as an actual being opposed to God is rejected by the Bahá'í teachings...the term is understood by Bahá'ís to mean the promptings of self and desire and the dark side of human nature."*(13 February 1974, letter from Universal House of Justice)

### Questions:

- Is the devil a being opposed to God? \_\_\_\_\_
- What does the term "devil" mean in the Baha'i Writings?: \_\_\_\_\_

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The devil is not part of the teachings of Abraham, Moses or Jesus.

The concept of the devil entered Judaism during the Babylonian Exile in the 6th and 5th centuries B.C. Of course Jesus born 2000 years ago would use the language of that time and therefore Jesus often speaks about the devil. We must realize that during the time of Jesus, medical knowledge was very poor and sick people were often considered to be possessed by the devil. Jesus had to put spiritual, abstract ideas into a language that the Jewish people with their very limited medical knowledge could understand. Unfortunately after Jesus, the devil has been used to justify the most incredible cruelty including the burning of so called witches.

The word Satan comes from a Hebrew word which means obstacle, an adversary who is blocking the path. Indeed, we encounter on the way to God an obstacle, called Satan. In the Baha'i Faith, Satan is an externalized symbol for the reality of evil or sin which keeps us away from God.

The devil is not an actual being who is opposed to God. Satan is within us.

The Baha'i Writings tell us: *"Every good thing is of God and every evil thing is from yourselves. Will ye not comprehend! This same truth has been revealed in all the Scriptures if ye be of them that understand."* (Baha'u'llah, Gleanings p 149)

*"The evil spirit, Satan or whatsoever is interpreted as evil, refers to the lower nature of man. This lower nature is symbolized in various ways...all such ideas and nomenclature are symbols expressing the mere human or earthly nature of man"* (Foundations of World Unity, p.77)

In this way, Baha'is believe in the power of Satan. Indeed our entire life is a battle with Satan or this 'adversary', which is really nothing more than our lower or earthly nature.

### Sharing some writings from the Bible

Jesus said: *"But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies"*: (Matthew 15:18)

Paul writes in similar terms about the evil within man as which keeps him away from God, he speaks about the battle between "the works of the flesh" which are the evil deeds or sins and "the fruits of the spirit".

<sup>19</sup>*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these adultery, witchcraft, hatred ... wrath, strife, seditions ... murders, drunkenness, ...as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.* <sup>22</sup>*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith.* (Galatians 5: 19- 22)

### First role play

**QUESTION** Do Baha'is believe in Satan?

♥ See Flipchart p. 45 & 46

### Typical answer

“No, Baha’u’llah says there is no such thing as the Devil”

**Participants reflect:** (initiated by “evaluator”) **Is this an effective answer? Explain why or why not? Any suggestions how to improve?**

### Observation:

A “no” answer without further explanation closes doors. Baha’i writings repeatedly affirm the reality of Satan, interpreting it as the lower nature. They add that evil does not exist, stating that therefore the devil does not exist. The Christian may tend to interpret this as a dismissal of the Bible’s warnings.

**Alternative answer:** Yes, Baha’is believe in Satan. Also, the Baha’i Writings also speak about the ‘Evil one, waiting to entrap you’. This is in a way similar to the Bible. Also Jesus in his sermons and parables tells us that we must take responsibility for what we do and that we can choose to be good or bad.

Baha’is believe the same, that evil is within each of us, keeping us away from God. The word ‘Satan’ is a Hebrew word which means ‘adversary’. Our entire life we have to battle Satan or ‘this adversary’, which is nothing more than our material nature, or animal nature.

So in this life we have to learn to replace hate with love, ignorance with knowledge, despair with hope and doubt with belief.

Baha’is believe in Satanic power. The Bible tells us that it is the power of Satan which blinds the minds of them “*which believe not*” (2 Cor 4:4). This is the same to-day. People are now ‘blinded’ to investigate the truth of Baha’u’llah revelation. Although the Bible tells us that we should “try the spirits whether they are from God”. Therefore we have to make an effort to investigate Baha’u’llah’s claim.

**Participants reflect:** (initiated by “evaluator”) **Is this an effective answer? Explain why or why not? Any suggestions how to improve?**

### Comments:

Both Christian and Baha’i writings speak about the Devil in similar terms. Both Christians and Baha’is have to struggle against sin, which separates us from God.

### **Second role-play:**

One Christian Mary and two Baha’is, Quddus and Tahirih

Quddus gives inefficient answer.

**Mary :** *Quddus, how do you know you’re not being led astray by the Devil?*

**Quddus** *Oh, Bahá’is don’t believe in the Devil. We believe that evil is just the absence of good.*

**Mary :** *But Jesus speaks about the devil, therefore it must be true.*

**Comments:** What went wrong? It is true that Abdu’l-Baha explains that as darkness is the lack of light, poverty is the lack of wealth and evil is the lack of good.

**Mary:** *How do you know you’re not being led astray by the Devil?*

**Tahirih:** *All Baha’is fearlessly assert the divinity and Sonship of Jesus Christ, believe in and take the Holy Bible seriously. We believe that Christ is the image of the*

*invisible God, Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the same, yesterday, today and for ever so definitely Bahai's are not following the Devil.*

*But Baha'is believe in the power of evil. It was evil that the religious leaders who were well versed in the Holy Scripture condemned Jesus to the shameful death of crucifixion. The Bahá'í Writings confirm satanic power which means that people have (through their free will) the ability to turn against God. We know this power can prevent souls from recognizing their Lord. The Jews rejected Christ claiming that Jesus was not the Messiah, that Jesus did not fulfill the prophecies, and that Jesus broke the laws of Moses.*

*It was the same evil which caused the murder of more than 20000 followers of the Bab. Also Baha'u'llah suffered his entire life due to the blindness and evil of the people who rejected Him.*

Here the Bahá'í changed the focus from the literal existence of Satan to the “power of Satan or evil ” which prevent souls from recognizing their Lord. A comparison is then made between the evil forces which caused the crucifixion of Jesus and now the suffering of Baha'u'llah. The conversation is in that way refocused on Baha'u'llah.

Is the second presentation more efficient? Why? If time permits create your own role-play. One person is Christian, the other is a Baha'i. An example: The Christian claims that the devil is a real person. The Baha'i explains briefly the Baha'i point of view and then refocuses to the opposition against Baha'u'llah.

## **SECTION 19: Miracles**

♥ See flipchart page 41-42

From childhood onwards, most people hear cultural and religious stories taken from their Holy Scriptures. For example some children grow up with fascinating religious stories taken from the Bible, learning about miracles performed for example by Noah, Moses, Daniel, Elias and Jesus. Other children hear wonderful stories from the Islamic tradition or Hindu scriptures etc.

Children mainly live in the present and are completely unaware of the historical background of the stories. They do not know that many of those religious stories are from a distant past often from a time when stories were told only from mouth to mouth (oral tradition) Therefore these stories become “emotionally imprinted” on their mind.

This is the reason that when we explain the spiritual meaning of these miraculous stories that we have to remove these emotional apprehensions very slowly.

Discuss in pairs:

- a) How belief in these religious miraculous stories told in childhood can have a positive influence or a negative influence on our future development. Write your answer below.
- b) How you suggest removing any apprehensions from the seeker? Afterwards discuss suggested steps and quotations below.

### **Exercise:**

1. In which way can those religious stories have a negative influence? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. In which way can those religious stories have a positive influence? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When we are sharing the Baha'i understanding about miracles, we could take the following steps.

**STEP 1:** Abdu'l-Baha t explains; “*we must first establish the fact that the power of God is infinite, unlimited, and that it is within that power to accomplish anything*”

**STEP 2:** Abdul'-Baha tells us that Baha'is do not deny miracles. *“Our purpose is not to deny such miracles; our only meaning is that they do not constitute decisive proofs, and that they have an inner significance”*. (Abdu'l-Baha: Some Answered Questions, Pages: 37-38).

**STEP 3:** All the holy Books record miracles. For example, all miracles recorded during the life of Jesus run parallel with miracles recorded in the Old Testament. So we must accept all of them (see Appendix 5!) Miracles are only a proof for those people who witness it!

We could also consider when speaking with evangelical Christians without going into an argument that the Bible also warns us to be careful in believing in miracles as 'false prophets' and 'spirits of devils' can also perform miracles

*"For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles."* (Revelation 16:14)

*"..and the false prophet that wrought miracles before him..."* (Revelation 19:20)

**STEP 4:** We must learn the special terminology used in the Holy Books. Attachment 3 explains some of this terminology. *“The Holy Books have their special terminologies which must be known and understood. Physicians have their own peculiar terms; architects, philosophers have their characteristic expressions; poets have their phrases; and scientists, their nomenclature.”*

*“Second, we must understand the interpretation of Christ's words concerning the dead. A certain disciple came to Christ and asked permission to go and bury his father. He answered, "Let the dead bury their dead." Therefore, Christ designated as dead some who were still living -- that is, let the living dead, the spiritually dead, bury your father. They were dead because they were not believers in Christ. Although physically alive, they were dead spiritually. This is the meaning of Christ's words, "That which is born of flesh is flesh; and that which is born of Spirit is spirit." He meant that those who were simply born of the human body were dead spiritually, while those quickened by the breaths of the Holy Spirit were living and eternally alive. These are the interpretations of Christ Himself. Reflect upon them, and the meanings of the Holy Books will become clear as the sun at midday.”* (Abdu'l-Baha, P.U.P. p. 245)

*"Therefore, holding to literal interpretation and visible fulfillment of the text of the Holy Books is simply imitation of ancestral forms and beliefs; for when we perceive the reality of Christ, these texts and statements become clear and perfectly reconcilable with each other. Unless we perceive reality, we cannot understand the meanings of the Holy Books, for these meanings are symbolical and spiritual - such as, for instance, the raising of Lazarus, which has spiritual interpretation.* (Abdu'l-Baha, P.U.P., p. 245)

We have to be very careful with the use of the word symbolical and use it with caution!

Baha'is often tend to emphasize the symbolical meaning of the stories in the Holy Scriptures. Devout Christians might be upset and refuse to listen any longer as for them, symbolical means that his story didn't happen and that the Baha'is do not believe in the Bible. The meaning of certain words have changed since the time of Baha'u'llah. It is often important to stress that Baha'is take the Bible and its contents very seriously! Only with that attitude can we share the spiritual gems which are revealed in the Baha'i Writings and are often enshrined and hidden in these stories!

Baha'u'llah gave us in the Book of Certitude the key to unlock the twofold nature and station of Manifestations of God and also the twofold language of the Holy Scriptures, literal and symbolical.

### **Baha'i understanding about the stories in the Bible.**

The Baha'i Writings explain that certain Bible events didn't happen literally but have deep

spiritual meaning. We gave already a number of examples in section 10; The Holy Bible.

1. Creation of world in seven days (p.40)
2. Story of Adam and Eve (p.41)
3. At the baptism of Jesus, the heavens opened, dove descended and the voice of God spoke. (p.40)
4. Transfiguration on the Mount (p.43)
5. Resurrection of Lazarus (p.43)

The Baha'i writings also share many insights into the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ which finds a parallel in the Old Testament in the story how Elias was taken into heaven. These topics will be discussed later in this course and in Appendix 4.

### ♥ Exercise using flipchart page 41-42

Explain that in this drawing, the man with the fishing net represents Peter who believed in Jesus and received spiritual sight. The other person is a Jew who didn't believe in Jesus and who became spiritually blind. This is the meaning of Jesus words when He said that He would make people blind. And Jesus said; ***“For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.”*** (John 9:39)

Of course Jesus would not blind anybody in a physical way.

Indeed all the Holy Books are full of miracle stories. Moses, Elias and Daniel all performed miracles. Hindu's, Buddhists, Muslims also recorded many miracles and if you accept miracles from Jesus than you must also accept miracles done by Krishna, Buddha, Muhammad, the Bab and Baha'u'llah.

### Sharing Stories about Miracles

For example it is recorded that when a Baha'i died in Akka (He didn't breathe, his body was already cold and the family were mourning around the dead body), Baha'u'llah instructed Mirza Aqa Jan to say, “a special healing prayer” and within one hour he was alive again (Abdu'l-Baha: Memorials of the Faithful, Pages: 157-158). Of course such narratives constitute no proof. ***“For if they are proofs for those who are present, they fail as proofs to those who are absent”*** (Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 100)

Abdu'l-Baha explains the greatest proof for the truth of Jesus and Baha'u'llah. ***“Recollect that Christ, solitary and alone, without a helper or protector, without armies and legions, and under the greatest oppression, uplifted the standard of God before all the people of the world, and withstood them, and finally conquered all, although outwardly he was crucified. Now this is a verifiable miracle which can never be denied. There is no need of any other proof of the truth of Christ..***

***And this is one of Baha'u'llah's greatest miracles: that He, a captive... wielded power. The prison changed into a palace, the jail itself became a Garden of Eden. Such a thing has not occurred in history before; no former age has seen its like: that a man confined to a prison should move about with authority and might; that one in chains should carry the fame of the Cause of God to the high heavens, should win splendid victories in both East and West, and should, by His almighty pen, subdue the world. Such is the distinguishing feature of this supreme Theophany ....***

***Although the royal farman specifically decreed that Baha'u'llah was to be held in solitary confinement within the Akka fortress, in a cell, under perpetual guard; that He was never to set foot outside; that He was never even to see any of the believers - notwithstanding such a farman, such a drastic order, His tent was raised in majesty on the heights of Mount Carmel. What greater display of power could there be than this, that from the very prison, the banner of the Lord was raised aloft, and rippled out for all the world to see!”.***

(Abdu'l-Baha: Memorials of the Faithful, Pages: 27-28)

(Also Baha'u'llah was in prison opposed by two mighty kings, who commanded big armies, but both kings lost their power as prophesied by Baha'u'llah)

**Visualisation exercise:**

Just close your eyes. Imagine you are constructing a beautiful building working with more than hundred people. Can you see the building rising up before your eyes, bricks, concrete, beautiful shiny blue windows, and an enormous skyscraper? Now imagine all the hard work is done and the building is finished. At night you see one lone person in black clothes planting a bomb in the building. Boom, it all goes up. All that work by hundreds of people is quickly destroyed by one man!

Now visualize a building that one man builds alone. Then a hundred people try to destroy it, but cannot. This is what happened to Jesus and to Bahá'u'lláh. Jesus was crucified but His teachings spread. In the same way, Bahá'u'lláh was opposed by fanatic priests and two powerful kings commanding large armies. They put Bahá'u'lláh in a number of prisons. However, from his dark prison in Israel, His teachings of peace, justice and unity would spread to the four corners of the world. Only one person with the power of God builds it up, yet all the people of the earth are powerless to destroy it. This is a true and verifiable miracle. This is a proof that both Jesus and Bahá'u'lláh are sent by God as this can only be accomplished with the power of God.

## UNIT 4: PROOFS

Purpose:

- To understand that several signs foretelling the coming of the Messiah are the same as those for the Return of Christ.
- To be able to explain using the Flipchart in a non-controversial and systematic way the fulfillment of some of the prophecies relating to the Return of the Spirit of Christ
- To relate the prophecies to the Coming of the Kingdom

### Introduction:

**Pairwork:** Discuss the meaning of the following quotation from Shoghi Effendi: *“Abdu'l-Bahá said that when people become true Christians, they will find themselves Bahá'ís. One or two of the best Bahá'ís I know were very earnest, sincere, devoted Christians and accepted the Bahá'í teachings with very little difficulty and without any intervening period of religious scepticism, as an amplification and fulfilment of the teachings and prophesyings of Christ and the prophets.”* (Shoghi Effendi, *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Baha'i Community*, p. 421)

### SECTION 1: “The Spiritual Return”

#### ♥ Use Flipchart p. 47 & 48 and 53 & 54

Imagine that you were a Jew living in Israel, in the time of Jesus. Imagine that you were a “strong” believer in Moses and in the Torah, awaiting the coming of the Messiah. Which “side” would you have chosen? Would you have listened to the religious leaders who told the people that Jesus was a false Messiah (Hebrew) or false Christ (Greek language) or would you have “walked in the footsteps” of Jesus together with a group of mainly uneducated simple people?

Was it easy for the Jews to recognize Jesus as the Messiah? This subject was often used by Abdu'l-Bahá who explained that the reason why the Jewish people (who were expecting the Promised One) did not recognize Him when He appeared was mainly due to their blind attachment to the name “Moses” and they didn't see the literal fulfillment of the prophecies. The problem was that the prophecies were not fulfilled literally but spiritually! The Master used this concept to prepare the Christians for a spiritual understanding about The Return of Christ.

*“The Jews still await the coming of the Messiah, and pray to God day and night to hasten His advent. When Jesus came they denounced and slew Him, saying: “This is not the One for Whom we wait. Behold, when the Messiah shall come, signs and wonders shall testify that He is in truth the Christ. The Messiah will arise out of an unknown city. He shall sit upon the throne of David, and behold, He shall come with a sword of steel, and with a scepter of iron shall He rule. He shall fulfill the Law of the Prophets. He shall conquer the East and the West, and shall glorify His chosen people the Jews. He shall bring with Him a reign of Peace during which even the animals shall cease to be at enmity with man. For behold, the wolf and the lamb shall drink from the same spring ... and all God's creatures shall be at rest...”*

*Thus the Jews thought and spoke, for they did not understand the Scriptures nor the glorious truths that were contained in them. The letter they knew by heart, but of the life-giving Spirit they understood not a word.*

*Hearken, and I will show you the meaning thereof: Although Christ came from Nazareth, which was a known place, He came also from heaven. His body was born of Mary, but His Spirit came from heaven. The sword He carried was the sword of His tongue, with which He divided the good from the evil, the true from the false, the faithful from the unfaithful, and the light from the darkness. His Word was indeed a sharp sword! The throne upon which He sat is the Eternal Throne from which Christ reigns forever, a heavenly throne, not an earthly one,*

*for the things of earth pass away but heavenly things pass not away. He reinterpreted and completed the Laws of Moses and fulfilled the Law of the Prophets. His Word conquered the East and the West. His kingdom is everlasting. He exalted those Jews who recognized Him. They were men and women of humble birth, but contact with Him made them great and gave them everlasting dignity. The animals who were to live with one another signified the different sects and races, who, once having been at war, were now to dwell in love and charity, drinking together the Water of Life from Christ the Eternal Spring.”* (Abdu’l-Bahá: Paris Talks, p 56)

Exercise 1: The table below consists of two columns. Read above quote and select in the first column the signs for the Coming of the Messiah and in the second column the spiritual fulfillment of that particular sign.

Signs for His Coming	Spiritual Fulfilment

Exercise 2: Use flipchart page 53 -54 in pairs and explain in your own words why most Jewish people missed the coming of Jesus the Christ.

## **Section 2: Examples used by Abdu’l-Baha**

Abdu’l-Bahá uses several examples to introduce “the spiritual or biblical meaning of Return”. (These examples are found in Some Answered Questions p. 132-133)

Example of the lamp and the light:

*“It is like this lamp: it was here last night, and tonight it is also lighted, and tomorrow night it will also shine. We say that the lamp of this night is the same light as that of last night, and that it has returned. It refers to the light, and not to the oil, the wick or the holder”.*

Example of the flower:

*“For example, there was a flower last year, and this year there is also a flower; I say the flower of last year has returned. Now, I do not mean that same flower in its exact individuality has come back; but as this flower has the same qualities as that of last year -- as it has the same perfume, delicacy, color and form -- I say the flower of last year has returned, and this flower is the former flower. When spring comes, we say last year's spring has come back because all that was found in last year's spring exists in this spring. That is why Christ said, "You will see all that happened in the days of the former Prophets."*

Example of the tree:

*“We will give another illustration. The seed of last year is sown, branches and leaves grow forth, blossoms and fruits appear, and all has again returned to seed. When this second seed is planted, a tree will grow from it, and once more those branches, leaves, blossoms and fruits will return, and that tree will appear in perfection. As the beginning was a seed and the end is a*

*seed, we say that the seed has returned. When we look at the substance of the tree, it is another substance, but when we look at the blossoms, leaves and fruits, the same fragrance, delicacy and taste are produced. Therefore, the perfection of the tree has returned a second time.”*

Pairwork: Work with your partner putting into your own words these three examples illustrating the “spiritual return”

### **Section 3: Spiritual return of Elias**

Some people think that the Return of Christ means that they shall see in bodily form the identical person of Jesus of Nazareth who walked the streets of Jerusalem two thousand years ago. This is not in accordance with the Bible. Jesus Himself explained the spiritual meaning of Return when He referred to John the Baptist as the return of Elias.

#### **Who is Elias?**

Elias (often called Elijah) is one of the Prophets of the Old Testament. He did all the miracles which Moses and Jesus did. He parted the waters like Moses and gave sight to the blind, multiplied food, resurrected a dead child as Jesus did. According to the Bible, he didn't die but went straight to heaven! *“And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven”* (King James Bible, 4 Kings 2:11)

As they thought He didn't die but went straight to heaven, the Jews believed that he would return.

#### **The spiritual return of Elias**

The Jews regarded the return of Elias as one of the signs for the coming of the Messiah as it was written in the book of Malachi: *“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD”* (Malachi: 4:5)

With this in mind many Jews were waiting for Elias to return as a sign for the return of the Messiah. As they interpreted the prophecy in a literal sense, they believed that the same Elias would descend physically from the visible sky!

As this strange event didn't happen, the Jewish priests used it to disprove that Jesus was the Messiah because in their eyes, one of the signs announcing the coming of the Messiah remained unfulfilled! Also the disciples of Jesus were confused and they asked Jesus for an explanation why Elias had not returned!

#### **John the Baptist is Elias:**

*“And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, that Elijah is come already and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they liked. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.”* (Matt. 17:11)

Jesus explains in the above text, that the prophesy about “Elias must come first” was actually fulfilled, not with the return of the person and body of the former Elias, rather Elias had returned ‘in the spirit and power’ in the person of John the Baptist. John the Baptist had, of course, a different identity from that of Elias who lived two hundred years earlier. But the body was not important in the eyes of Jesus. What was important was the spirit. The spirit of John the Baptist was the same as the spirit of Elias. Indeed, the prophetic and spiritual attributes of Elias were again manifested in John the Baptist.

Similar to Jewish expectations about Elias, many Christians believe that the same Jesus will return bodily. Based on the explanation of Jesus we can understand that the Return of Christ is not the return of the same identity of Jesus of Nazareth who lived on this earth two thousand years ago. The Return of Christ is the Return of the Christ spirit and the reappearance of the

spirit and power of Jesus in the person of a different man with a new name and a new identity.

We must also remember that Christ is not the name of a person, but a title<sup>1</sup>. The word Christ is a Greek word which is derived from the Hebrew `Messiah`. Christ means, the `Anointed One`, or as most Christians call him `the Saviour`. As it is a title, it is of course possible for several people to have the same title.

**John the Baptist says: “I am not Elias”!**

When a delegation of Jewish religious leaders went to see John the Baptist, John the Baptist responded that he was not Elias!

*“And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. “ And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elijah? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No”* (King James Bible, John 1:19-21)

*Abdu’l-Bahá explained that both statements (Jesus and John the Baptist) are correct; “In the same way, if we regard the return of the individual, it is another individual; but if we regard the qualities and perfections, the same have returned.*

*Therefore, when Christ said, "This is Elias," He meant: this person is a manifestation of the bounty, the perfections, the character, the qualities and the virtues of Elias. John the Baptist said, "I am not Elias." Christ considered the qualities, the perfections, the character and the virtues of both, and John regarded his substance and individuality.*

*“The explanation is this: not the personality, but the reality of the perfections, is meant -- that is to say, the same perfections that were in Elias existed in John the Baptist and were exactly realized in him. Therefore, John the Baptist was the promised Elias. In this case not the essence,[1] but the qualities, are regarded.”* (S.A.Q. p.133)

In this way Abdu’l-Bahá gradually opened the eyes of the Christians who were waiting for the Return of Christ.

There is a parallel between the Return of Elias and the Return of Christ. Even the words used in the Bible to describe the Ascension of Jesus and his Return are very similar to the words used in the Old Testament:

*“And it came to pass, while he [Jesus} blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.”* (Luke: 51 -53)

The reason for the great joy of the disciples was because “He was coming back”.

**Exercises:**

1. When Jesus speaks about the Return, does He speak about the Return of the individual or the return of His qualities? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Explain your own words how this applies to Baha’u’lláh? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Fill in the blank spaces using the examples given by Abdu’l-Bahá in the quotes above.

Different	Same
Different lamp	Same light _____
Different flower	Same _____
	Same _____
	Same _____
Different person.	Same _____

**Pairwork:**

Imagine you are living in Israel during the time of Jesus. One person is a Jew and a strong believer in Moses and the prophecies of the Torah. The other person is a disciple of Jesus. The disciple of Jesus explains to his Jewish friend about the spiritual return of Elias using `Abdu’l-Bahá’s explanation.

## Section 4: “Compare the days ...”

*“If thou wishest to find the truth, compare the days of the Manifestation of the Beauty of Abha with the days of Christ; consider this is identically like that and the same doubts and oppositions are put forth”*  
 (Tablets of Abdu’l-Baha v.2, p. 410)

### ♥ Use Flipchart p. 61 &62

1. Explain above quote in your own words: \_\_\_\_\_

Shoghi Effendi explains the parallel between the lives of the Manifestations of God using the example of the life of the Bab: *“The passion of Jesus Christ, and indeed His whole public ministry, alone offer a parallel to the Mission and death of the Báb, a parallel which no student of comparative religion can fail to perceive or ignore. In the youthfulness and meekness of the Inaugurator of the Babi Dispensation; in the extreme brevity and turbulence of His public ministry; in the dramatic swiftness with which that ministry moved towards its climax; in the apostolic order which He instituted, and the primacy which He conferred on one of its members; in the boldness of His challenge to the time-honored conventions, rites and laws which had been woven into the fabric of the religion He Himself had been born into; in the role which an officially recognized and firmly entrenched religious hierarchy played as chief instigator of the outrages which He was made to suffer; in the indignities heaped upon Him; in the suddenness of His arrest; in the interrogation to which He was subjected; in the derision poured, and the scourging inflicted, upon Him; in the public affront He sustained; and, finally, in His ignominious suspension before the gaze of a hostile multitude -- in all these we cannot fail to discern a remarkable similarity to the distinguishing features of the career of Jesus Christ”*  
 (Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. 56 )

### Exercise 1:

In the first and second column you find some events out of the life of the Báb and of Jesus. Discuss these events in pairs.

<b>The Báb</b>	<b>Jesus</b>
“youthful and loving and kind”	Jesus died when he was 32 years old. People loved him. He showed divine love by praying for “those who crucified Him”
Period of His ministry was very short - 6 years	His ministry lasted only 3 years
The apostolic order which He instituted: (the 19 Letters of the Living)	He had 12 disciples
The boldness of His challenge to the time-honored conventions	He told the Pharisees that they were “serpents ” “graves” etc (see Luke 11:44 and Matt. 23:33)
The indignities heaped upon Him	Barnabas was freed and Jews were shouting: to crucify Jesus.
The suddenness of His arrest	Jesus was arrested in the middle of the night.
The interrogation to which He was subjected He confirms His station.	Pilatus asked Jesus: Are you the Son of God. Jesus confirms.
The scourging inflicted upon Him	Jesus was scourged before crucifixion.
The public affront He sustained	The crown of thorns The board: King of the Jews.
His suspension before the gaze of a hostile multitude	Jesus was crucified
The miraculous circumstances of His execution	The events of his crucifixion fulfilled Bible prophecies and later resurrection

	visions, removing the extreme sadness and giving new hope to apostles
Confusion, bewilderment and despair seized his followers after the Báb died.	Believers scattered Peter, denied Jesus three times
More than 20,000 of his followers were tortured and killed in public. They preferred to give their life rather than to deny the Báb.	Christian martyrs

**Exercise 2:**

There are a number of similarities between the life and the suffering of Baha'u'lláh and Jesus as well. As it is impossible to do justice to the life of Baha'u'llah in one paragraph, participants refer to the statement of Baha'u'llah which was released by the Universal House of Justice in 1992 to mark the centenary of the passing of Baha'u'llah. Fill in the blanks.

<b>Similarity</b>	<b>Jesus</b>	<b>Bahá'u'lláh</b>
Both are divine educators		
Both came at time of spiritual darkness.		
Both persecuted by religious leaders		
Both showed forth innate knowledge		
Both sacrificed and suffered.		
Both showed divine love, divine wisdom	5:13 Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:3)	
Both revealed their spiritual relationship with previous divine educators such as Moses, Abraham	“If you had believed Moses, you would have believed in Me, for He wrote of Me”	
Both their words, and the example of their lives, transformed others to such an extent that they were ready to lay down their lives for the Cause.		
Both fulfilled prophecies from Holy Scriptures. The time of their coming, the place of their coming, their name, all are prophesied as a proof of their mission.		
Both foretold events in future which happened.	Foretells the fall of Israel and the destruction of the temple	Baha'u'lláh foretold ..... ..... ..... .....

**Exercise 3:** Form small groups. Reflect upon the lives of Jesus, the Báb and Baha'u'lláh. One person is Christian, the other is a follower of the Bab and the third person is a Baha'i. Discuss similarities between the lives of the different Manifestations of God.

Comparison should be done in an atmosphere of mutual sharing and reflecting. Also take into account that our knowledge about the life of the historical Jesus is rather fragmentary and many of the events in the life of Jesus must be understood spiritually rather than literally. Also discuss which “doubts and oppositions are put forth” by the people whenever a new Manifestation of God arises.

## SECTION 5: Recognize the Promised One by His voice

### He will speak with the same voice:

Jesus gave the following sign to His disciples when they asked Him how they would recognize the promised One. Using symbolic language, Jesus compared His followers with sheep, who will hear the voice of the Master. He said: *"My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow Me"* (John 10:27). This “voice” is the Word of God.

**Pairwork:** Use the following quotes in a teaching situation with your partner.

The voice of Jesus, the Son of God:	The voice of Baha'u'llah fulfills:
<i>“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.”</i> (King James Bible, John 6:7)	<i>“The Comforter Whose advent all the scriptures have promised is now come that He may reveal unto you all knowledge and wisdom. Seek Him over the entire surface of the earth, haply ye may find Him”</i> (Shoghi Effendi: World Order of Baha'u'llah p.104-105)
<i>“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now”.</i> (John 6:12)	<i>“This is the Word which the Son veiled when He said to those around Him that at that time they could not bear it... Verily the Spirit of Truth is come to guide you unto all truth... He is the One Who glorified the Son and exalted His Cause...”</i> (The World Order of Baha'u'llah)
<i>“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.”</i> (John 6:13)	<i>“Verily, He Who is the Spirit of Truth is come to guide you unto all truth. He speaketh not as prompted by His own self, but as bidden by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.”</i> (Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 12)
<i>“And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me”</i> (John 16:8-9)	<i>“Issue forth from your habitations and bid the people enter the Kingdom of God, the Lord of the Day of Judgement. The Word which the Son concealed is made manifest. It hath been sent down in the form of the human temple in this day. Blessed be the Lord Who is the Father! He, verily, is come unto the nations in His most great majesty. Turn your faces towards Him, O concourse of the righteous!”</i> (Baha'u'llah, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts, p. 59)
<i>... he shall glorify me</i>	<i>“Christ is the “Lord of all being”</i> (Baha'u'llah, E.S.W. p. 100)

...he shall testify of me	“This is that which the Son (Jesus) hath decreed. And whatsoever hath proceedeth out of His blameless, His truth speaking, trustworthy mouth can never be altered” (Proclamation of Baha’u’llah p. 93)
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The following quotation of Abdu’l-Baha explains that the Spirit of Truth is embodied in a Man and is not the Holy Spirit as most Christians believe.

*“In the Gospel of John, in speaking of the Promised One Who was to come after Christ, it is said in chapter 16, verses 12, 13: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak". Now consider carefully that from these words, "for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak," it is clear that the Spirit of truth is embodied in a Man Who has individuality, Who has ears to hear and a tongue to speak.”* (S.A.Q. p. 109)

## Section 6: Why did Christians expect Christ to return in 1844?

### ♥ See Flipchart: p. 49 till 52

The Return of Christ is an important subject in Bible and the disciples were expecting this Return to take place in their own lifetime. But about one hundred and fifty years ago, around the year 1844, there was a strong expectation among the Christians that the time of the return of Jesus had finally arrived. This sudden rise in expectation was called the ‘Advent movement’.

Baha’u’llah explained: *“Afterwards, the companions and disciples of Jesus asked Him concerning those signs that must needs signalize the return of His manifestation. When, they asked, shall these things be? Several times they questioned that peerless Beauty, and, every time He made reply, He set forth a special sign that should herald the advent of the promised Dispensation. To this testify the records of the four Gospels”* (The Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 22)

Baha’u’llah refers here to the following text in the Bible:

One day, sitting on the Mount of Olives, the apostles asked Jesus three questions:

- *When shall these things be?*  
(this refers to the destruction of temple as prophesied by Jesus (Matthew 24: 1))
- *and what shall be the sign of thy coming?*
- *and of the close of the age?* (Some older Bibles as King James still use the wrong translation “end of the world”)

**Pairwork:** Answer the questions below. Use the Flipchart p 49 -52 to simulate a teaching situation with your partner.

### First promise:

- (a) Jesus Christ would return when all the countries have become Christian. “yes” or “no”
- (b) Please give Bible reference in Gospels for first promise..\_\_\_\_\_
- (c) How widely was the Gospel spread by 1844? \_\_\_\_\_

**Second promise:**

(a) What is meant by the term “Time of the Gentiles”? \_\_\_\_\_

(b) Please give reference in Bible for second sign \_\_\_\_\_

(c) Which event relaxed the conditions allowing Jews to return to Israel since 1844? \_\_\_\_\_

Explain in your own words how the second sign was fulfilled? \_\_\_\_\_

**Third promise:**

(a) Please give reference in Gospels for third sign \_\_\_\_\_

(b) After reading text below explain to your partner why the time prophecies are so important.

Many prophecies are general. For example, there will be famines, wars etc. There have been so many wars during the last 2000 years. Which one does the prophecy apply to?

The year 1844 corresponds with the year 1260 in the Islamic calendar! There are many more time prophecies especially in the book of Revelation which point to the year 1260. The fact that both dates coincide is called by the Master the “most conclusive proof.

Therefore time prophecies are a greater proof as they are exact and specific. This prophecy pinpoints exactly the year of the Bab’s manifestation and the beginning of the Baha’i era according to the actual text of the Book of Daniel.

Abdu’l-Bahá referred to the time prophecies of Daniel as follows: *“Nothing could be clearer than this agreement of the prophecies with one another. The Báb appeared in the year 1260 of the Hejira of Muhammad, which is the beginning of the universal era-reckoning of all Islam. There are no clearer proofs than this in the Holy Books for any Manifestation. For him who is just, the agreement of the times indicated by the tongues of the Great Ones is the most conclusive proof. There is no other possible explanation of these prophecies.”* (S.A.Q. - p.71)

**Section 8: Other signs for His Return**

**♥ Use Flipchart p. 55 & 56**

In the Book of Certitude, Baha’u’lláh unlocks the mysteries of the Holy Scriptures explaining the two-fold language of Revelation. Many of these symbols are applicable to all the Manifestations of God.

Reflect on the following statements of the Book of Certitude, then do the exercise below. *“These are the melodies, sung by Jesus, Son of Mary, in accents of majestic power in the Ridvan of the Gospel, revealing those signs that must needs herald the advent of the Manifestation after Him. In the first Gospel according to Matthew it is recorded: And when they asked Jesus concerning the signs of His coming, He said unto them: "Immediately after the oppression[1] of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the earth shall be shaken: and then [1] The Greek word used (Thlipsis) has two meanings: pressure [1] and oppression shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet...."[1]. (The Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 24) It is unquestionable that in every succeeding Revelation the "sun" and "moon" of the teachings, laws, commandments, and prohibitions which have been established in the preceding Dispensation, and which have overshadowed the people of that age, become darkened, that is, are exhausted, and cease to exert their influence (The Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 41)*

Abdu'l-Baha said: *“Know thou that the people, even unto this day, have failed to unravel the hidden secrets of the Book. They imagine that Christ was excluded from His heaven in the days when He walked the earth, that He fell from the heights of His sublimity, and afterwards mounted to those upper reaches of the sky, to the heaven which doth not exist at all, for it is but space. And they are waiting for Him to come down from there again, riding upon a cloud, and they imagine that there are clouds in that infinite space and that He will ride thereon and by that means He will descend. Whereas the truth is that a cloud is but vapour that riseth out of the earth, and it doth not come down from heaven. Rather, the cloud referred to in the Gospel is the human body, so called because the body is as a veil to man, which, even as a cloud, preventeth him from beholding the Sun of Truth that shineth from the horizon of Christ”*

(Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 168)

Most Christians are familiar with the following passage in the Gospels.

*“Immediately after the oppression of those days shall the sun be darkened and the moon shall not give light and the stars shall fall from heaven. “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in Heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet” (Mathew 24:29-31) and then shall appear the sign of the son of man”(Mathew 24:29)*

*“Immediately after the oppression”*

This “oppression” is an essential feature of every Revelation. Unless it comes to pass, the Sun of Truth will not be made manifest. By ‘oppression’ is meant the lack of capacity to acquire spiritual knowledge and understand the Word of God.

*“The sun shall be darkened”*

The sun mentioned in this prophecy is not the sun which is visible to our physical eyes. No, it is a spiritual sun. Just as the sun in the sky gives us life, light and warmth, the spiritual sun gives us spiritual life, knowledge, and guidance.

The Divine teachers such as Moses and Jesus, gives us spiritual light (knowledge) and are therefore called “the Spiritual Suns of Truth.”

In the time of Jesus, men had changed the teachings of Moses and therefore they were unable to recognize Jesus. The sun remains the sun, but religious leaders are the cause of darkening or veiling the light of the sun. As a result “the sun of Moses was darkened” during the time of Jesus.

As Jesus said: **“For had you believed in Moses, you would have believed in me”** (John 5:46)

In the same way, religious leaders have, in the name of Christ, changed the teachings of Jesus, and as a result, the sun of Jesus has been darkened.

*“and then shall appear the sign of the son of man”*

This refers to the forerunners of the Manifestation, such as John the Baptist came before Jesus, or Sháykh Ahmad a saintly and wise man who foretold the coming of the Báb.

*“And then shall the tribes of earth mourn”*

The people will lament about the decline of the previous (spiritual) Sun of divine beauty.

*“They shall see the Son of man coming”*

The Promised One shall appear in the heaven of the Will of God as a human being.

*“in the clouds of heaven”*

A well-known sign for the Return of Christ is that He will appear in a cloud. Science teaches that a cloud is vapour. When you boil water, steam or vapour escapes. Also, water from the sea evaporates and forms clouds in the sky. As the image suggests, one cannot stand on a cloud as it is vapour.

Many Christians are expecting to see Jesus return riding on a cloud: *“they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”* (Matt 24: 29, 31) but in another part of the bible it says: *“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.”*(2 Peter 3:10)

Perhaps the thief will be in the house, and the owner will not know it. *“Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame”* (Revelation 16:15)

If taken in a physical sense these quotes seem to contradict one another. It shows that it is impossible to take the clouds or the thief in the night literally as they have a spiritual meaning. (For more information, see Christianity Renewed Volume 3, p. 42) ([www.maxwellalexander.com](http://www.maxwellalexander.com))

Also imagine yourself in a village in the mountains. In the morning when you get up, the clouds are close to the ground and it is difficult to see the mountain tops around you. Clouds obscure the view.

Every Manifestation of God appears “with the clouds of heaven” and “as a thief in the night”. During His first coming, Jesus came in the clouds as it was very difficult for Jews to recognize Jesus as a king from Heaven. The clouds obscuring the spiritual vision of the Jews were the fact that He came in a human body with all its limitations, such as sleeping and eating. The clouds were not in the sky but in front of their eyes. The spiritual meaning of ‘clouds’ is anything that makes it difficult for people to recognize the ‘divine teacher of God.’

Jesus often spoke about people who have eyes but they don’t see. Only those people whose spiritual eyes are opened will be able to see Him! Baha’u’llah tells us in the Book of Certitude that clouds are:

- a. Those things that are contrary to the accepted ways and desires of men.
- b. The annulment of the laws of the former Revelation, the repeal of its rituals and customs.
- c. The appearance of that immortal Being in the image or mortal flesh with such human limitations as eating, drinking, poverty and riches, glory and abasement, sleeping and waking.

***“The moon shall not give her light”***

The moon gives us light at night. We are now living in a spiritual night. The religious leaders, who have no light of their own, but reflect the light of their Messenger (or spiritual sun) are like the moon. These religious leaders and their teachings have lost their influence. They no longer offer guidance for humankind.

***“The stars fall from heaven”***

Reflect on the following words of Baha’u’llah:

***“O concourse of bishops! Ye are the stars of the heaven of My knowledge”*** (Baha’u’llah, Tablets of Baha’u’llah, p. 14)

The ‘fall of the stars’ therefore means the fall of the religious leaders not physical stars as the beloved Master explains:

*“The second coming of Christ also will be in like manner: the signs and conditions which have been spoken of all have meanings, and are not to be taken literally. Among other things it is said that the stars will fall upon the earth. The stars are endless and innumerable, and modern mathematicians have established and proved scientifically that the globe of the sun is estimated to be about one million and a half times greater than the earth, and each of the fixed stars to be a thousand times larger than the sun. If these stars were to fall upon the surface of the earth, how could they find place there? It would be as though a thousand million of Himalaya mountains were to fall upon a grain of mustard seed. According to reason and science this thing is quite impossible”* (Abdu’l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 110)

Also Bahá’u’lláh warns us: *“Leaders of religion, in every age, have hindered their people from attaining the shores of eternal salvation, inasmuch as they held the reins of authority in their mighty grasp.”* (Baha'u'llah, The Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 15)

On occasion, after a Baha’i has taught a Christian about the Faith, then that person will go back to his church and ask advice from his priest. Then there will be a great opposition forthcoming from the religious leader. So to use the words of Jesus about the priests beforehand will to some extent forewarn the Christian about the reaction he is to expect. Jesus speaking of the religious leaders tells us: *“Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.”* (Matt. 15:14) Jesus rebukes the religious leaders who rejected Him in the strongest terms and called them: *‘blind leaders’, ‘hypocrites’, ‘graves’ and ‘serpents’.* *“Ye hypocrites...This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”* (Matt 15:7)

**Activity**

♥ Use flipchart p. 53-54 to fill in the following table:

SIGNS	MEANING
“Immediately after the oppression”	
“The sun shall be darkened”	
“and then shall appear the sign of the son of man”	
“And then shall the tribes of earth mourn”	
“They shall see the Son of man coming”	
“in the clouds of heaven”	
“The moon shall not give her light”	
“The stars shall fall from heaven”	

**2. Question:**

- Explain in your own words what is meant by *“Jesus will come as a thief in the night”*

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Summarize in a few words the reasons why only a few devout Christians out of 2 billion have recognized the coming of the “Glory of God”

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## **SECTION 8: The new name and the place of His Coming**

### **♥ See Flipchart p. 57&58 and 59&60**

**Pairwork:** Read notes below then use Flipchart to make a presentation.

Please note that the white stone mentioned in Revelation 2:17 refers to the “white stone” which was engraved with a name and was used in the time of the Romans as a “business card” when officials introduced themselves during travel.

Abdu’l-Baha explained:

*“If the Jews had comprehended Moses, they would have accepted the Christ; but they were occupied with the name and when that name was changed they denied the reality”.*

*It is the same with the Christians. What a pity that they are worshipping a title! They see only the garment. If one recognizes a king by his garments, one would not know him were he to clothe himself differently. Who is the Christ? When one sees the Christ qualities shining from another source, one must recognize that light.* (Abdu’l-Baha, Divine Philosophy, p. 33)

Explain `Abdu’l-Baha’s example of “the king and his garments”

### **The name of Baha’u’lláh - and the Place of His Coming:**

Often Christian friends are asking: “Where is the name Baha’u’llah found in the Bible?”

They forget that the name Jesus is not used in Old Testament in reference to the coming of the Messiah! Also the prophecy of Isaiah was very confusing for the Jews and can only be understood spiritually: *“Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”* (King James Bible, Isaiah 7:14)

Luckily this confusion doesn’t exist relating to Baha’u’lláh which is an Arabic name (or spiritual title), which means in English “the Glory of God” or the “Glory of the Lord”. What is truly remarkable is how frequently this spiritual title “Glory of God” is mentioned in the Bible in relationship to “the Return of Christ”.

Please take into consideration when you are sharing the quotations in the Flipchart page 57 that there are so many different versions of the Bible existing which give different translations for the words “the Glory of God”. Some of the newer versions of the Bible do not use the name “Glory of God” and replaced it with other words, for example, “light”. The King James Version, the New Revised Version all use the words “Glory of God”.

## **SECTION 9: The same Spiritual Reality and “Sign for Peace”**

### **♥ See Flipchart p. 61 & 62**

Participants explain using examples from the life of Baha’u’llah why “The Spiritual Reality of Baha’u’llah” is the same as “the Spiritual Reality of Christ”. Christians who truly love Jesus will recognize the same reality in Baha’u’llah. This is a very convincing approach, and if you ever find a Christian who is very receptive you can start right here.

In a similar way Jews who truly loved Moses, also believed in Jesus. *“For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me”* (John 5:46)

### **♥ See Flipchart p. 63 & 64**

Participants explain how the prophecy of Isaiah for the establishment of peace is linked with the building of the Arc on Mount Carmel.

Carmel is a Hebrew word, which means Vineyard or Mountain of God. This promise of the Bible in (Isaiah 2:2) is now being fulfilled with the establishment of the Universal House of Justice on Mount Carmel. Every eye can see “the House of God” standing on the “Mountain of God”. Bahá’u’lláh foretold that peace amongst nations would be established.

## ATTACHMENT 1:

### Many Christians believe that it is forbidden to add to the Bible

This is often used by the clergy to prevent their followers to investigate other religions. They refer to the following quote as a basis for their belief:

***If any man shall add unto these words, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book*** (Rev 22:18)

This quote stops many Christians from investigating any other religion. But a short comparison with other texts in the Bible will show the danger of regarding your own religion as the last one ...

- The same happened after Moses. ...***You shall not add to the word*** ... (Deut 4:2) but Jesus and later Christianity changed the social laws. For example, circumcision, marriage and divorce, the Jewish law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.
- The same happened after Abraham ... The Sabbath is called a perpetual covenant. (Exodus 31: 16) and the Lord called "***circumcision an everlasting covenant***". (Genesis 17:13. But these so called `eternal' laws are changed in Christianity!
- The reason is that when time changes, the social laws of the religion changes. For example, eating pig in time of Moses caused many diseases. Indeed, the pig was an unclean animal living in human excrements! Now times have changed. Another example is circumcision; the everlasting covenant. Circumcision was replaced by baptism. Paul explains "***real circumcision is a matter of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter***" (Genesis 17:1-14)

## ATTACHMENT 2: Is there anything new in the Baha'i Faith which cannot be found in Christianity?

Some Christians ask above question. Abdu'l- Baha answered this questions stressing the importance of the Covenant.

Exercise: Form pairs Read the following discourse from Abdu'l-Baha (see below) and underline those principles which cannot be found in Christianity.

***"All the divine principles announced by the tongue of the Prophets of the past are to be found in the words of Bahá'u'lláh; but in addition to these He has revealed certain new teachings which are not found in any of the sacred Books of former times.***

***A fundamental teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is the oneness of the world of humanity. Addressing mankind, He says, "Ye are all leaves of one tree and the fruits of one branch." By this it is meant that the world of humanity is like a tree, the nations or peoples are the different limbs or branches of that tree, and the individual human creatures are as the fruits and blossoms thereof. In this way Bahá'u'lláh expressed the oneness of humankind, whereas in all religious teachings of the past the human world has been represented as divided into two parts: one known as the people of the Book of God, or the pure tree, and the other the people of infidelity and error, or the evil tree. The former were considered as belonging to the faithful, and the others to the hosts of the irreligious and infidel -- one part of humanity the recipients of divine mercy, and the other the object of the wrath of their Creator. Bahá'u'lláh removed this by proclaiming the oneness of the world of humanity, and this principle is specialized in His teachings, for He has submerged all mankind in the sea of divine generosity. Some are asleep; they need to be awakened. Some are ailing; they need to be healed. Some are immature as***

*children; they need to be trained. But all are recipients of the bounty and bestowals of God. Another new principle revealed by Bahá'u'lláh is the injunction to investigate truth -- that is to say, no man should blindly follow his ancestors and forefathers. Nay, each must see with his own eyes, hear with his own ears and investigate the truth himself in order that he may follow the truth instead of blind acquiescence and imitation of ancestral beliefs.*

*Bahá'u'lláh has announced that the foundation of all the religions of God is one, that oneness is truth and truth is oneness which does not admit of plurality. This teaching is new and specialized to this Manifestation.*

*He sets forth a new principle for this day in the announcement that religion must be the cause of unity, harmony and agreement among mankind. If it is the cause of discord and hostility, if it leads to separation and creates conflict, the absence of religion would be preferable in the world.*

*Furthermore, He proclaims that religion must be in harmony with science and reason. If it does not conform to science and reconcile with reason, it is superstition. Down to the present day it has been customary for man to accept a religious teaching, even though it was not in accord with human reason and judgment. The harmony of religious belief with reason is a new vista which Bahá'u'lláh has opened for the soul of man.*

*He establishes the equality of man and woman. This is peculiar to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, for all other religions have placed man above woman.*

*A new religious principle is that prejudice and fanaticism -- whether sectarian, denominational, patriotic or political -- are destructive to the foundation of human solidarity; therefore, man should release himself from such bonds in order that the oneness of the world of humanity may become manifest.*

*Universal peace is assured by Bahá'u'lláh as a fundamental accomplishment of the religion of God -- that peace shall prevail among nations, governments and peoples, among religions, races and all conditions of mankind. This is one of the special characteristics of the Word of God revealed in this Manifestation.*

*Bahá'u'lláh declares that all mankind should attain knowledge and acquire an education. This is a necessary principle of religious belief and observance, characteristically new in this dispensation.*

*He has set forth the solution and provided the remedy for the economic question. No religious Books of the past Prophets speak of this important human problem.*

*He has ordained and established the House of Justice, which is endowed with a political as well as a religious function, the consummate union and blending of church and state. This institution is under the protecting power of Bahá'u'lláh Himself. A universal, or international, House of Justice shall also be organized. Its rulings shall be in accordance with the commands and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, and that which the Universal House of Justice ordains shall be obeyed by all mankind. This international House of Justice shall be appointed and organized from the Houses of Justice of the whole world, and all the world shall come under its administration.*

*As to the most great characteristic of the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, a specific teaching not given by any of the Prophets of the past: It is the ordination and appointment of the Center of the Covenant. By this appointment and provision He has safeguarded and protected the religion of God against differences and schisms, making it impossible for anyone to create a new sect or faction of belief.*

*The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are boundless and illimitable. You have asked me what new principles have been revealed by Him.* (Abdu'l-Baha, PUP p. 454)

### ATTACHMENT 3: Some symbols used in the Bible

Water	The knowledge of God	CR 2, p.
Fire	The love of God	CR 2, p. :
Bread	The Word of God	CR Sacraments
Blood of Jesus	Teachings of Jesus	Sacraments
Eating the bread	Follow divine qualities of Christ	Sacraments
Will never die	To have eternal life	Sacraments
Meat of Christ	To do the Will of God	Sacraments
Blind	Spiritual eyes closed to the truth of the Messenger	Miracle
See	To recognize the Messenger of God	Miracle
Dead	Not to obey the Will of God	Miracle
Leper	Shunned by God (because of a sinful life)	Miracle
Air	Unseen world (Spiritual World)	Rapture
Wind	Coming from Unseen World (Spiritual world)	Rapture
Last day	Close of the old and opening of a new dispensation	General
Judgment	Acceptance or rejection which occurs when new Manifestation of God comes	General
Return	Re-appearance of attributes of God in new human temple	General
Trumpet	A warning or arousing	Return
Sun	Manifestation of God	Return
Darkening of sun	Leaders of religion have lost their power to guide or change hearts of people	Return
Stars	Religious leaders	Return
Falling of stars	Spiritual leaders do not give guidance	Return
Cloud	Difficult to recognize	
Grave	Error of non-acceptance or opposition	
Tomb	Symbol of spiritual death or unbelief	
Paradise	Nearness to God	
Hell	Remoteness from God	
New Jerusalem	New Revelation - Law of God - New Messenger of God	
The body of Christ	His followers, the Church	
Dead	Not to obey the Will of God, sin	
Women clothed with sun and moon	Muhammad	
Angel	Heavenly power or blessed beings( saints)	

Devil	“Blocks the progress towards God ”	
Kingdom of Christ	Wherever love and unity exists in the hearts	
Kingdom of Antichrist	Wherever discord, hatred, antagonism exist in the heart	

(\* CR is abbreviation for Christianity Renewed, Volume 1, 2 and 3 by Maxwell Alexander)

#### **ATTACHMENT 4: Gradual development of the Resurrection doctrine.**

The Bible is originally a Jewish book, written by Jews for Jews. Therefore it is important to have some idea to know how the understanding of the Resurrection changed from the time of Jesus until to-day. Below you find a chronological table.

#### **JEWISH UNDERSTANDING of the term “resurrection”.**

For most Jews, the Resurrection is related to the Day of Judgment, in which all the dead will rise and be judged by God.

#### **THE TWELVE APOSTLES**

For the apostles, resurrection meant that Jesus was exalted by God and that the day of Judgment was very near. The apostles expected Jesus to return in their lifetime to judge the people. Only those people who believed in Him would be saved. They used the Old Testament prophecies to prove that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Son of God. This is the essence of the speech given by Peter on Pentecost and the declaration of Faith given by Stephen the first martyr. As recorded in the Book of Acts.

#### **EPISTLES OF PAUL**

Paul wrote his letters about thirty years after Jesus crucifixion and he included himself as last witness of the resurrection. Paul spoke of resurrection as spiritual event.

It was a spiritual body. **Flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God:** Paul asserted: **“nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable”** (1 Cor 15:50)

For Paul there was not a two stage process in which Jesus first came back to earth (the resurrection) and then forty days later from earth to heaven ( the ascension). For Paul, God raised Jesus from death to sit at right hand of God. The resurrection appearances show how Jesus kept working to build His church. For Paul, the body of Christ became the church itself.

But for Paul the resurrection was real. Without the resurrection our teachings are in vain. Paul links the resurrection of Christ with our own “resurrection” at the end of time. For Paul ascension and resurrection was the same event. For Paul, there is no empty tomb, no disappearance of the physical body from the grave.

#### **GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK**

About 20 years after Paul, Mark wrote his gospel. The eyewitnesses had died already. Mark’s gospel is very short. The original text of Mark ended at Chapter 16, verse 8. Mark tells us that the twelve disciples have fled in fear. The only present are women. There were no guards, no angels, no emergence of one from the grave, no risen Christ! The women were told the news but the women flee “for they are afraid” and say nothing to anyone....

#### **GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW**

When Matthew wrote his gospel, Jerusalem had been destroyed and Jews were now dispersed into the Greek speaking world. It was a time of opposition. Jews started to attack Christian claims about Jesus. Christians defended themselves and these defensive arguments were incorporated into the developing Christian tradition. Mathew adds “earthquake, angels

descending” guards struck down in fear.

This time Mary Magdalene is not afraid. The women go and tell the happy news to go to Galilee to see the risen Lord. For Mathew, there is no difference between resurrection and ascension. Matthew only mentions one appearance of “the Risen Lord”. The disciples meet Jesus on top of a mountain who tells them to baptize and spread the gospel. For Matthew, Jesus became the new Moses giving the new law from the new Mount Sinai.

### **GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE**

Luke was very familiar with gentile world especially the Roman mythology about Gods who were resurrected, descended on earth.

Luke tells us the beautiful story how Jesus walks with some disciples on the road . Jesus explains to them the scriptures and in the breaking of bread he is recognized as the risen Lord. Also in Luke, Peter encouraged by the woman, runs to the empty grave and picks up the clothes of Jesus. Many visions are mentioned. which can be understood as spiritual visions or as physical events. One might note that while Luke seems to depict physical appearances, the appearances sound very much like those of angels of the Lord in the Old Testament. They also took part in human activities like eating “*and there came two angels ....and they did eat*”(Genesis 19:3), and Judges (chapter 6:21 and 13:20) both speak of an angel vanishing, as did Jesus in Luke 24:31. The two chapters from Judges both say that the angel "appeared" to people, and those who the angel appeared to did not realize immediately that it was an angel, thinking that it was a man. The chapters are clearly not intended to be read as literal history, and we know that angels are not physical.

### **THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN**

John’s gospel is the most spiritual gospel. It was written around 100 AD. In John, only Mary Magdalene meets the angels at the tomb.

Only in John does Jesus offer his wounds for inspection by Thomas. Thomas doesn’t touch Jesus but believes. The reason for this story is found at the end when Jesus warns Thomas saying “*blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe*” (John 20:29).

### **MODERN SCHOLARS**

95% of Bible scholars do not accept a physical resurrection as it is not supported by an in depth study of the text. Harper’s Bible dictionary (p. 864, 1985 edition) gives the following definition of Resurrection. “Resurrection is to be distinguished from resuscitation or reanimation of the physical body. It denotes a complete transformation of the human being .... from 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 we learn that faith in the resurrection is based not on empty tomb but on the appearances of the Lord. The word used for “appeared” is the same Greek word used elsewhere for visionary experiences.(emphasis added) We may today characterize these experiences as revelatory disclosures from the transcendent realm. No distinction was drawn between the resurrection and ascension. The resurrections are manifestations of the resurrected and already ascended Christ from heaven”

### **BAHA’I FAITH**

In Some Answered Questions, Abdu’l-Baha explains the meaning of the Resurrection. It is important when sharing this with Christians that the entire chapter is discussed to avoid any controversy. Than the Christian will understand that Paul’s understanding is the same as Abdu’l-Baha’s explanation:“...*it is clearly stated in many places in the Gospel that the Son of man came from heaven, He is in heaven, and He will go to heaven. So in chapter 6, verse 38, of the Gospel of John it is written: "For I came down from heaven"; and also in verse 42 we find: "And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?" Also in John, chapter 3, verse 13: "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven."*

(Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 103)

*“Therefore, we say that the meaning of Christ's resurrection is as follows: the disciples were troubled and agitated after the martyrdom of Christ. The Reality of Christ, which signifies His teachings, His bounties, His perfections and His spiritual power, was hidden and concealed for two or three days after His martyrdom, and was not resplendent and manifest. No, rather it was lost, for the believers were few in number and were troubled and agitated. The Cause of Christ was like a lifeless body; and when after three days the disciples became assured and steadfast, and began to serve the Cause of Christ, and resolved to spread the divine teachings, putting His counsels into practice, and arising to serve Him, the Reality of Christ became resplendent and His bounty appeared; His religion found life; His teachings and His admonitions became evident and visible” .... (S.A.Q. p. 104)*

Most Christians	Disciples of Jesus	Paul	Mark	Matthew	Luke	John	Modern scholars	Baha'i' Faith
2005 AD	35 AD	50 AD	60 AD	70 AD	80 AD	110 AD	2005 AD	19 <sup>th</sup> century
Jesus died for our sins and rose the "Third day" and and continued living on this earth for another 40 days.	God exalted Jesus to sit at right hand of God on the throne of David (Acts 15:12)	Paul considered himself to be a witness to the resurrection. (1 Cor 15:8) List which Paul gives us is very different from Gospels.	Short gospel No resurrection appearances in original version	Few Vision/ resurrection appearances	More Visions/ resurrection appearances	Most Visions resurrection appearances	Death of Jesus His Resurrection and Ascension is are the same event	Resurrection is a spiritual and divine fact. It is much more than a temporary resuscitation of a body !
Had Jesus not conquered death, hell and fire Church of Christ would not have existed.	<b>"Jesus died in the flesh but was raised in the spirit"</b> (1Peter 3:18)	<b>"Jesus abolished death and brought immortality"</b> (Timothy 1:10)	The women didn't tell anything to any man:for they were afraid. (Mark 16:8)	Mary Magdalene tells disciples	Peter runs to the grave	Race between Peter and other disciples.	Belief in resurrection based on appearances not the empty tomb story.	<i>Reality of Christ is alpha and omega</i>
	Disciples do not use "empty tomb story" as a proof. Instead they explain how Jesus fulfilled prophesies	For Paul death has spiritual meaning: (dead as sinners) <b>"I die daily"</b> 1 Cor.15:31 <b>The "dead" are now resurrected together with Christ</b> (Ephesians 2:5)		Tells story of gravestone, guards asleep etc No direct witness to the event of Resurrection	Belief in resurrection based on appearances	Belief in resurrection based on resurrection appearances	Empty tomb story is secondary development	<b>"And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven."</b>
	No direct witness no the resurrection	Paul didn' know about the story about an empty tomb. Paul was an experienced preacher and if he had known about it He would definitely have used it when he was preaching. y					<i>I am with you always until the end of the world</i>	
		<b>"Flesh and blood shall not inherit the Kingdom of Heaven"</b>						



## ATTACHMENT 5: Station of Baha'u'llah in the Christian tradition

*Did not Christ Himself, addressing His disciples, utter these words: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth"?*

*From the text of this recognized tradition, as well as from the words of Christ, as attested by the Gospel, every unprejudiced observer will readily apprehend the magnitude of the Faith which Baha'u'llah has revealed, and recognize the staggering weight of the claim He has advanced.*

(Shoghi Effendi: World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 25)

### PRINCE OF PEACE

*How tragically has Christendom ignored, and how far it has strayed from, that high mission which He Who is the true Prince of Peace has, in these, the concluding passages of His Tablet to Pope Pius IX, called upon the entire body of Christians to fulfill - passages which establish, for all time, the distinction between the Mission of Baha'u'llah in this age and that of Jesus Christ: "Say: O concourse of Christians! We have, on a previous occasion, revealed Ourselves unto you, and ye recognized Me not. This is yet another occasion vouchsafed unto you. This is the Day of God; turn ye unto Him..... Direct yourselves towards Him.... Verily, He [Jesus] said: 'Come ye after Me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.' In this day, however, We say: 'Come ye after Me, that We may make you to become the quickeners of mankind.'"..... Open the doors of your hearts. He Who is the Spirit [Jesus] verily, standeth before them.*

(Shoghi Effendi: The Promised Day is Come, p. 106-108)

*Rest thou assured that in this era of the spirit, the Kingdom of Peace will raise up its tabernacle on the summits of the world, and the commandments of the Prince of Peace will so dominate the arteries and nerves of every people as to draw into His sheltering shade all the nations on earth. From springs of love and truth and unity will the true Shepherd give His sheep to drink.*

(Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Baha, p. 246)

### SPIRIT OF TRUTH

*CXVI. O kings of Christendom! Heard ye not the saying of Jesus, the Spirit of God, "I go away, and come again unto you"? Wherefore, then, did ye fail, when He did come again unto you in the clouds of heaven, to draw nigh unto Him, that ye might behold His face, and be of them that attained His Presence? In another passage He saith: "When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth." And yet, behold how, when He did bring the truth, ye refused to turn your faces towards Him, and persisted in disporting yourselves with your pastimes and fancies.*

(Baha'u'llah: Gleanings, p. 246)

*The century has dawned when the Spirit of Truth can reveal these verities to mankind, proclaim that very Word, establish the real foundations of Christianity and deliver the nations and peoples from the bondage of forms and imitations. The cause of discord, prejudice and animosity will be removed, the basis of love and amity be established. Therefore, all of you must strive with heart and soul in order that enmity may disappear entirely and that strife and hatred pass away absolutely from the midst of the human world. You must listen to the admonition of this Spirit of Truth. You must follow the example and footprints of Jesus Christ. Read the Gospels. Jesus Christ was mercy itself, was love itself. He even prayed in behalf of His executioners - for those who crucified Him - saying, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." If they knew what they were doing, they would not have done it. Consider how kind Jesus Christ was, that even upon the cross He prayed for His oppressors.*

(`Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 41-42)

*In the Gospel of John, in speaking of the Promised One Who was to come after Christ, it is*

said in chapter 16, verses 12, 13: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak."

Now consider carefully that from these words, "for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak," it is clear that the Spirit of truth is embodied in a Man Who has individuality, Who has ears to hear and a tongue to speak. In the same way the name "Spirit of God" is used in relation to Christ, as you speak of a light, meaning both the light and the lamp. (Abdu'l-Baha: Some Answered Questions, p. 109)

### COMFORTER

*This is the Word which the Son veiled when He said to those around Him that at that time they could not bear it... Verily the Spirit of Truth is come to guide you unto all truth... He is the One Who glorified the Son and exalted His Cause...*

*"The Comforter Whose advent all the scriptures have promised is now come that He may reveal unto you all knowledge and wisdom. Seek Him over the entire surface of the earth, haply ye may find Him."* (Shoghi Effendi: World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 104-105)

### GENERAL TITLES FOR BAHÁ'U'LLAH

*To Him Jesus Christ had referred as the "Prince of this world," as the "Comforter" Who will "reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment," as the "Spirit of Truth" Who "will guide you into all truth," Who "shall not speak of Himself, but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak," as the "Lord of the Vineyard," and as the "Son of Man" Who "shall come in the glory of His Father" "in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory," with "all the holy angels" about Him, and "all nations" gathered before His throne. To Him the Author of the Apocalypse had alluded as the "Glory of God," as "Alpha and Omega," "the Beginning and the End," "the First and the Last." Identifying His Revelation with the "third woe," he, moreover, had extolled His Law as "a new heaven and a new earth," as the "Tabernacle of God," as the "Holy City," as the "New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." To His Day Jesus Christ Himself had referred as "the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory." To the hour of His advent St. Paul had alluded as the hour of the "last trump," the "trump of God," whilst St. Peter had spoken of it as the "Day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat." His Day he, furthermore, had described as "the times of refreshing," "the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy Prophets since the world began."*

(Shoghi Effendi: "God Passes By" p. 95-96)

## ATTACHMENT 6: Miracles recorded in the Old Testament

We will only discuss here some miracles performed by Prophet Elias (also called Elijah) and prophet Elisha as they are very similar to the one earlier recorded for Moses and later for Jesus.

The Bible recorded that because Prophet Elisha witnessed the ascension of Prophet Elias, he received the same power to do miracles; **“And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.**

**And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing; nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.”** (4 Kings 2:9-10)

Some examples:

### **1. Resurrection of the dead**

The Bible tells us how a widow’s son died. When the mother asked Elias to rise the child from the death, the prophet Elias asked God to **“let this child’s soul come into him again...and the soul of the child came into him again and he revived.”** (1 Kings 17:17-24)

Also prophet Elisha did similar miracles. In 2 Kings 4:32-37 the Bible explains how he also rose up a child from the dead.

### **2. Blinding people and curing them of blindness**

The Prophet Elisha blinds all the soldiers in the Syrian army and later gives them sight again. (2 Kings 6:20)

**“And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the LORD, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. And Elisha said unto them, This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria. <sup>20</sup>And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw”** (2 Kings 6:20)

**3. Giving and curing of leprosy:** In 2 Kings 5:10-27, Prophet Elisha first gives leprosy to a person and later cures him from leprosy.

**4. Dividing of sea, rivers:** Every body know that Moses divided the Red Sea (Ex. 14:21-31) so that Israelites could pass through but also Prophet Elijah and Prophet Elisha did a similar miracle when they divided the river Jordan near Jericho (2 Kings 2:7, 8, 14)

### **5. Multiplication of flour (for bread making) and oil:**

Elias lived at a time that there was a big drought in Israel and there was very little food.

Elias used miracles to multiply meal and oil ( the Bible tells us that how much they were using the meal and the oil, the barrel of meal and oil remained full). Compare with the story about Moses in Exodus 16 about Manna which rained down from heaven.

**“And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die. <sup>13</sup>And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. <sup>14</sup>For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain**

*upon the earth. <sup>15</sup>And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. <sup>16</sup>And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.” (3 Kings 17:14)*

#### **6. Multiplication of bread and corn:**

Also the multiplication of bread and corn was done by prophet Elisha

*<sup>42</sup>And there came a man from Baalshalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof. And he said, Give unto the people, that they may eat. <sup>43</sup>And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people, that they may eat: for thus saith the LORD, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof. <sup>44</sup>So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the LORD. (2 Kings 4:42-44)*

That in the Bible the word “dead” often has a spiritual meaning is explained in the other quotes. *So it is that Christ said to one of His disciples: "Let the dead bury their dead;" for "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."(1)*

*Observe: those who in appearance were physically alive, Christ considered dead; for life is the eternal life, and existence is the real existence. Wherever in the Holy Books they speak of raising the dead, the meaning is that the dead were blessed by eternal life; where it is said that the blind received sight, the signification is that he obtained the true perception; where it is said a deaf man received hearing, the meaning is that he acquired spiritual and heavenly hearing. This is ascertained from the text of the Gospel where Christ said: "These are like those of whom Isaiah said, They have eyes and see not, they have ears and hear not; and I healed them."(1)*

(Abdu'l-Baha: S.A.Q. p. 101-102)

## Appendix 7 : Oneness of Religion

As Baha'is, our purpose is to share the Cause of Baha'u'llah, the promised One. In this section we will explore the Cause of Baha'u'llah and compare it with the Cause of Christ. To begin with, now that you have finished the course, express some of your thoughts what you think is the purpose of the coming of Jesus, the Son of God, and Baha'u'llah, the Glory of God.

1. The Cause of Baha'u'llah is: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. The Cause of Christ is: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Is there a difference between the cause of Baha'u'llah and the Cause of Christ? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Which are some of the differences? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Compare now your answers with the following statements found in the Writings and change your answers accordingly.

*“Thus He saith: "Our Cause is but One." In as much as the Cause is one and the same, the Exponents thereof also must needs be one and the same.” (Book of Certitude)*

*“The Great Being saith: O ye children of men! The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men. Suffer it not to become a source of dissension and discord, of hate and enmity”.*

*O honoured lady! For a single purpose were the Prophets, each and all, sent down to earth; for this was Christ made manifest, for this did Baha'u'llah raise up the call of the Lord: that the world of man should become the world of God, this nether realm the Kingdom, this darkness light, this satanic wickedness all the virtues of heaven -- and unity, fellowship and love be won for the whole human race, that the organic unity should reappear and the bases of discord be destroyed and life everlasting and grace everlasting become the harvest of mankind.*

(Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 31)

Shoghi Effendi explains the objective:

*“Far from aiming at the overthrow of the spiritual foundation of the world's religious systems, its avowed, its unalterable purpose is to widen their basis, to restate their fundamentals, to reconcile their aims, to reinvigorate their life, to demonstrate their oneness, to restore the pristine purity of their teachings, to coordinate their functions and to assist in the realization of their highest aspirations.. These divinely-revealed religions, as a close observer has graphically expressed it, "are doomed not to die, but to be reborn”*

*Does not the child succumb in the youth and the youth in the man; yet neither child nor youth perishes?”*

(Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 114)

Shoghi Effendi confirms the difference between the Cause of Jesus Christ and the Cause of Baha'u'llah as follows : *“What other interpretation can be given to these words, addressed specifically by Baha'u'llah to the followers of the Gospel, in which the fundamental distinction between the Mission of Jesus Christ, concerning primarily the individual, and His own Message, directed more particularly to mankind as a whole, has been definitely established: 'Verily, He [Jesus] said: 'Come ye after Me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.' In this day, however, We say: 'Come ye after Me, that We may make you to become the quickeners of mankind.'”* (Shoghi Effendi, The Promised Day is Come, p. 106)

1. What is the Cause of Christ? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is the Cause of Baha'u'lláh? \_\_\_\_\_
3. In which way did Baha'u'lláh exalt the Cause of Jesus Christ? \_\_\_\_\_

Abdu'l-Bahá tells us: *“The Cause of Bahá'u'lláh is the same as the Cause of Christ. It is the same Temple and the same Foundation. Both of these are spiritual springtimes and seasons of the soul-refreshing awakening and the cause of the renovation of the life of mankind. The spring of this year is the same as the spring of last year. The origins and ends are the same. The sun of today is the sun of yesterday. In the coming of Christ, the divine teachings were given in accordance with the infancy of the human race. The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh have the same basic principles, but are according to the stage of the maturity of the world and the requirements of this illumined age”* (Baha'i World Faith, p. 400)

Complete the following sentences:

1. The divine teaching were given by Jesus Christ in accordance with: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. The divine teachings given by Baha'u'llah are according to: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Pair work:** Imagine that you are in a fireside and a devout Christian would ask you if there is any differences between a Bahá'i and a Christian, what would you answer? Discuss in small group.

Question: *“Are not all Christians Baha'is? Is there any difference?”*

Abdu'l-Bahá answered this question in the house of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur J. Parsons, Dublin, New Hampshire (6 August 1912):

Answer: *“When Christians act according to the teachings of Christ, they are called Baha'is . For the foundations of Christianity and the religion of Baha'u'llah are one. The foundations of all the divine Prophets and Holy Books are one. The difference among them is one of terminology only. Each springtime is identical with the former springtime. The distinction between them is only one of the calendar -- 1911, 1912 and so on. The difference between a Christian and a Baha'i, therefore, is this: There was a former springtime, and there is a springtime now. No other difference exists because the foundations are the same. Whoever acts completely in accordance with the teachings of Christ is a Baha'i. The purpose is the essential meaning of Christian, not the mere word. The purpose is the sun itself and not the dawning points. For though the sun is one sun, its dawning points are many. We must not adore the dawning points but worship the sun. We must adore the reality of religion and not blindly cling to the appellation Christianity. The Sun of Reality must be*

*worshiped and followed. We must seek the fragrance of the rose from whatever bush it is blooming -- whether oriental or western. Be seekers of light, no matter from which lantern it shines forth. Be not lovers of the lantern. At one time the light has shone from a lantern in the East, now in the West. If it comes from North, South, from whatever direction it proceeds, follow the light. Let me illustrate further. A certain person bestowed a coin upon five beggars. They resolved to spend it for food. The Englishman said, "Buy grapes." The Turk wanted uzum, the Arab anab, the Greek stafi'li, the Persian angur. Not understanding each other's language, they quarreled and fought. A stranger came along. He was familiar with all five languages. He said, "Give me the coin; I will buy what you wish." When he brought them grapes, they were all satisfied. They wanted the same thing but differed in the term only. Briefly, when reality dawns in the midst of the religions, all will be unified and reconciled." (Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 247)*

Which examples did Abdu'l-Bahá use to prove that the difference between religions is "one of terminology only"? (1) \_\_\_\_\_ (2) \_\_\_\_\_ (3) \_\_\_\_\_ (4) \_\_\_\_\_ (5) \_\_\_\_\_

**The Seeming Contradiction:**

At this point Christians will often reject the idea of the Oneness of Religion as they say all religions are different. Then is the time to explain the seeming contradiction, why there is only One Religion, the eternal Faith of God, but on the other hand why religion must be renewed from age to age.

Compare the following quotations, and then answer the questions:

1. ***"This is the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future."***  
(Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 136)

3. Abdu'l-Baha explains the difference between spiritual laws which indeed doesn't change and the social teachings which change according to the needs of time:

***It is therefore evident that whilst the spiritual law never alters, the practical rules must change their application with the necessities of the time. The spiritual aspect of religion is the greater, the more important of the two, and this is the same for all time, it never changes! It is the same, yesterday, today, and for ever!***  
(Abdu'l-Baha, Paris Talks, p. 142).

For example "to pray or worship God" is a spiritual law. How to put this law into practice, changes from revelation to revelation. In Baha'u'llah's Revelation ***"the concepts of the past are brought to a new level of understanding, and the social laws, changed to suit the age now dawning, are designed to carry humanity forward into a world civilization the splendors of which can as yet be scarcely imagined."***  
(Baha'u'llah, The Kitab-i-Aqdas, p.1)

**Questions:**

1. Are the first two quotations contradictory? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Give two reasons why religions are renewed? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Explain the difference between spiritual laws and social laws within a religion.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Why are spiritual laws eternal? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
5. Name two spiritual laws \_\_\_\_\_
6. Name two social laws \_\_\_\_\_
7. Name two reasons why religions change?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. After carefully studying above quotes, do you agree that a common Baha'i statement: "The time of Jesus is finished now, now is the time of Baha'u'llah" could be an insult for devout Christians as it gives the impression that the work that the perfect Jesus the Son of God did was not perfect? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Do you think a more "Christian friendly statement" regarding renewal could be: Jesus said: ***"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of Truth is come, He will guide you into all truth"*** (John 16:12 - 13)  
***"And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter"*** (John 14 - 16)

How could you use these two quotes in the conversation with your Christian friend to explain the need for renewal. For further explanation see Christianity Renewed Volume3 - p17 & 18.

Often Christians will ask: *What is the difference between Christianity and the Baha'i Faith?*

**Exercise:** Form pairs Read the following answer from Abdu'l-Baha (see Appendix 6) and underline those principles which cannot be found in Christianity.

\_\_\_\_\_