

**Reflecting on Two Revolutionary Characters of Faith:
The Apostle Paul (from Christianity) and
Jenab-i Táhirih (from Babi/Baha'i)**

by

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**Reflecting on Two Revolutionary Characters of faith:
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Jenab-i Táhirih (from Babi/Baha'i)**

In this dissertation, I am discussing the similarities between the apostle Paul and Jenab-i Táhirih, including their lifestyles and beliefs before and after converting to a new faith, as well as their understanding of religion and their theology. The impressions that they made and the fruits of their labour as an influence on their religion and the world in general are also addressed.

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ELNAZ RASTI GHALATI

Declaration

Student Number: **50126865**

I declare that *Reflecting on Two Revolutionary Characters of Faith: The Apostle Paul (from Christianity) and Jenab-i Táhirih (from Babi/Baha'i)* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Date: 12/25/2020

Signature: ELNAZ RASTIGHALATI

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'ELNAZ RASTIGHALATI', written in a cursive style.

Place: IRAN- SHIRAZ

Summary

Investigating the history of religions leads us to people who made a tremendous impact during their time, and even have changed the course of history and religion in some way. This research reviews the events of the 1st and 19th centuries CE by examining the role and influence of two influential figures of Christianity and Babi: Paul and Táhirih. Scrutinising the life of these two apostles, shows that, regardless of their cultural, social, and religious differences, there are undeniable similarities between them, as both of them can be seen as revolutionary characters who have influenced not only the time in which they lived but are still influential in the religions that they helped to form.

This research examines the similarities between Paul the apostle in Christianity and Táhirih in the Babi religion. These two figures became apostles and revolutionary 'heroes' who surpassed their contemporaries and became the sources and influencers of such significant changes that their religious beliefs actually managed to influence the paths of history and the development of new religions. They challenged the Jewish and Muslim communities and ignored many of the religious and cultural customs of their time and are therefore fiercely attacked and often misrepresented. Through the theoretical lens of comparative historical research and by implementing document analysis as research method, the study aims to provide a fair and neutral perspective on both Paul and Táhirih in order that insiders (Christians and Baha'is), as well as (close) outsiders (Muslims and Jews), can have a better understanding of the influence that these two people had on the development of the two religions (Christianity and Babi) into separate belief systems.

Keywords

Paul the apostle

Jenab-i Táhirih

Christianity

Baha'i

Judaism

Islam

Theology

Society

Religion

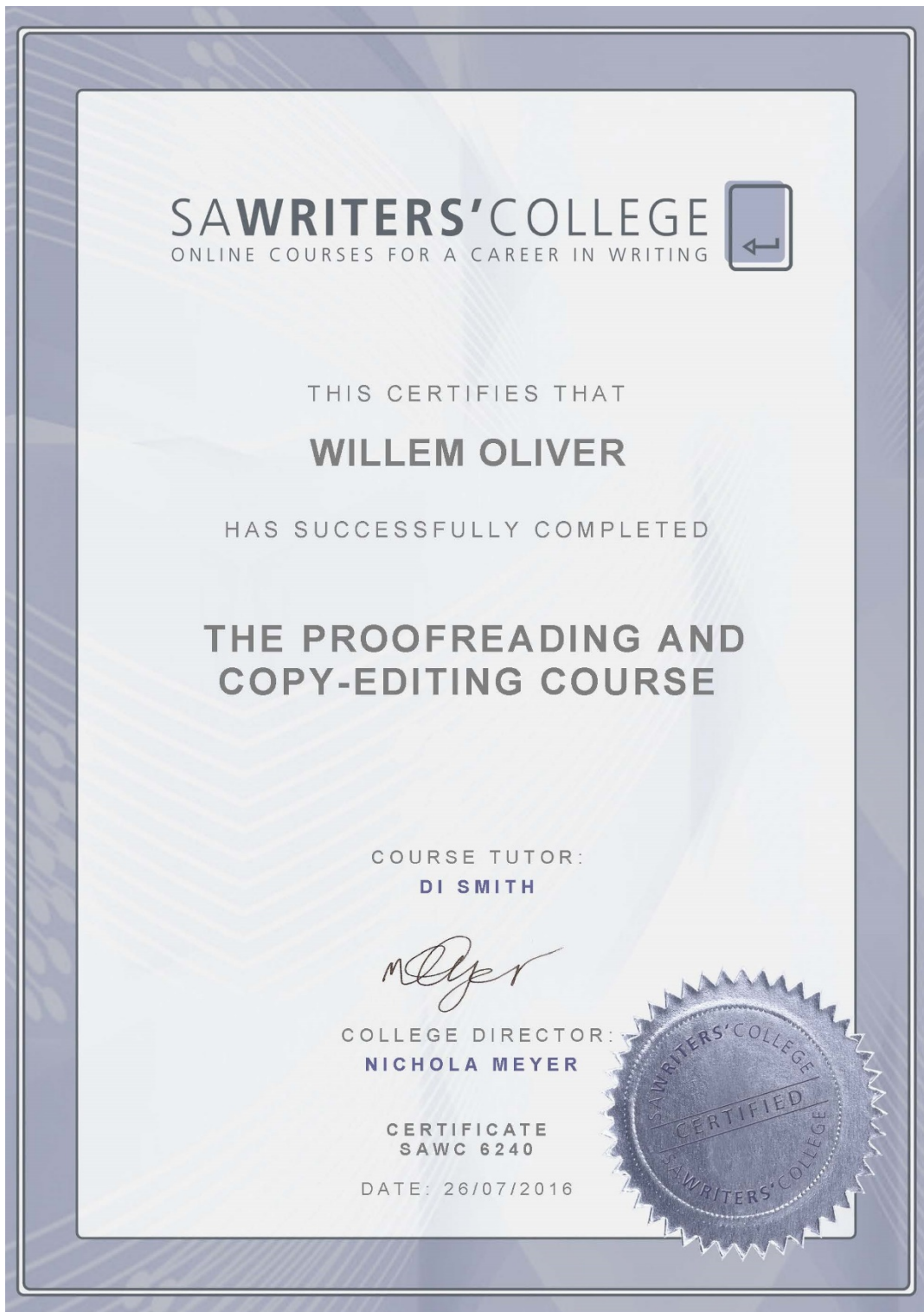
History

Abbreviations of Biblical Books

All the references made by the author to the Bible are from the NIV (n.d.).

Book	Abbreviation	Book	Abbreviation
Matthew	Mt	Philippians	Php
Mark	Mk	Colossians	Col
Luke	Lk	1 Thessalonians	1 Th
John	Jn	2 Thessalonians	2 Th
Acts	Ac	1 Timothy	1 Tim
Romans	Rm	2 Timothy	2 Tim
1 Corinthians	1 Cor	Titus	Tit
2 Corinthians	2 Cor	Philemon	Phm
Galatians	Gal	Hebrews	Heb
Ephesians	Eph		

Certificate of the Editor



CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATIAN AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

It will be no exaggeration to claim that Christianity and the Babi faith owe their development to two prominent characters, i.e. Paul the apostle and Jenab-i Táhirih. Indeed, if one examines the most significant and influential occasions of Church History and the Babi movement, it is difficult to overstate the critical contributions made by Paul and Táhirih, whether historically¹ or theologically, in both the Christian and Babi faiths.

However, regardless of their considerable contributions to Christianity and the Babi/Baha'i faith, both Paul and Táhirih caused many debates and arguments among both insiders and outsiders. Scrutinising different manuscripts regarding Paul and Táhirih render various perspectives about them.

At first glance, the impression may be that they do not share anything in common, since they lived in different eras and had different cultural and religious backgrounds, not to mention the fact that they had different genders. On the one hand, there is Táhirih, a Muslim woman who was brought up in a bigoted society where females were humiliated and scorned. However, she overcame all these restrictions and became a role model for her contemporaries and also the source of inspiration for generations of females globally. On the other hand, there is Paul, a Jew, who first expressed hostility to the new faith and eventually became one of the zealous apostles of Jesus Christ and revolutionised the foundation of Christianity with his theology. In fact, Paul enhanced the process of conversion for non-Jews (Gentiles) by removing some Jewish rituals like circumcision (Gibbon 2002), and was titled the 'apostle of the Gentiles' (Gal 2:7-8).

¹ Both the Jerusalem Council and Antioch incident contributed to the formation of the Church in Antioch. The Badasht Conference and Táhirih's contribution in declaring the independency of the Babi faith from Islam as well as her role in establishing equality between male and female are just some of her fruits.

Reviewing the Babi/Baha'i documents regarding Táhirih, depicts numerous positive dimensions of her character, influence, and contributions. Her personality, her impact, and her conduct were praised by the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and almost all Baha'i historians.² However, considering some non-Baha'i sources, particularly Islamic and Azali documents, a different and negative perspective emerges about her. They characterise her as a person who has followed her passion and has deviated from the right path (Mottahedeh 1997; Mohammad Hosseini 2000).

Researching Christian writings regarding Paul also reveals that there exist two opposite opinions about him. Some people regard him as a very important apostle who played a prominent role in developing Christianity (Taylor 2012:3), while others accuse him of adulterating the pure steam of Christian teachings (Grant 1914:375; Beheshti 1979; Farhat 2011; Fakhrol Eslam 2012).

These two opposing arguments regarding Paul and Táhirih beg for a deeper review of different and wider sources to ascertain a fair and more objective portrayal of these two impressive characters. To this end, in what follows, I will use both Christian and non-Christian, as well as Baha'i and non-Baha'i documents to examine the lives of both Paul and Táhirih, as well as their contributions, their statuses in their faiths and history in general, and more importantly, exploring their spiritual lives. In general, I intend to explore different aspects of the characters of Paul and Táhirih as well as their personal lives, including their personalities, religious backgrounds, specific lifestyles as a Jew and Muslim and then as a Christian and Babi, the culture that they helped to construct, their methods of teachings, and their relationships with their previous faiths, which were Judaism and Islam, and alternatively Christianity and Babi. I will then categorise their similarities and differences. In addition, I will evaluate their values and contributions to Christianity and Babi/Baha'i as seen by the world in general. It is noteworthy to mention

² 'The Báb praised Táhirih and declared that she is fully authorized in her decision' (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:192). Bahá'u'lláh titled her Táhirih, meaning the 'pure one' (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:250). Abdu'l-Bahá introduced her as the 'Burning Brand of the Love of God' and 'a Lamp of His Bestowal' (Borovicka 2016:41). Effendi also admired her brevity and acknowledged that her fame perpetuated and penetrated the whole world (Borovicka 2016:41-42, 46).

that, for my final judgement and conclusion, I will focus on the New Testament and the Baha'i writings as primary sources.

I hope that this research could offer a reasonable explanation on the characters of both Paul and Táhirih and their statuses and, more importantly, shed light on some misunderstandings that permeated especially in the Islamic literature about Paul and Táhirih. With this, I hope to make a contribution to a deeper comparative analysis of these two towering religious figures.

1.2 Background to the Study and Literature Review

In order to construct the background to these two figures, and before discussing different sources, it is important to mention that, with reference to Paul, I will basically focus on the Bible. Regarding Táhirih, I will mainly rely on the manuscripts from the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi. Moreover, I will also use records by her contemporaries who were somehow in touch with her, including the Baha'i histories and also non-Iranian sources.

Included as background to these two figures, I refer to their birthplaces, their occupations and lifestyles as Jew and Muslim, their conversions, their writings, and their deaths.

1.2.1 Paul's Background

In his book, *The early life and background of Paul the apostle*, Wallace (2002) presents Paul's life, including his birthplace, his identity as both a Jew and a Roman citizen, and his education. In contrast to the more or less neutral description of Wallace, Langton (2007) renders a controversial biography about Paul, based on Jewish literature. The article tries to 'reconcile Paul with Judaism' (Langton 2007:299). He offers an alternative image of Paul's adulthood³ and his perspective on Jewish law that have further

³ According to Langton (2007:292), Paul, the sensitive, lonely adolescent was drawn into sexual experimentation with pagan girls and women, experiences which he both enjoyed and was troubled by, for he knew that such pleasurable liaisons were prohibited by the law. Along with this, his hunger –

influenced and shaped his attitude towards Christianity. He also describes Paul's conversion, the Antioch incident, his relationship with Peter, and his approach to Gentile missiology.

Almost all the Christian articles that I reviewed about Paul's connection with Judaism and his perception about the law, have the same perspective regarding this topic. They state that Paul never tore his tie with Judaism and definitely did not intend to break the Jewish law. He has rather perceived the universalism of Judaism (Barclay 1976; Best 1982; Byrne 1998; Roetzel 1999; Waldron 2006; Deffinbaugh 2004; Bugg 2010; Henning 2010; Fredriksen 2014; Sibley 2016). Conversely, Jewish scholars like Langton (2009) and Harrington (2010:1) regard Paul as an apostate who was the real founder of Christianity. Iranian Islamic historians claim that Paul turned back to Judaism and invented his own gospel (Beheshti 1979; Farhat 2011; Fakhrol Eslam 2012). However, according to certain parts of the New Testament, this assumption about Paul is expressed through a lack of knowledge about him and his outcomes in spreading Christianity.⁴

In contrast to Islamic Scriptures, Baha'i manuscripts have a different perspective regarding Paul. Abdu'l-Bahá, for example, testifies and confirms Paul's righteousness, his inspiration,⁵ and more importantly, the validity of the Old and New Testament as holy books (Borovicka 2016:40).

and his tendency to experiment – led him in a moment of weakness to eat non-kosher meat, for which, again, he suffered guilty pangs of conscience.

⁴ Cf. for example, *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile* (Rm 1:16).

⁵ 'Physical nearness or remoteness [to the manifestation of God] is of no importance; the essential fact is the spiritual affinity and ideal nearness. Judas Iscariot was for a long time favored in the holy court of His Holiness Christ, yet he was entirely far and remote; while Paul, the apostle, was in close embrace with His Holiness' (Borovicka 2016:40).

1.2.2 Táhirih's Background

1.2.2.1 Baha'i Scriptures

From all the Baha'i writings, it is obvious that there are various documents regarding Táhirih and almost all of them have the same opinion regarding her life, belief, and background before and after her conversion.

The first category belongs to the Scriptures of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, Abd'ul-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi which authenticity are, in the same vein as the holy Bible, unquestionable, and I will basically rely on them in my research.

The second category is rendered by Baha'i writers like Johnson (1982), Fadil Mazandarani (2009), Mohammad Hosseini (2000), Momen (2003), and Shahrokh (2018). All of them report that Táhirih was born in a rich Muslim family in Qazvin, and from her childhood she was different from all her siblings. Her intelligence and sagacity caused that she became fascinated with the new manifestation i.e. the Báb, without even physically visiting them, and finally she devoted her entire life to the path of her beloved.

1.2.2.2 Non-Baha'i sources

Although a number of Islamic historians, including Muhammad Taqi Lassan-al Mulk Sepehr (1958) and Mohammad Ja'far ibn Muhammad Ali Khormuji (1965) attack and question the Báb's validity and disgrace his followers, including Táhirih, others like Za'im al-Dawlah Tabrizi (1903) do not ignore her courage, dignity, and influence on women's rights and freedom.

1.2.3 Theology

With the term 'theology' I refer to the understanding and perception that Paul and Táhirih had of their faith, in other words, the way that they perceived their beloved and his teachings/principles and how this is reflected in their writings.

1.2.3.1 *Paul's theology*

Paul's theology causes controversy among both Christian and non-Christian historians. The New Testament, and specifically Paul's epistles, reveal unique perspectives and concepts which were possibly not totally understood by his readers/hearers who lived in that era. Concepts such as justification by faith alone, Paul's eschatological views, the universality of the gospel, and the equality between Jews and Gentiles, among others, are examples of such issues as reviewed by Gould (1899), Carus (1901), Grant (1914), Stendahl (1963), Duling (2003), Taylor (2012), Third Millennium Ministries (2012), Koptak (1990), Leonard (2012), and Byler (2016). These scholars agree that Paul's theology was influenced by the Hellenistic culture, which could justify his preaching of the gospel to the Jews and Gentiles. In contrast, however, Islamic historians like Beheshti (1979), Farhat (2011), and Fakhrol Eslam (2012) regard Paul as hidebound and that he deviated from the right path to invent a fake gospel.

1.2.3.2 *Táhirih's theology*

Researching Táhirih's theology is somewhat more complicated since she uttered her passionate, radical, and revolutionary beliefs through Persian and Arabic poems. According to Lee (2016:6), the structure of these poems is mystical and one can infer from it the sense of 'universal love and her call for equality and world peace.' Since these elements are not included in the Báb's teaching, Lee believes that she probably perceived the magnificence of Bahá'u'lláh and the Baha'i principles that he promoted later. Concepts such as the union with God ('Fana'), the abrogation of Islamic law and ritual with the appearance of the Qa'im, including the removal of the veil and the custom of dissimulation (Arabic: *Taqiyyah*), and the belief in prescient, deifying, and attacking Muslim's clergy's power, are some of the motifs that had been rendered and argued by Táhirih and reviewed by historians such as Fadil Mazandarani (1944), Maneck (1989), Mohammad Hosseini (2000), and Lee (2016).

1.2.4 **Similarities between Paul and Táhirih**

In 2016, Borovicka specifically discussed the similarities between Paul and Táhirih and their respective contributions to Christianity and the Babi/Baha'i faith (Borovicka 2016).

What makes this article credible is that it mainly relies on the words of the manifestation of God as unaltered documents. In addition to this article and the abovementioned sources, I will also use a multiple of other sources for this research.

1.2.5 Summary

To sum up, reviewing, comparing, and contrasting various sources show clearly that there are differing opinions regarding Paul and Táhirih in Christian, non-Christian, Islamic, and Baha'i Scriptures. I will incorporate these different viewpoints in my research to indicate the diverse perspectives. However, in my discussion I will mainly rely on primary sources like the New Testament, the holy Qur'an and the Scriptures of the manifestation of God, including the Bahá'u'lláh, Abd'ul-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi as sacred texts, to enable me to make fair judgements and observations regarding the lives and influences of Paul and Táhirih on their respective religious traditions.

1.3 Problem Formulation

The dissertation will focus on the events that took place during the first 100 years of both religions, since many prominent incidents of both Church History and the Babi history such as the conversions (and its outcomes) of Paul and Táhirih, their journeys to different cities for spreading Christianity and the Báb's message, and their confrontation with inside and outside opponents occurred in this period.

Paul was the apostle who apparently turned his back on his previous belief system (Judaism) and became the Christian apostle to the Gentiles (Russian Academy of Science 1987). He revolutionised the Judaist foundation of Christianity when he asserted that non-Jews (Gentiles) do not need to perform the tradition of circumcision when they become Christians (Durant 1944). Paul's revolutionary claims and theology were not acceptable or understandable, neither for most of the Jewish communities of that era nor for Muslims later (Beheshti 1979). However, Paul refused to backtrack on his claims and succeeded to gain the approval of the Christians in Jerusalem and established his position among Christian leaders (Roetzel 1999).

Táhirih, a decisive, assertive, and intelligent Muslim woman, renounced her previous belief system (Islam) when she heard that the *Qu'im*⁶ was declared (Maneck 1989). In the same vein as Paul, she has revolutionised the foundation of Islam through her radical conduct by, for example, appearing unveiled when announcing the beginning of a new era i.e. the Báb's independent declaration (Lee 2016). This action was considered as very controversial since it caused a separation between Muslims and Babis, resulting in Táhirih being called a heretic (Mohammad Hosseini 2000).

Reviewing different sources/manuscripts, particularly Islamic documents, depict opposite perspective regarding both Paul and Táhirih. Regarding Paul, most non-Christian historians, specifically Islamic scholars, are portraying him as an ignorant believer, a person who has changed and scratched Jesus Christ's message and ruined the real face of Christianity (Farhat 2011). Some of them even go so far as to question the authenticity of all his documents (14 books of the New Testament are mostly attributed to Paul), accusing him of destroying Peter's position and dignity and finally calling him a liar and a traitor (Farhat 2011).

Regarding Táhirih, although most scholars, even non-Iranian ones, are praising her and calling her the prodigy of her era, there are scholars who scoff her, accused her that she ignored modesty, and defamed her family's reputation (Za'im al-Dawlah Tabrizi 1903).

This animosity regarding Paul and Táhirih can be contributed to various reasons, ranging from disregarding the contributions that both of them made to spread Christianity and the Babi faith, a lack of understanding their beliefs through studying their writings (i.e. Paul's letters and Táhirih's poems and proses), and an ignorance about the magnificent roles that both of them played in their respective religions. More conservative people, both inside and outside religious traditions, cannot tolerate it when a new prophet or leader breaks old rituals and traditions. They then severely criticise and

⁶ According to Shi'i scriptures, Qu'im is the title of the twelfth Imam on who's coming they are waiting. According to Baha'i belief, the Báb is the Qu'im.

attack these leaders and prophets who they feel are disturbing and causing trouble for believers.

Therefore, this research will review various sources and opinions – both positive and negative – about Paul and Táhirih, and will also try to render a fair and acceptable perspective on both of them by painting a comprehensive and comparative image of them. To reach this goal, I will research both Christian and non-Christian documents, Islamic, Babi and Baha'i books, articles, and journals. In addition, the research will rely on the Old and the New Testament as well as the manuscripts of the manifestation of God.

1.3.1 Research Question and Sub-Questions

The main question of this research is: *Why are Paul and Táhirih labelled as revolutionary characters of their respective eras?*

The following sub-questions that support the main question, are:

- Are there similarities between their personalities and theologies? If so, what do we learn from them?
- To what extent were they committed to their previous religion and then to Christianity and the Babi faith?
- What were their respective missions, and did they succeed? How?
- Why do some sources propose a negative image of Paul the apostle and Táhirih?
- How much were Paul and Táhirih influenced by the societies in which they lived?
- Why did they differ from other believers? Did they realise something that their fellow-believers missed?
- What are their positions in history?

1.3.2 Aim and Objectives of the Research

The main goal of this research is to investigate the similarities between Paul and Táhirih through both their extant manuscripts and other documents, and to collect evidence to ascertain that they can be considered as revolutionary heroes of their respective eras.

The objectives of the research are:

- Find similarities between the personalities and theologies of Paul and Táhirih and draw lessons from it.
- Investigate the personalities and culture of both Paul and Táhirih, as well as their lifestyles before their conversion, to see how their thoughts and attitudes were formed towards their new religions, and how much they had in common.
- Also investigate their respective roles, contributions, and influences on the faith that they propagated.
- Reach a better understanding of their faith, by examining their extant documents/ manuscripts.
- State why they are hailed as heroes of their particular eras.
- Search for the source of their inspiration and motivation. Did they benefit from the same source of revelation?
- Render a fair image of both Paul and Táhirih to inform followers of both religions (Christianity and Baha'i) to have a better understanding of the character of these religions.

1.4 Clarification of Concepts

The *Bahá'í faith* developed from the Iranian religion that was started by the Báb, a merchant who proclaimed a new interpretation of Shia Islam in 1844 and was executed in 1850. Together with the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá are the three central figures of the religion (A.V. 2017). After 1960, the religion spread rapidly outside Iran and Turkey, while the adherents were persecuted in Iran since 1979 (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2020).

Christianity a one of the world's largest and major religions, founded upon the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth (the Christ) in the 1st century CE (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2020).

The term '*revolutionary*,' which this research project often uses to describe both Paul and Táhirih, refers to the courageous, unique, and alternative actions of people which result in significant changes in the structure of society.

Qajar was an Iranian royal dynasty of Turkic origin especially from the Qajar tribe, ruling over Iran from 1789 to 1925 (Ghani 2000:1).

1.5 Research Methodology

Comparative historical research is a theoretical framework used in social sciences. Mill (1950:211-216) describes it as a method of difference and agreement. It can be used to study historical events and figures in an attempt to provide descriptions, deepen understanding, identify patterns, analyse trends, or explain these either by direct comparison with other historical events or figures, or with current events or figures. Schutt (2006:397) identifies four stages to conduct systematic qualitative, comparative, historical studies: First, the researcher must develop a premise of the investigation by identifying specific events, people, and concepts related to the theme of the research. Thereafter, a selection of the cases (for example, people, places, and events) must be made and motivated. The third step is to examine the similarities and the differences between these, and lastly, based on the information gained, draw conclusions and provide explanations.

This method is suitable to use when a comparison of a topic across different societies or time periods is done, but the researcher must respect and keep in mind the cross-cultural variations in customs, values, and meanings. The value of this method lies in its ability to make people aware of the 'narrowness of our minds' and to recognise the 'shortcomings and harmful consequences' (Azarian & Petrusenko 2010:44) of biasness and assumptions – in the case of Paul and Táhirih, regarding religion. However, it must

be kept in mind when working with this framework, that the data set could be incomplete and biased. The researcher does not have control over variables and there cannot be researcher-subject interaction.

The comparative investigation of Paul and Táhirih will be conducted through the method of document analysis of both their personal writings (primary sources) and secondary sources of people who wrote about them. Document analysis is a qualitative research method in which documents are interpreted to give voice and meaning around a specific topic (Bowen 2009). It is done through an investigation of data material and documents which already exist (Scambor n.d.:1). According to O'Leary (2014), a document analysis consists of the following eight stages:

- Gathering relevant texts.
- Develop an organisation and management scheme.
- Make copies of the originals for annotation.
- Assess the authenticity of a document.
- Explore a document's agenda and biases.
- Explore the background information.
- Ask question about a document.
- Explore the content.

To render a comprehensive discussion, I will focus on both primary and secondary sources, developing reasonable interpretations from them. Regarding the biographies, lifestyles, and religious backgrounds of both Paul and Táhirih, I will basically rely on the New Testament that is acknowledged as authoritative by the followers of different religions and the Scriptures of the manifestation of God, including Bahá'u'lláh and the two authoritative interpreters of the Baha'i Scriptures, namely Abd'ul-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. I will also review reliable Christian, non-Christians, and Baha'i sources, in order to render a fair and balanced interpretation regarding the lives and work of Paul and Táhirih. Added to these, I will review some Iranian Islamic literature and non-Iranian manuscripts about Paul and Táhirih in order to explore certain misunderstandings that arose in some of these documents by relying on both the Bible and Baha'i Scriptures.

1.6 Significance of the Project

This research is important and different from previous studies because the actions, spiritual characteristics, and influence of Paul have not been thoroughly explored or understood by followers of the Baha'i faith. Similarly, the deeds and spiritual personality of Jenab-i Táhirih and her influence on the Baha'i faith are not thoroughly perceived or understood by followers of the Christian religion. Hence, this research will be useful for both sides since it will scrutinise both of these characters' background and lifestyles before and after their conversions, as well as their influences on Christianity and the Babi movement respectively.

Furthermore, this dissertation will largely rely on original documents, including the holy Bible (The Old and the New Testament) and the documents of messengers of God. In addition, it will employ more recent documents that have been published by researchers who were in touch with Táhirih and later with her kindred.

The documents written by Iranian Islamic historians relied on sources (books) that were published in Iran, under the supervision of the Islamic Republic Publication Center. Most of these sources present negative images of both Paul and Táhirih which have the Islamic perception that – even according to a Muslim's view – these documents are to be regarded as second-hand sources. They rarely refer to the holy Qur'an and the Baha'i holy Scriptures.

It is my aim with this research to uncover the legitimacy of calling both Paul and Táhirih revolutionary heroes and to render an appropriate image of both of them.

1.7 Chapter Outline

In Chapter 2, I will discuss the life of Paul from his birth until his death as a martyr for his faith. Paul's life as a Jew and his life after his conversion, following Jesus as the Messiah, is discussed after which the attention shifts to his writings and his theology. In Chapter 3, I will discuss the life of Táhirih from her birth until her martyrdom, including her life as a Muslim, Shaykhi, and a Babi woman. Her achievements and writings will be

reviewed as well. Chapter 4 will particularly focus on both Paul's and Táhirih's positions, impressions, and legacies. In Chapter 5, I will categorise the similarities between Paul and Táhirih, based on information that has been rendered in previous chapters. Chapter 6 reviews the mystical conversions of Paul and Táhirih, consulting a Baha'i document, *Seven Valleys*, and discussing the stages that they had to pass in order to reach the highest degree according to the view of the Sufism. The final chapter will conclude the research and contain the findings regarding the positions of Paul and Táhirih as heroes of faith in their respective societies.

1.8 Summary

Both Paul and Táhirih are seen as heroes of faith by most of the followers of their specific religions. As both of these religions were founded upon an older religious tradition, there are also people who regard them as heretics who have misled others to divert from the 'true' religion. This research aims to portray both Paul and Táhirih in a fair way and to find similarities between their lives, beliefs, actions, and theologies in order to enlighten people from both inside and outside the respective faith traditions on the real value of these two revolutionaries in history. To achieve this goal, I will apply the document analysis method and interpret different sources regarding them.

Chapters 2 and 3 of the research will serve to introduce the reader to the lives, works, and writings of Paul and Táhirih. In Chapter 4, their statuses and impressions will be reviewed and then compared in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 focuses on the mystical experiences of Paul and Táhirih and the stages that they had to pass to reach their intended purposes, which was a union with God.

In the next chapter, I will focus on Paul's life before and after his conversion, and the events of his life until his martyrdom.

CHAPTER 2

PAUL THE APOSTLE

2.1 Introduction

When one reviews Paul's annals and biography with an analytical perspective on his character, it is not surprising that, like all human beings, Paul's character is a product of manifold influences. Being a diaspora Jew, living in the Roman Empire among Gentiles and pagans, and having been raised in the shadow of both a Hellenistic and Roman culture, resulted in a tough but open-minded individual who served humanity and Christianity in the best way that he could. To better explore his personality and the forces that shaped his social impact, this chapter considers Paul's life in separate segments, including his life and the forces that impacted him before his conversion. Paul is discussed as a devoted Christian, alongside the challenges that he went through with his theology and fruits of his work, with an attempt to gain deep insights into the forces that shaped his personality and belief system, and which ultimately culminated in his undeniable influence on the course of Christian history. To achieve this goal, I will employ different documents ranging from Christian, non-Christian, and Islamic corpuses.

2.2 Paul's Background

2.2.1 A Short Biography

Paul was a Greek-speaking Jew who was born in Tarsus, one of the principal cities of the Roman Empire, and the capital of the province of Cilicia (Durant 1944:294). The exact year of his birth is unclear. According to Durant (1944:294), he was born before 10 BCE. Bruce estimates the date of Paul's birth in one of the early years of the Christian era (Bruce 1980:234), while Montague (1966) postulates that Paul was born in 5 CE.

The best source for Paul's autobiographical statement is his letter to the Philippians (specifically Php 3:5) where he states: '...circumcised on the eighth day, a member of

the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews, as to the law a Pharisee' (cf. also Duling 2003:150).

Wright (1974) relates that Paul's father was a member of the ancient tribe of Benjamin and that he belonged to the party of the Pharisees – a Jewish religious group that believed in destiny and life after death and lived an ascetic life while carefully teaching their students the Hebrew Scriptures (Gibbon 2002).

Paul's father was a Roman citizen, which was in itself a significant position during that era. Roman citizens had many advantages, for instance, if a Roman citizen was arrested by local authorities, they were automatically entitled to a fair trial. If the citizen felt that the outcome was not fair, they could appeal directly to the emperor for judgement, as it happened when Paul was arrested in Jerusalem (Durant 1944:294). Wallace (2000) agrees with Durant:

Local Tarsian citizens who did not have Roman citizenship did not have the same privileges. Roman citizens could also serve in government posts, vote in Roman affairs, join the Roman legion, and become members of the senate. Anyone who was a citizen of Rome had a tremendous advantage as a resident of Tarsus.

Roman citizens normally had two names, hence Paul's two names arising from his Roman heritage were *Paulus* or *Paul* which can be translated with 'small,' while his Hebrew name was *Saul*, which can be translated with 'desire' or 'asked for' (Wallace 2002). That is why, according to the New Testament, he was initially called Saul, and after his conversion he was called Paul. According to Scriptures, he preferred to be called Paul, since the name 'Saul' had a negative meaning in Greek⁷ (Duling 2003:151).

⁷ 'The term Saulos in Greek could describe the waddling gate of a tortoise, the prancing of a horse, or even the sexually suggestive walk of a courtesan or devotee of the Dionysiac rites' (Duling 2003:151).

Regarding Paul's mother,

we hear absolutely nothing, but everything seems to indicate that the home in which he was brought up was one of those out of which nearly all eminent religious teachers have sprung – a home of piety, of character, perhaps of somewhat stern principle, and of strong attachment to the peculiarities of a religious people (Stalker 2007⁸).

He seemingly had a sister, while some sources indicate that he had a nephew in Jerusalem whom he communicated with, which will be discussed later (Duling 2003: 151).

2.2.2 Paul's Birthplace and its Influence on Him

Taking Tarsus as birthplace of Paul reveals many facts about Paul's behaviour, his attitude towards the world, and the approaches that he further adopted regarding religion. Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia, came into existence long before Paul was born. A 100 years prior to Paul, Alexander the Great brought the Hellenistic (Grecian) culture and customs into the city, and the people of Tarsus preserved this Greek culture even after it became Roman territory. The Roman kings granted special privileges, such as exemption from tax to government, being liberal in trade, and education (Gundry 1994).

The geographical position of Tarsus (located in Southern Asia Minor or south eastern Turkey, close to the Mediterranean coast), made this city one of the prominent trade centres of that era – it was a prosperous city during the time of Paul (Sanders 1977). Apart from various industries, including the production of minerals and lumber, investments in good roads, public health, and beautification projects, it was famous for tent-making (Wallace 2002). Pollock (1972) indicates that this craft became popular in Paul's era and it became Paul's occupation too – this made him free from want and asking charity from Christian communities.

⁸ The ebook of Stalker (2007) does not have any page numbers.

In the antiquity era, Tarsus was considered to be a 'University city.' Educators from all over the Roman Empire, including Grecian, Egyptian, African, and Roman territories, came to Tarsus to teach at the schools. In this way they brought their culture and philosophy (particularly Stoic philosophy) to the city, which is evident in the writings of Paul (Key & Young 1958). According to Duling (2003:151), Tarsus as educational centre rivalled Athens and Rome.

Regarding the belief system of Tarsus, the people in this city not only deified most of the gods and goddesses, but they sincerely worshiped these gods, because the gods could rescue them from demons and endow them with eternal life (Durant 1944). In my opinion, this kind of loyalty and fidelity towards these idols, somehow prepared the Greeks to accept Paul's future gospel.

In light of the above and given the social milieu in which Paul grew up, it may be reasonable to interpret his attitude and conduct. He was raised in a Greek city where different people with different backgrounds learned how to live next to each other, while having different cultures and belief systems. In addition, being a Jew did not pose a problem for Paul to sympathise with and honour the Gentiles, since he gradually realised that showing sympathy to Gentiles was not equal to concurring with them (Durant 1944).

2.2.3 Paul's Adulthood and Education

Historians like Taylor (2012) argue that being a Jew and a Greek Roman citizen simultaneously, led Paul to benefit from both education systems, but in different ways. He claims that Paul has utilised the Greek rhetoric and genre and immersed himself in the Greek version of Israel's Bible. However, Stalker (2007) believes that being an Orthodox Pharisee, Paul did not receive formal education in Greece, since acquiring Greek knowledge was not a Jewish priority (Durant 1944), or it may be that his religious father thought it would be sinful to allow his son to attend a heathen university. He therefore rather sent his son to the synagogue while the son was still young, maybe

only 5 years old (Wallace 2002). The Jewish philosopher, Philo, said the following concerning this:

For all men are eager to preserve their own customs and laws, and the Jewish nation above all others; for looking upon their laws as oracles directly given to them by God Himself, and having been instructed in this doctrine from their very earliest infancy they bear in their souls the images of the commandments contained in these laws as sacred (Yonge 1997).

After Paul had advanced in the Pentateuch and Mishnah (Wallace 2002), he moved to Jerusalem to receive formal rabbinic training in the school. Stalker (2007) elaborates: 'To every Jewish child of a religious disposition Jerusalem was the center of all things; the footsteps of prophets and kings echoed in the streets; memories sacred and sublime clung to its walls and buildings; and it shone in the glamor of illimitable hopes.' At that time, the religious school of Jerusalem was headed by Gamaliel I, the son of Simeon ben Hillel: 'He was called by his contemporaries the Beauty of the Law, and is still remembered among the Jews as the Great Rabbi' (Stalker 2007). Paul began his formal studies under Gamaliel's supervision. The courses that a rabbi had to undergo consisted of the Scriptures with the comments of the sages and masters linked to it. Obviously Paul worked through it all. Stalker (2007) claims the following about Paul:

The outstanding qualities of Paul's intellect, which were conspicuous in his subsequent life – his marvelous memory, the keenness of his logic, the super-abundance of his ideas, and his original way of taking up every subject – first displayed themselves in this school, and excited, we may well believe, the warm interest of his teacher.

However, religious training did not satisfy the curiosity of Paul. It has been documented that he challenged his teachers' knowledge and power by asking questions that they could not or were not eager to respond to (Langton 2007).

A Jewish writer, Samuel Sandmel explains that living in a Hellenistic culture as a Jew, made Paul different from the Jews of Palestine, since he acquired both Jewish education and philosophy at the same time. Regarding Paul's education, Sandmel asserts that Menelaus has accepted to train Paul, since he believed that Paul had a glorious future. With Menelaus' assistance, Paul got familiar to Plato and other Greek philosophers. His acquaintance with philosophy reached its peak when he was introduced to Proprius, a Gentile philosopher who criticised Judaism, since he thought that there was a connection between the Jewish Law and evil (Sandmel n.d.). Hence, Sandmel thinks that Paul's companionship with the Gentiles as his neighbours, and being trained by a non-Jewish thinker, prepared him for his future connections with the Gentiles (Langton 2007:293-296).

Paul's circumstances became stressed and confusing when his mother committed suicide. After the suicide he became suspicious of the law of Moses.⁹ He was in a dilemma. On the one hand he studied the Torah privately, and on the other hand he regarded Moses' law as an enemy (Langton 2007:293).

It is hard to deny the influence of the Hellenistic world and philosophy on shaping Paul's mind and his future perceptions of Christianity. However, we must not forget that, despite the suspicion and doubts that captured him during specific occasions, he remained loyal to Judaism, even after his conversion. He never doubted the holiness and inspiration of the Torah (Durant 1944) and observed the Jewish law carefully (Henning 2010:6). He always gave priority to the Jewish culture and beliefs over those of the Gentiles. In Roman 1:16 he stated: *...because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile*. The most marvellous benefit that he drew from Jerusalem was 'the conviction that the one prize which makes life worth living is the love and favor of God' (Stalker 2007). Apparently, this belief motivated him to persecute Christians to gain God's mercy, but after his

⁹ Sandmel claims that Paul's father got lost on a trade adventure, while the reason for his mother's suicide was her despair at the refusal of the rabbinic establishment to issue her a divorce from her missing husband, so as to allow her to remarry a new suitor (Langton 2007:293).

conversion inspired him to search God's love and favour through an unquestionable faith towards Christ.

In the following paragraphs I will explore Paul's loyalty to Judaism in more detail.

2.3 Paul as a Jew and His Connection with Judaism

It is interesting to note that some Jewish scholars postulate that Paul lived and died while being an authentic Jew (Langton 2007:286). In fact, they regard Paul as a Greco-Roman Israelite, but a deviant one that no longer lived in a Jewish community (Duling 2003:153). Sholem Asch (cf. Langton 2007) is a Jewish scholar who believes that Saul's cosmopolitan upbringing – he was subject to both Hellenistic thought and culture, and Jewish principles – meant that 'two souls lived side by side in the heart of the young Saul and they struggled for the mastery.' Paul therefore never severed ties with Judaism (Langton 2007:286).

According to Sanders (n.d.), '[u]ntil about the midpoint of his life, Paul was a member of the Pharisees' party.' Paul indicated his faith in Acts 22:3, stating: *'I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today.'*

In Philippians 3:5-6 Paul stated that he was *circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.*

As a devoted Pharisee, Paul held to the ethics of the Jewish law and the principles that described the identity of a Jew. He kept the Sabbath, avoided the eating of non-kosher meat, avoided adultery, believed in life after death, and was a zealous observer of the Torah and Jewish festivals (Wallace 2002). He also memorised the Old Testament and this enabled him to quote from it wherever he needed it – and he did so (Stalker 2007).

At this stage it is worth to note that studying in Jerusalem in the presence of teachers like Gamaliel who was a lofty man with an enlightened mind and was tolerant to the Greek culture on the one hand, and being a diaspora Jew on the other hand, influenced Paul's mind and thoughts deeply and formed and consequently changed his relationship to Judaism for ever (Stalker 2007). In my opinion, these two factors underpinned Paul's multifarious virtues like love, mercy and generosity, tolerance, and non-dogmatism.

However, as mentioned before, in general, the Judaism of the Diaspora differed from those in Palestine, due to various factors (McNamara 1979), and Paul was no exception to that. The Jews in the Diaspora were more flexible in their relationship with other cultures and religions since they were surrounded by other nations who had their own cultures and religions (Gibbon 2002) – this acts as justification for Paul to show honour and respect, even to Gentile women (Durant 1944).

The diaspora Jews were somehow involved in pagan affairs, ranging from honouring pagan gods, serving as soldiers and generals in their armies, and working as town councillors in their cities (Fredriksen 2015:640) To summarise, living in the Diaspora has taught the Jews to find an appropriate way to worship their own personal God and to meet requirements of the Mediterranean pagan communities – and that compromised their friendship, loyalty, and patronage towards Judaism. Paul's advice about eating meat that was offered to idols could well reflect an established Jewish *modus vivendi* as a good example of Jewish moderateness and fellowship (Fredriksen 2015:640-641).

However, Paul's contribution to the community in which he resided was more than what has been indicated above. At first, he puzzled why God created Jews and non-Jews, and then he reached the conclusion that the 'Messiah will restore the Kingdom of God throughout the earth, and not simply restore the Kingdom of Israel. The apostle's interest in the wider world is thus again contrasted with the parochialism of Palestinian Jewry' (Langton 2007:287). Moreover, under the training of Proprius, he even became concerned about the fate and destiny of non-Jews (Langton 2007:293).

Another distinction that can be drawn between the Jews living in the Diaspora and the Jewry of Palestine, is their relationship with and perception of the Jewish law. Most Palestinian Jews believed that the meticulous performance of the regulation of their law, and even the conviction that man can succeed in doing so, brought spiritual pride to them and a belief that this would put God in debt. This type of attitude resulted in pride and self-righteousness (Barclay 1976). However, Paul as a Jew in the Diaspora had a different perception regarding the Jewish law. Through experience, he stated that no human being will be justified in God's sight by works of the Jewish law (cf. Rm 3:20; Gal 3:11), and also, that *a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ* (Gal 2:16).

To summarise, Paul's Judaism was not only about performing Jewish laws and tradition. Since he assumed himself to be one of the devoted Jews who performed their law, he believed that through good deeds and obedience a person can be prosperous (Sanders 1977) and more importantly, this salvation/redemption will not be confined to Israel alone, but will be for everyone (Roetzel 1999).

Genesis 12:3 states that *all peoples on earth will be blessed through you [Israel]*. Apparently, this interpretation and perception by Judaism was not in accordance to the majority, but set a consistent basis/foundation for Paul's future mission.

2.3.1 Paul's Perception of Judaism

Paul had a unique insight and perception of Judaism. He was eager to settle the unity among the Jews and the Gentiles (Schreiner 2001), and he intended to achieve this lofty goal through Christianity and believing in Jesus Christ. However, he had to pass through different stages to accomplish this challenging objective. He repeatedly argued that Judaism and performing its laws and rituals, including circumcision, cannot bring about redemption and salvation.

Paul's letter to the Romans is the best document that portrayed his attitude towards Judaism. In this letter he stated: *A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is*

circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God (Rm 2:28-29). In another part of this letter, he stated something that probably revolutionised the basis of Judaism and their theory of a 'Chosen Nation,' by saying: *Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them. Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is then also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised (Rm 4:8-12).*

According to these verses, Paul disappointed the Jews by telling them straight that one will not achieve deliverance solely through their religion, which was keeping the Jewish law. Arguably, this was an alarming statement for the Jews who had the pride of their own religion that promised them salvation.

Gradually Paul stated that God is not only the God of Israel, but also the God of the Gentiles/pagans, as He can also shower His blessings and mercy on them, and they will be rescued through their faith in Jesus Christ. In Romans 9:24-25 Paul stated: *Even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? As he says in Hosea: 'I will call them "my people" who are not my people; and I will call her "my loved one" who is not my loved one.'* In Romans 10:12-13, Paul went further by expressing the fact that the Jews and non-Jews are equal before God: *For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'* It is therefore clear that Paul has initially commenced his evangelism among the Jews, and only later turned to the Gentiles to fulfil the mission that his Lord has given him (Deffinbaugh

2004). However, he did not achieve much success among the Jews, since both his interpretation of Judaism and his behaviour were not according to the Jewish practices. Therefore, he focused on Gentiles who apparently were ready to accept his gospel.

2.4 Paul's Reaction to the New Gospel

Perhaps when one reaches this part of Paul's story, i.e. his reaction to the new gospel, it is at once baffling and inspiring to see how a person like Paul who, according to his testimony, was one of the hardest enemies and persecutors of the Church,¹⁰ transformed to one of the most devoted and influential proponents of Christianity.

According to manuscripts, Paul was not present in Jerusalem at the time of the movement of John the Baptist and later Jesus Christ. Indeed, he returned to Jerusalem just after Jesus' death (Stalker 2007). However, through his rich background and talent, soon after his return, he received a remarkable position in the Sanhedrin and started his mission as one of the persecutors of Christianity.¹¹

The story began with Stephen, a pious and zealous Christian and one of the seven deacons who had been appointed to watch over the temporal affairs of the Christian society. As a brave Christian he propagated the New Gospel from synagogue to synagogue, preaching the Messiahship of Jesus and announcing the advent of freedom from the yoke of the law (Stalker 2007).

The Jewish authorities tried to stop him, but obviously they could not. However, he was finally arrested and stoned by the Jewish authorities, while Paul witnessed this horrible incident (Stalker 2007).

The writer of Acts has portrayed the confrontation of Stephen with the Jewish elders: *Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the*

¹⁰ Philippians 3:6: *...as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.*

¹¹ This movement was not called Christianity during these early days. In Acts 11:26, we read that the term 'Christianity' was first used in Antioch in Syria. This most probably occurred in the writings of Ignatius (ca 35-107), who was the second bishop of the city of Antioch during the 2nd century CE (McGrath 2013:1).

Freedmen (as it was called) – Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia – who began to argue with Stephen. But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke. Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, ‘We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.’ So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. They produced false witnesses, who testified, ‘This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law’ (Ac 6:8-13).

Acts 6:14, following these verses above, depicts that Stephen has defeated the Jewish elder authorities with his words, and since they could not put up with this humiliation, they accused him of preaching against the Temple and the Mosaic law and finally sentenced him to death. Stephen was stoned by Jewish authorities and Paul witnessed the incident. Acts interestingly reveals both sides’ reactions: *At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ When he had said this, he fell asleep (Ac 7:57-60).* This was Paul’s first recorded encounter with Christian believers but obviously not the last. He revealed such a zeal and persistence at this occasion that he had been offered a special position/seat in the Sanhedrin by Jewish authorities, ‘where we find him soon afterward giving his vote against the Christians’ (Stalker 2007).

Looking back at the event of Stephen’s martyrdom, scrutinising his debate with the Jews¹² in the council and the story that he narrated, and Paul’s presence at the stoning

¹² Benedict XVI stated that Stephen appealed to the Jewish scriptures to prove how the laws of Moses were not subverted by Jesus but, instead, were fulfilled. Stephen denounces his listeners as “stiff-necked” people who, just as their ancestors had done, resist the Holy Spirit’ (Kerr 2012), as he asked his audience in the Sanhedrin: *‘Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him’ (Ac 7:52).*

and persistence against the Christians, depict many facts that further influenced Paul's conversion.

First of all, it is easy to infer from this episode that the conversion of Greek-speaking Hellenistic Jews like Stephen and the way in which he encountered the Jews, the eloquence and the power of his knowledge, his reaction against the Sanhedrin authority, and his martyrdom,¹³ somehow impressed and prepared Paul for his further mission. In fact, New Testament books, especially Paul's epistles, are live testimonies for this claim, since we read repeatedly that Paul faced same challenges with Jewish authorities in different cities, and probably did what Stephen had done before. This is a reference to the way in which Paul replied to the enemies' accusations and how he prayed for them.

I also firmly believe that the process of conversion is not a single event. It is rather a process, and much like every process it contains different stages. Being a witness of this terrible incident (Stephen's martyrdom) was one of the stages that Paul was set to pass through. Notwithstanding the fact that Paul may have been unconscious of this reality at that time, it was nonetheless such a life-changing experience – at least retrospectively.

2.5 A New Chapter in Paul's Life: His Conversion

As mentioned above, the process of Paul's conversion began with Stephen's martyrdom and consequently the persecution of Christian believers. In fact, Stephen's persistence in preaching the gospel on the one hand, and Paul's determination to obtain God's favour by performing the Jewish law on the other,¹⁴ agitated Paul to start a mission that changed his life for good. It seems that, after Stephen's death, Paul began to drag forth Christians and arrested them wherever he found them. This severity in persecution led

¹³ The exact details of Paul's death are unknown, but tradition holds that he was beheaded in Rome and thus died as a martyr for his faith (Sanders 1977).

¹⁴ 'It was the universal belief of his people that the Messiah would only come to a nation keeping the law, and it was even said that, if one man kept it perfectly for a single day, his merit would bring to the earth the King for whom they were waiting. Paul's rabbinical training, then, culminated in the desire to win this prize of righteousness, and he left the halls of sacred learning with this as the purpose of his life' (Stalker 2007).

him ultimately to Damascus which was destined to be the place of his transformation (Stalker 2007).

2.5.1 Life-Changing Experience (His Inspiration on His Way to Damascus)

I qualify Paul's conversion as 'life-changing' for various reasons: First of all, this experience totally impressed Paul's character, manner, and perspective, and more importantly formed his theology. Through this experience, Paul's perception of religion (particularly Judaism) was enriched and his relationship with God and people expanded. It may be argued that Paul's outstanding experience that had a fundamental effect on him and changed his life for good, is one of the unique and influential texts of Church History.

Luke states the following in Acts 9:1-27: *Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked. 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. 'Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.' The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, 'Ananias!' 'Yes, Lord,' he answered. The Lord told him, 'Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.' 'Lord,' Ananias answered, 'I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.' But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is my chosen*

instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.’ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord – Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here – has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, ‘Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?’ Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah. After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall. When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.

This is a vivid statement that portrays the story of Paul’s relationship with Christianity from the beginning until his conversion and his becoming a devoted apostle. It also includes the following:

- Initially, Saul did not accept Christianity – he was persistent in killing its followers. The New Testament acknowledges Saul’s involvement in Stephen’s stoning (Ac 7:59-60).
- Although Saul did not engage with the Lord while He was on earth, Jesus Christ spoke to him, called his name and showed him that He was aware of all Saul’s enmity and hatred towards Him and His followers, and when Saul asked His Name, the Lord introduced Him to Saul as Jesus. It is evident, as this part

explains that even a person like Saul who persecuted Christian followers, can be chosen by Jesus Christ to hear the new gospel. Furthermore, it informs Paul's future claim that asserts that God's glory and blessings do not have any relationship with performing the Jewish laws and principles, since he was a stubborn Jew who started attacking and slaughtering Christians in the name of Judaism and apparently, sticking to that law did not bring him any benefits (Durant 1944).

- Saul was not alone in his journey to Damascus, since his fellow travellers also heard the voice that spoke to him. I think that could be one of the reasons that certified the accuracy of Paul's inspiration.
- After hearing the voice, Paul was ready to obey his Lord's will and commandments. This reveals that he has accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and was eager to pursue his new order, not following the Jewish law anymore, since it did not seem satisfactory to him.
- Another astonishing part of this narrative is about Ananias who had a dream. It depicted that the Lord would not act according to human beings' thoughts and imaginations, since Ananias did not think that a bigoted person like Saul deserved to be chosen and accepted as Jesus Christ's follower.
- Jesus Christ confirmed that He chose Saul to bear His Name before the Gentiles and kings, and also before the children of Israel. With this, Jesus implied both Paul's mission and his bravery, since nobody was better aware of the toughness of preaching for the three mentioned groups. Moreover, Jesus foresaw Paul's miseries that He showered upon him. Even more importantly, the Lord acknowledged Paul's claim about preaching among Gentiles that later became a controversial issue between Paul and the other apostles.
- Paul started his mission among the Jews, as the quoted passage above states that he began to preach in the synagogues. This statement repudiates the accusation that some historians hold about Paul, especially the Muslim historians who claim that Paul ceased Judaism completely and limited his mission among pagans (cf. Shahrestani 1992).

- Barnabas also testified about the authenticity of what Paul claimed in front of the apostles in Jerusalem.

These are some evidence that reveal Paul's righteousness and his faithfulness towards the Jews and Christianity, and more importantly his mission among the Gentiles. The following section will discuss this issue more elaborately.

2.5.2 Paul's First Trip as a Christian: Preparation or Preaching?

According to Paul's epistle to the Galatians, he recovered from blindness after three days and was then baptised by Ananias. He then became more aware of what had occurred to him and went to Arabia. In fact, if he did not mention this issue, one would have no idea of this significant chapter of Paul's career (Briggs 1913:254). Although there is no record of Paul's solitude in Arabia, one can perceive and notice the importance that these years had on Paul's future life.

In addition, various theories were proposed regarding the reason for this trip. Many scholars like Stalker (2007) and Briggs (1913) agree that although Jesus' message was vivid, he apparently required more time to digest the massive incident that befell him like a thunderbolt. He needed to figure out what would be his next step.¹⁵ This was a natural reaction for a man who had an intense belief in his previous creed which was now shaken and shattered. To get rid of the confusion that surrounded Paul, this time was needed 'for intellectual and theological readjustment before he would be equipped for his great career as an apostle' (Briggs 1913:254).

Modern scholars argue that Paul had already prepared/equipped himself for his mission, as the years that he spent in Arabia was the beginning of his missionary activity as a zealous Christian (Briggs 1913:255-257). This group renders the following

¹⁵ 'The language of the book of Acts, where it is said that "straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues," would lead us to suppose so. But we learn from his own writings that there was another powerful impulse influencing him at the same time; and it is uncertain which of the two he obeyed first. This other impulse was the wish to retreat into solitude and think out the meaning and issues of that which had befallen him' (Stalker 2007). However, Duling implies that it is possible that Paul has started his missionary activity in Damascus and due to arising hostility he had to flee Damascus (Duling 2003:159).

evidence to affirm their claim: First, the epistles to the Romans and the Galatians demonstrate that Paul's conversion process brought him certainty, light, and freedom wherever there were uncertainty, darkness, and bondage of legalism (Briggs 1913:256). In other words, Paul had already undergone/passed through all these stages. Therefore, after his conversion, there was no trace of confusion or disappointment in Paul's speeches and epistles.

Second, Paul was a man of action. It would be far from an impetuous personality to waste three years just to sit and think or readjust his thoughts. Again, in Galatians 1:16, he averred that the light came into his soul that he *might preach him [Jesus] among the Gentiles*. He further declared in the next sentence that he 'straight-away' – instead of studying or inquiring from Peter or other Christians – went to 'Arabia, logically, to begin the task that had just been made plain to him' (Briggs 1913:256). Third, the term 'Arabia' in the Old Testament often referred to the East and it seems that Paul also used the terms 'Arabia' and 'East' interchangeably, which was the home of the 'Jewish Eastern Dispersion' (Briggs 1913:257-258).

It therefore does make sense why Paul laments the Jews and turns to the Gentiles. Paul kept his promises: He first preached among the descendants of Abraham, his own nations. When they rejected his gospel, he initiated his mission among the non-Jews who were scorned and overlooked by the Eastern Jews (Briggs 1913:258-259). Evidence confirms that Paul's first missionary journey was from Damascus to Arabia (Briggs 1913:255). It is evident that Paul's conversion, as was his life as a devoted Christian, was not a single event but rather a process that was tested, improved, and deepened through time. His epistles bear the testimony to this process as well. I therefore do not see any contradiction between these two theories. Paul went to Arabia and as he equipped himself to become a true Christian servant, he simultaneously evangelised the people around him.

2.6 His Gospel

The term 'gospel' means 'good message/news' or 'glad tidings' (cf. MacArthur 2017: 110). Dykes states that 'gospel' can be linked to the Greek verb εὐαγγελίζω that can be

translated with 'to announce with good tidings' or 'one who announces or instructs in the good news.' The noun is εὐαγγέλιον which can be translated with 'the message of good-news.' As these terms appear in various contexts, the meanings would differ according to the context (cf. Dykes 2006:3).

However, when one concentrates on Paul's gospel, it is seemingly not that simple as there are diverse opinions regarding his gospel as it is still argued by different scholars.¹⁶ To better perceive Paul's gospel, it would be useful to first reflect on his epistles in which he refers to how, where, and when he has received this gospel and then to discuss some significant features of it according to his epistles being accepted by both Christians and non-Christians.

In Galatians, Paul states: *Paul, an apostle – sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead...As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!...I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus. Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with*

¹⁶ 'For nearly two centuries now, many dispensationalists such as Stam, Bultema, Baker, Welch, Knoch, Anderson and Bullinger have asserted that the gospel which Paul preached, differed from that which the Jewish apostles and Jesus of Nazareth preached. [However, the] limited dispensationalists including Ryrie, Moody, Chafer, Ironside, Pentecost, Walvoord, Darby, Gaebelein and Scofield, cling to the traditional dictate that there is only one "gospel" and that it was preached by all of the New Testament apostles (Including Paul and company)' (Dykes 2006:2).

him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles – only James, the Lord's brother. I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie (Gal 1:1, 9, 11-20).

From the above verses one can derive that Paul has received his gospel on his way to Damascus, while he was a zealous Jew, traveling to pursue and persecute Christians. The gospel that Paul received through this revelation was direct, without the intervention of any medium or human.

Generally, the features of Paul's gospel are: First, Christ has died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures. Paul believes that Jesus Christ was crucified for our sins since, according to Scriptures, the wage of sin is death (Rm 6:23). Paul assumes that the unfaithful people (including himself) are sinful and spiritually dead. However, he thanks God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:57; Rm 7:25). In fact, Jesus Christ's blood became the atonement of human's sin (MacArthur 2017:112).

Second, Jesus was buried and raised from the dead on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. Paul believes that it was a miracle that Jesus was raised from death since normal people do not raise when they are buried. Hence, he concludes that this was a supreme event. He also admits that *if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins (1 Cor 15:17)*. Third, Jesus now reigns from the right hand of God and will reign until all his enemies have been destroyed (1 Cor 15:24-26). This statement is based on Jesus' words, *'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me' (Mt 28:18)*. Paul firmly believed that Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah (Third Millennium Ministries 2012:6), the promised one – Christ, the Messiah – *who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David (Rm 1:3)* and who owns the *kingdom of God (cf. 2 Tim 2:12-4:1, 18)*.

Fourth, then comes the resurrection of all who are dead, when Jesus will return to the earth and raise these souls who are sleeping (are dead). Those who are in Christ will be raised with imperishable bodies, and all will be judged (Jones 2003:114). Paul reaffirms

this doctrine of the Evangelists as seen in John 14:1-3,¹⁷ Mark 13:27,¹⁸ and Matthew 25:34¹⁹ regarding the resurrection. In 1 Thessalonians 4:17, Paul affirms it: *After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.*

Pondering on the pronouncements made by Jesus and Paul, indicates that they were both in accord with each other regarding the resurrection and the Day of Judgement. Both of them indicated that, after Jesus was raised again, he did not intend to rule over or conquer the earth. However, he will be the judge over all mankind, and he will provide a place for those who have believed in him, i.e. the saints. Fifth, then comes the end. Jesus will deliver the kingdom of God to the Father, having destroyed every rule, authority, and power (Jones 2003:115).

Paul finishes his gospel with 1 Corinthians 15:24-25: *Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.* These are just some important features of Paul's gospel that are similar to the Gospels. In the following sections I will explore Paul's gospel in more detail.

2.6.1 The Gospel of the Kingdom: Completion or a Unique One?

As indicated above, there are different theories regarding Paul's gospel. Some scholars (cf. Dykes 2006:2 – fn 16) believe that Paul's gospel is similar to the four Gospels. This group even goes further and asserts that it would be wrong to mention that these are differences between Paul and the Gospels (Dykes 2006:2). They provide some evidence for their claim. These scholars claim that, according to Paul's testimony, he did not derive his gospel through a human intermediary: 'It was given to him by direct

¹⁷ *Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (Jn 14:1-3).*

¹⁸ *And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens (Mk 13:27).*

¹⁹ *Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world' (Mt 25:34).*

“revelation of Jesus Christ” in the Damascus road event when he was simultaneously apprehended by the risen Lord and commissioned to preach Him among the Gentiles’ (Cabaniss 1976:164). According to the Archdeacon Guillebaud, Paul preached his gospel immediately and did not postpone his mission to confer with the other disciples (Cabaniss 1976:164). Hence, what he preached was the ‘exact words’ of Jesus Christ. In fact, Paul himself insisted that the gospel that he preached was basically the same as the gospel that was preached by the Jerusalem apostles and their colleagues: *Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed* (1 Cor 15:11).

There are also scholars who believe that Paul’s gospel is a Gospel of Completion, since it includes all of the aspects of the four other Gospels. They assert that Matthew’s Gospel is the Gospel of Kingdom,²⁰ John’s Gospel is the Gospel of Life,²¹ Luke’s Gospel is the Gospel of the Forgiveness of Sins,²² while Mark’s Gospel is the Gospel of Service.²³ However, the gospel of Paul is the Gospel of Completion as it contains all features of the other Gospels. Furthermore, Paul’s gospel contains much more, which means that there are some significant aspects of the gospel that are only found in his epistles (Living Stream Ministry 2016).

The following are some features of Paul’s gospel that distinguishes his gospel from others:

- Paul’s gospel speaks of five dimensions of Christ in each Christian (Living stream Ministry 2016):
 - Christ is in us as the hope of glory (Col 1:27).
 - Christ lives in us (Gal 2:20).
 - Christ is formed in us (Gal 4:19).

²⁰ *From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near’* (Mt 4:17). *But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you* (Mt 12:28).

²¹ *...that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him* (Jn 3:15). *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full* (Jn 10:10).

²² *...and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem* (Lk 24:47).

²³ *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many* (Mk 10:45).

- Christ is making His home in us (Eph 3:17).
- We are filled with Christ to be the fullness of God (Eph 3:19).
- According to Romans 1:1 and 9, as well as 8:9-10, 1 Corinthians 15:45, and 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, Paul demonstrates that the spirit of Christ lives within His followers after His resurrection.
- According to 2 Corinthians 1:22, one realises that the Spirit of Christ is a seal and a pledge.
- On several occasions in Paul's gospel, it is clear that he assumes Christ as the Head, and the Church as His body (Col 1:18; Eph 1:22-23).
- Romans includes the whole gospel that Paul preached. It consists of the forgiveness of sins, sanctification and transformation, the constitution of the Body of Christ, and finally the way in which the Church should act (Living stream Ministry 2016).

A third group of scholars argues that Paul's gospel is thoroughly different from that of Jesus of Nazareth and His Jewish apostles (cf. e.g. Dykes 2006). They render another interpretation about Paul's revelation on the Damascus Road. For them this was a unique incident that Paul has experienced, which illustrates the fact that Paul did not adapt to any previous gospels and was not taught by any human (Dykes 2006). According to Galatians 2:1-10, Paul shares his gospel with the chief apostles of Jerusalem, clearly indicating that his different gospel was acknowledged by the disciples: *Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain. Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. As for those who were held in high esteem – whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism – they added nothing to my message. On the contrary,*

they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised. For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles. James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along.

According to the abovementioned perspective, Paul's epistles contained some aspects that were unknown up to this day. Some cases in point are:

- The Holy Spirit is living inside individual believers (Rm 8:11; 1 Cor 6:19).
- The believers have adopted the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:5; 2:19-22; Rm 8:15).
- 'Heaven' is now our eternal home (Php 3:20; 1 Th 4:13-18; 2 Th 2:13; Eph 2:6).
- When we are resurrected, we will have a new spiritual body which is fit for heaven (1 Cor 15:35-49).
- Justification is not by the Jewish law, but by 'faith' in Jesus Christ (Gal 2:16; 3:12).
- As justification is by faith, no Jewish traditions are needed (Eph 2:8; Rm 3:19-22).
- Very important is that only Paul regards Jesus' death, His burial, and His resurrection as good news (1 Th 3:5-7²⁴). Peter and the other apostles refer to the death of the Lord as a charge against the Israelites (Dykes 2006:7-9).

In light of the abovementioned aspects, some scholars believe that Paul's gospel contains distinctive inspirations. In my opinion, Paul's revelation on the Damascus road, his epistles (forming most of the New Testament), his rich and spectacular gospel, and

²⁴ *For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain. But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith (1 Th 3:5-7).*

his devotion and service to Christianity are undeniable. At the same time, it is important to underscore that all the apostles were connected to the same source of inspiration, which is Jesus the Lord. In other words, each of them, according to their talents, capability, and circumstances, had been chosen for a special mission. In this light, Paul's gospel considered more aspects and offered more insights in comparison to the other gospels, demonstrating his unique mission, yet complementing all the other disciples (Dykes 2006:2).

2.7 Paul's Theology

Explaining Paul's theology is not simple because his sermons and letters are complex and deal with multifaceted concepts, which sometimes seem controversial. It may be argued that Paul's theology is like a sealed letter and although many scholars have been trying to unfold it and explain its mysteries, none of them could succeed completely. This difficulty originates from many factors, ranging from his previous life as a diaspora Jew, living under the impression of the Jews, of both Greek and Roman cultures, and more importantly, in my opinion, his unique and complex personality.

However, much like others, this research will concentrate on Paul's epistles to decipher some aspects of his theology. To achieve this goal, I will review and discuss Paul's epistles separately in order to identify the influence that the different cultures have left on his theology.

2.7.1 Different Aspects of Paul's Theology

Scholars like Stalker (2007) argue that 'Paul's theology is nothing but the explanation of his own conversion.' Paul's conversion is mentioned in Acts as well as two of his epistles, 1 Corinthians and Galatians. The story of Paul's conversion in Acts is indicated under three points, giving more detail in comparison to his own epistles. In Acts 9:3-9, 22:7-12, and 26:12-18 it is mentioned that on his way to Damascus, Paul has witnessed the resurrected Jesus Christ, and the Lord Himself appointed Paul as an apostle to preach the gospel among the nations.

In 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, Paul indicates that he has seen the risen Christ through a revelation on his way to Damascus. In the following verses he describes this fact that, according to Scriptures, Jesus Christ died, was buried, and was raised for our sins. This is a significant part of Paul's theology. He states that human beings are sinners, and a sinful man is like a dead body. In fact, they are spiritually dead and cannot be released from this sin on their own accord. To get rid of this sin, Paul proposes a solution, and that is the resurrection of Jesus Christ who has also appeared to him and freed him from the burden of his sins (MacArthur 2017:110).

However, Paul reminds his addressees that 'the baptism into the death and resurrection of the Lord is valueless unless the believer lives a dying-rising life. Oneness with Christ means fellowship in his sufferings and resurrection' (Grant 1914:381). I will discuss and elaborate on this concept later.

Galatians also contains Paul's theology and describes his conversion as a divine revelation, with Jesus appearing to Paul: *I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin...But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being* (Gal 1:11, 15-16).

All the above citations from the Bible regarding Paul's conversion somehow point to one important aspect of Paul's theology: He firmly believes that Jesus' death was not useless. He died to release humanity from their earthly sins. The second common point in these citations is that the risen Jesus has appeared to the apostles, including Paul.

Galatians 3:28-29 addresses an important aspect of Paul's theology where he proclaims that there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles or others when they believe in Christ: *There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.* This theory, especially the equality

between the Jews and the Gentiles, became one of the controversial issues of Christianity, since the Jews felt that they were superior to the Gentiles.

Likewise, the first three chapters of Romans emphasise the equality between the Jews and the Gentiles. In Romans, Paul indicates that both Jews and Gentiles are sinners; therefore, none of them has a right to claim superiority over the other (Third Millennium Ministries 2012). Similarly, in Romans 4-8, Paul concludes that as long as both Jews and Gentiles are equal, the path of salvation is the same for both of these groups. In Romans 9-11, Paul focuses on the complementary roles of Jews and Gentiles in God's plan for human history: 'One of the great objects of the appearance of Christ was to break down the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile and make the blessings of salvation the property of all men, without distinction of race or language' (Stalker 2007).

This issue is only one of the multiple aspects of Paul's theology that narrates his bravery – in other words, while living in a patriarchal society that categorised people according to their birth, and most of the time they could not ascend to the upper class, Paul's claim regarding the equality of the Jews and Gentiles, highlights his courage, his deep insight of Jesus' message and how he broke the traditional chains and went beyond his contemporaries.

Another element of Paul's theology is his belief towards the identity of Christ. Paul firmly believed that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and had all God's attributes.²⁵ However, aside from the belief of this unity between Christ and God (cf. Grant 1914:12), he believed that Jesus was subordinate to God, the 'Father.'²⁶ In addition, Paul looked

²⁵ ...regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life[a] was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power[b] by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord (Rm 1:3-4).

²⁶ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Php 2:5-11).

upon Jesus as the promised Messiah of Israel (Cabaniss 1976). He referred to Jesus by the title of 'Christos.' The English term 'Christ' in the New Testament is a transliteration of the Greek term 'Christos' which, in turn, is a translation of the Hebrew term 'Mashiach.' 'Mashiach' (*anointed one*) refers to someone who is chosen for a special purpose, such as a king. 'Mashiach' is sometimes expressed in Greek as *Messias* or in English as 'Messiah' (cf. Lindell 2013). Paul mentioned this topic on many occasions, like in Galatians 1:1, 3:27, and 4:14, as well as 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 5:23, and 2 Corinthians 1:19 and 5:18.

Another element of Paul's theology that was unique up to his time (in comparison to other religions) is that he considered Jesus as the means through whom God, the 'Father' created 'all things' and humankind. Paul's belief reflects the influence of Greek philosophy: 'The Greek philosopher Heraclitus believed that a "logos" created the order of the world. (The unknown writer of the book of John claimed that Jesus was this "logos" in John 1:1-14). Paul was from the city of Tarsus where Greek ideas were well known' (Lindell 2013). In Colossians 1:15-17 he stressed this matter vividly: *The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

According to this perspective (assuming Jesus as the Mediator), Paul declared in 1 Thessalonians 3:11 and 2 Corinthians 1:20 that Jesus is both an object of prayer and the Mediator through whom prayer is offered to God. All the above mentioned attributes that were accorded to Jesus, explain the fact that all the manifestations (messengers) of God are like a mirror that not only reflects God's glory, but they also narrate it to human beings. Indeed, via them, human beings can hear and perceive God's message.

Another part of Paul's theology that differs from that of the Jews of his time is his perception regarding eschatology. The term 'eschatology' comes from the Greek noun 'eschatos' which can be translated with 'last' or 'end.' Paul believed that the 'last days'

refer to the second coming of Jesus Christ. However, when we consider the ‘eschatological’ approach of Paul, we must expand the term to refer to much more than the second coming of Christ (Third Millennium Ministries 2012:11).

Both Paul and the Jews believed that the history was divided into ‘two ages’ – ‘this age’ and ‘the age to come.’ ‘This age’ refers to the exile of the Jews from the Promised Land, while ‘the age to come’ implies the time that God would fulfil all His promises of blessings to Israel (Third Millennium Ministries 2012:12). Ephesians 1:19b-21 is a good example of Paul’s attitude regarding these two ages: *That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.*

However, contrary to the Jewish perception about the appearance of God on Judgment Day, and that the people would enjoy all His blessings immediately, Paul believed that the transition from this age to the age to come is not a simple event. It would take time. He also believed that ‘the age to come’ had started through the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. In other words, Jesus Christ has already revealed some aspects of God’s Kingdom. Therefore, one can conclude that the age to come had already begun. It was inaugurated when Jesus ascended to heaven (Third Millennium Ministries 2012:12-13). Another aspect of ‘the age to come’ is the ‘foretaste of our eternal inheritance in the Holy Spirit’ (Third Millennium Ministries 2012:13). Jesus explains that believers have inherited the first fruits of the Spirit, and when He returns for the second time, they will enjoy the greater blessing of ‘the age to come in its fullness’ (Third Millennium Ministries 2012:13-14). In my opinion, what Paul proposed about the Christian’s eschatology was not understood by the people of his era. Scrutinising his epistles will assist us to expand our knowledge regarding his theory.

Besides, perhaps the most significant and controversial part of Paul’s theology is his perceptions regarding the Jewish law, faith, righteousness, justification, sanctification, and salvation, which will be discussed in the following section.

2.7.2 The Heart of Paul's Theology

Paul explains the abovementioned aspects of his theology as being based on his revelation on the road to Damascus. He reminds his addressees that he was a passionate and zealous Jew who strictly observed the Jewish law to gain God's favour. However, the more he strove to keep this law, the more active the motions of sin became within him. His conscience was becoming more oppressed with the sense of guilt, and the peace of a soul at rest in God was a prize which eluded his grasp (Stalker 2007).

Paul continues that his observance of the Jewish law during all these years neither saved him nor did he obtain prosperity (what he was looking for). Hence, he concludes that prosperity was not to be obtained by that law, and this became the one pillar of Paul's theology. In addition, as much as he persecuted the followers of the new religion (Christianity) to obtain God's mercy, he did not succeed to reach peace. However, as soon as Jesus appeared to Paul, he felt that he was encompassed by the divine love. Therefore, he offered his second inference: One's righteousness and strength will be found without a human's effort, but by merely trusting in God's grace and acceptance – this became the central part of Paul's theology (Stalker 2007).

Reviewing Paul's epistles demonstrates that, on various occasions, he emphasises that 'justification' is by faith. The following verses explain Paul's perception in the best way possible:

- Galatian 2:15-16: *We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.*
- Galatians 5:2: *Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.*

- Galatians 6:15-16: *Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule – the Israel of God.*
- Paul's letters testify to the fact that he had perceived Jesus' universal gospel (Gal 3:27-28): *[F]or all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Hence, to summarise Paul's attitude regarding justification, we can state that justification is imputed all at once and entirely apart from human works, not infused over a long period of time and mixed with human effort. Sanctification, the long process of growing and developing into the Christian ways, follows justification and continues for the entire lifetime of believers. However, justification is God's once and for all legal declaration that a believer has been acquitted of the guilt of sin and credited with the righteousness of Christ (Third Millennium Ministries 2012:10). In addition, according to Stendahl, the focus of the theory of 'justification by faith' centres around the inclusion of Gentiles in the new messianic community (cf. Maxwell 2013:147). Paul insisted (in this theory) that Jesus Christ had destroyed the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles (Third Millennium Ministries 2012), when he wrote in Galatians 3:28-29: *There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

With this prospective, Paul did not refer to a gracious God but rather to the question: 'What are the ramifications of the Messiah's arrival for the relation between Jews and Gentiles?'²⁷ (Maxwell 2013:147-148). This is the main theme of the epistles of an apostle who understood the universalism of Jesus' mission.

However, it is important to be aware of this fact that Paul has neither rejected the Jewish law nor did he condemn it, since in Romans 7:12 he admitted that this law is

²⁷ *So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith (Gal 3:24).*

holy²⁸ and also explains the positive side of it (Taylor 2012:150). His aim was to rather prepare and offer a new interpretation of the Jewish law, with which he wanted to express the fact that performing these laws, like circumcision, will not rescue human-kind, because when the owner of all laws appears, sticking to the old-fashioned ones of the Jews will not suffice. To believe in Jesus Christ and act according to His will, will guarantee redemption. In other words, Paul intends to convince his addressees to get rid of the old principles of their previous religion (Jewish faith), since every religion has its own rules that must be observed by those who believe in (Duling 2003).

To reaffirm that Paul did not propagate self-mastery (living free of the law) and to eliminate the misunderstanding that he was not against the law, one should refer to Galatians 5:13 where he confined liberty, stating, *You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.* Hence, one should not misuse Paul's words, *'I am made all things to all men'*²⁹ or *'I have the right to do anything,'*³⁰ since Paul stresses that the direction of liberty must be from Christ. Furthermore, Paul never broke his tie with Judaism, neither had he scorned them. He explains that people who joined the new religion are free from earthly restrictions. In other words, they do not need to observe trite customs, including circumcision for Gentiles (Longenecker 2015:121-122).

Each of Paul's epistles contains various aspects that could be discussed in detail. However, it is critical to point out that for a better comprehension of Paul's theology, one must consider all aspects of his theology, given the complexities of the matters concerned and the complementary nature of the issues under discussion. In other words, to separate each part of this puzzle, results in a misunderstanding that appears to have caused contentions and confusions among many scholars.

In the following sections, I will review how Paul preached the gospel that he received through his missionary journey.

²⁸ *So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good (Rm 7:12).*

²⁹ *To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men that I might by all means save some (1 Cor 9:22).*

³⁰ *'I have the right to do anything,' you say – but not everything is beneficial. 'I have the right to do anything' – but I will not be mastered by anything' (1 Cor 6:12).*

2.8 Paul's Missionary Travels

This study does not intend to discuss the missionary journeys of Paul or to mention all his wonderful achievements, as most of the information can be found in the Bible. When Paul started preaching the gospel among the Gentiles, he realised that it would not be necessary to circumcise them, because it would be their deeds that would testify that they truly believed in Jesus Christ (Noss 1949). In so doing, Paul went to various cities, preached in various synagogues, and established various Churches.

Before reviewing Paul's travels, it is important to indicate that, from the beginning of Christianity it was the wont of preachers not to go alone on their expeditions, but rather to take someone with, and this is why Paul was accompanied by fellow Christians in his missionary travels (Stalker 2007). What follows is a brief look at his three missionary journeys.

First trip (45-49 CE): Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark (Barnabas' nephew) started the first missionary journey. They went to Antioch, Cyprus, Paphos, and Asia Minor (Perga, Pamphylia, Pisidia, and Lycaonia). They first preached to the Jews and after being rejected by them, they turned to the Gentiles. In Antioch many God-fearers and Gentiles turned to Christianity and this resulted in their exile from the city by the Jewish community of Antioch (Beaude 1988). This trip brought marvellous fruits: First of all, Paul who preached under the shadow of Barnabas, unfolded his destined power³¹ and from that time he transformed from a subordinate apostle to a leader (Stalker 2007). Another consequence of this trip was establishing a number of Churches, including quite a few in the region of Galatia (Third Millennium Ministries 2012:6-7). After this trip, Paul and Barnabas separated from each other and they never saw each other again (Stalker 2007).

Second Trip: Arguably, this trip is the most significant and momentous one for various reasons. First, it happened almost contemporaneous with the Jerusalem Council (49-

³¹ 'Paul covered the Jewish magician with disgrace, converted the Roman governor, and founded in the town a Christian church in opposition to the Greek shrine' (Stalker 2007).

50). Paul received a Jerusalem decree that acknowledged that the Gentile converts were not obliged to be circumcised to gain salvation (Longenecker 2015:131). Furthermore, Paul pioneered to Europe (west) and started evangelising, which resulted in manifold and precious results (Stalker 2007). The following can be regarded as a summary of his trip: Between 50 and 52 CE, after the separation of Paul and Barnabas, Paul chose Silas and later Timothy (in Lystra). At first, they came back to the cities that Paul had already entered and preached his gospel in order to confirm that, according to the Jerusalem decree, they did not need to perform circumcision. Therefore, they went to Antioch, Syria, Cilicia, and Galatia. Then Paul and Silas went to Macedonia and afterwards to Philippi, where they founded the first house Church in a house of a woman called Lydia.³² Then they went to Thessalonica where they were again attacked by the Jews. During his trip to Athens, Paul did not gain much success since his divine words about Jesus did not penetrate into the hearts of the superstitious people of that city. Then Paul and Silas went to Corinth and visited Aquila and Priscilla,³³ the Jewish couple who welcomed Paul and became devoted Christians (Strauss 2004). Paul's mission was very successful in Corinth, since many people believed in Jesus Christ as the new manifestation of God, and in this city he wrote the first letter to the Thessalonians. Then he went to Ephesus, Caesarea, and Antioch.

Third trip: For the second time, Paul set out on a journey to the west. This journey included, at its beginning, a tour of all the Churches formerly founded in Asia Minor and then he visited the Churches of Greece too. Acts 18:23 and 21:17 vividly portray Paul's third expedition and his visits to the Churches that he had already established (cf. Third Millennium Ministries 2012:7). In the time slot between 53 and 58 CE, Paul went to Ephesus where he was accompanied by Titus and Timothy, and where he dealt with many troubles due to his evangelism in this city. However, eventually his hardship

³² *One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. 'If you consider me a believer in the Lord,' she said, 'come and stay at my house.' And she persuaded us (Ac 16:14-15).*

³³ *After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them (Ac 18:1-3).*

brought good results, since the citizens of the city burned their sorcery books and started to believe in Jesus Christ. During these years, he wrote letters to the communities of the Galatians and Corinthians and encouraged them to reunite. In addition, he wrote his letter to the Church in Rome, in which he endorsed them to put behind all distinctions between Jews and Gentiles (Beaude 1988).

I want to highlight some facts in the narrative of Luke as described in Acts:

- Paul's journey to Jerusalem emphasises the fact that he respected the Jewish-Christian community of that city, including Peter and James. This eliminates the hypothesis that Jerusalem and its disciples were against Paul and his mission, since Luke asserts clearly that, when Paul entered the city, the brothers welcomed him.³⁴
- Even the Christians in Jerusalem were aware of the fact that the Jews were conspiring against Paul.
- Paul's description about his mission and evangelism to the brothers in Jerusalem implies that, although he presumed himself to be an independent apostle, he somehow needed Jerusalem's approval (Kertelge 1992).
- Acts 28 contains some significant facts that can uncover specific mysteries about Paul's death. When Paul entered Rome, he visited the Jewish leaders and explained to them in detail what happened to him in Jerusalem. According to Acts 28:17-24, the Jewish leaders in Rome were split into two groups: Some believed Paul's words and supported his mission, whereas the others opposed his evangelism and apostleship.³⁵ Furthermore, Paul's prophecy that the Gentiles

³⁴ *The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present (Ac 21:18).*

³⁵ *Three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: 'My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. The Jews objected, so I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar. I certainly did not intend to bring any charge against my own people. For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.' They replied, 'We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of our people who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect.' They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about*

would accept Jesus' words, while the Jews would react antithetical, can imply that, hearing these words were really hard for the Jews. Hence, it would not be too farfetched to assume that the Jews were involved in Paul's death.

- Luke's silence about the death of Paul: Eastman (2014:39-41) has a theory that the Jews could be involved in Paul's death, but Luke did not want to mention it, thus concluding his epistle with this infamy and disgrace.

During these years, Paul had a trip to Jerusalem to attend the Pentecost ceremony, but he had to deal with the Jewish community that was very antagonistic towards him (Beaude 1988). Despite cautionary steps taken by Peter and James to protect Paul from the Jewish conspiracy, the Jews were in fact agitated against Paul, and accused him of idolatry. They therefore caused his arrest and finally martyrdom in Rome.

Fourth Trip: Luke reviews this trip in Acts 27-28. Apparently, it was a long sea journey and Paul faced shipwrecking, storms, and other troubles. When he finally arrived in Rome, he remained under the arrest of Roman guards for two years (60-62 CE). However, he was able to minister freely during this time and based on tradition, he was arrested by Nero and, according to some scholars, he had been executed around 64-65 CE by emperor's decree (Third Millennium Ministries 2012:8).

When one reviews his ceaseless striving during all these years, it is evident that Paul was a person who truly sacrificed his whole life in spreading Christianity. He accomplished this work by two means: The gospel that he preached bravely in different cities, and his behaviour that reflected what he preached practically, which in my opinion was even more important and influential than words.

In the following section, I will discuss Paul's writings that constitute a key part of the New Testament.

Jesus. Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: 'The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet...' (Ac 28:17-25).

2.9 Discussing Paul's Writings

2.9.1 The Theme of Paul's Writings

Before discussing Paul's epistles, it is necessary to state that this research does not intend to review Paul's letters in detail, since there are many manuscripts that have scrutinised all his extant Scriptures. It rather intends to place its focus on selected significant aspects that Paul mentioned in his epistles. In particular, the emphasis will be on some of Paul's statements that were not only unique, astonishing, and controversial in his era, but they also remained important topics of Church History.

Historically, most scholars attribute 13 letters to Paul as his authoritative writings: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon (Taylor 2012:21). However, during the past three centuries, the debate arose that the name of Paul as a sender in all these epistles does not guarantee and justify that he was the real writer thereof. Therefore, some scholars like Taylor (2012) divided these 13 letters into two categories: First, the undisputed letters (the so-called Pillar Epistles) where almost all scholars agree that Paul is the author, which are Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. Then there are the disputed letters that can be divided into two sections, namely those where one may fairly believe that Paul is the author, which are Colossians and 2 Thessalonians, and those letters where the majority of scholars regard them as pseudonymous, namely Ephesians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus (Taylor 2012:28). This research does not intend to argue or prove the accuracy of this division, since there are certain aspects inside these epistles that correlate to Paul's epistles. Thus, this research assumes that, despite the fact that these writings on some occasions could be inconsistent with Paul's opinions, they nonetheless are still very close to the content of those writings regarded to Paul.

Before scrutinising each letter separately, it is important to get a closer look at the style and content of Paul's writings.

In general, Paul's letters consist of three parts: An introduction consisting of a salutation, the sender, the recipient, and greetings; then a central section with moral exhortations, beginning with a formula of request, followed by the body that is the main part of the letter and is different according to the topic, the addressee, and the situation; and the conclusion, consisting of greetings and a closing or benediction (Duling 2003:183).

2.9.2 Paul's Undisputed Letters

2.9.2.1 Romans

According to the New Testament, Romans is the last and longest letter of Paul. It is also the most important letter because of its religious thoughts, since it contains significant and sophisticated information regarding Paul's theology and Christianity that had a revolutionary influence on the Western civilisation and inspired theologians like Martin Luther and Augustine (Duling 2003:230).

It may seem strange that Paul wrote this letter to people that he has neither visited before his imprisonment, nor did he found a Church in that city. However, many scholars render various reasons for Paul's intention for writing this letter. The main reason was Paul's eagerness to convey Jesus' gospel as far as he could.

The content of this letter depicts the core of Paul's theology, which is:

- The righteousness of God, and justification by faith only, and not via the Jewish law, already being discussed above (Rm 9:30; 10:4).
- God is the Judge and said that people who believe are to be set free and be justified (Rm 3:20).
- The advantage of the Israelites due to God's covenant with them (Rm 3:1-8).
- The equality of the Israelites and Gentiles under the judgement of God, as both of these groups are sinful before God (Rm 2:1-11; 3:9-20).
- The consequences of justification by faith are peace with God and joy in life (Rm 5:1-5).

- Two analogies – slavery and marriage. Both slave and wife are responsible to one master and husband. By this statement Paul prohibits betrayal in a relationship of master and slave, and bigamy (Rm 6:15; 7:6).
- Paul's description of the Mosaic law and its function (Rm 7:7-25).
- The place of Israel in God's plan for the salvation of all humanity. Paul explains that Gentiles were supposed to be rescued via Israel; however, things radically changed, since many Jews rejected Jesus Christ as Messiah, while some of the conservative ones were eager to impose their Jewish rites, such as circumcision, on Gentiles. However, Paul as an ardent Jew, emphasises this fact, and states that the Gentile-Christians should never feel superior over Israelites (Rm 11:18).
- Romans 12-14 contains moral exhortations. Moral exhortations refer to what people should do in response to God's grace towards them (Duling 2003:244). That includes the acknowledgment of spiritual gifts of Christians ranging from prophecy, ministry, love without dissimulation, and hospitality (Rm 12:3-21). In Romans 13, Paul implies one of his important political recommendation, i.e. being subject to the governing authority (cf. Rm 13:5). Romans 14 argues that the connection between weak (non-Israelite) and strong Israelites should be improved/amended (Rm 14:1-6).

2.9.2.2 *1 Corinthians*

This letter is unique among Paul's letters since it precisely indicates the place from which he wrote the letter, namely Ephesus.³⁶ In addition, according to Friedman (1999), 1 Corinthians 15 is a crucial chapter for understanding the meaning of the resurrection. Furthermore, as it will be discussed later, this epistle provides interesting information regarding the study of social relations in the early Jesus movement (Duling 2003:193).

The main concepts of this letter are:

³⁶ Ephesus is a city on the western coast of Asia Minor, across the Aegean Sea from Corinth (cf. 1 Cor 16:8).

- The faction in Corinth and Paul's theology of the cross: An argument arose among Corinthian in their relation to Church leaders such as Paul, Peter, and Apollos. They regarded baptism as a spiritual gift by which they would share the power of the person who baptised them. In 1 Corinthians 1:11-16 and specifically verse 13, Paul rejected these ridiculous arguments with the words, *Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?* In the following verses, Paul explained the wisdom of the cross. Crucifixion is a humiliating punishment. However, the Lord accepted it to show that superiority and salvation is not obtained through class and social position, but by faith and focusing on the wisdom of the cross, which brought equality among nations regardless of their strata in the society (1 Cor 4).
- Purity issues, incest, and sexual sins: Corinth was well known for its 'sexual immorality.' Paul faced this issue firmly by stating that an offender should be excluded from the Christian group. He established some norms for purity that had to be observed by the Corinthians and consequently all Christians (1 Cor 5:1-13).
- Litigation before a pagan court: In 1 Corinthians 6:1-11, Paul warned the Christians not to refer their quarrels to a pagan court. He recommended for them to settle their disputes outside the court and within their own group (cf. Duling 2003:196).
- Homosexuality, or the claim of some of the Christians with spiritual gifts who stated that 'all things are lawful for me' (1 Cor 6:12-20). Perhaps this is one of the controversial cases in the Pauline letters. Paul rejected a same-sex relationship, something that was rooted in old antiquity, specifically among the Greeks (Duling 2003:197). Scrutinising the Corinthians, reveals that some of them have abused Paul's words, 'all things are lawful for me' for their own sexual indulgences. In the following chapters, I will discuss this motif in detail.
- From chapter 7 onward, Paul responds to the Corinthians' questions regarding marriage, sex, and celibacy (1 Cor 7:1-40). Here Paul recommends men to marry women and assumes it as a holy bond. However, if a person prefers celibacy, they are actually choosing chastity.

- Meat being sacrificed to idols – other gods (1 Cor 8:1-11): Paul emphasises the fact that idols actually do not exist, and that there is in fact only one God who has created everything. The Jerusalem Conference and agreement that took place between Paul and other apostles reveals that Paul has accepted their decree regarding the abstention from food that is sacrificed to idols, but practically he did not put pressure on the Gentiles to observe this decree. In the following chapter, I will discuss the reason for this position.
- In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul argued about the dress and status of women in worship. This is one of the controversial issues of Church History. Recently some scholars are claiming that these were probably not Paul's words and commands, as they regard it as an interpolation (Duling 2003:197).
- The proper practice of the Lord's Supper in worship (1 Cor 11:17-34): In this pericope, Paul reminds the Corinthians that this sacrament must be a holy event and that there should be no division between upper and lower classes.
- Spiritual gifts (speaking in tongues): *But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church* (1 Cor 14:3-4). With these words, Paul emphasises the significance of prophesying in comparison to speaking in tongues, stating that the latter only relates to words, whereas the former refers to a profitable action.
- The future resurrection of the dead: As mentioned before, 1 Corinthians is an important epistle, since it renders the meaning of resurrection in a way that differs from previous explanations. Generally, many people of antiquity did not believe in life after death. However, except for the Sadducees, the other factions of the Jewish religion believed in life after death. In 1 Corinthians, Paul seizes the opportunity to illustrate this concept to the best of his ability. Specifically in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul argues that when it is mentioned that Jesus Christ was resurrected from death, it does not mean that he rose in his old physical body, but he rose in a new spiritual body (1 Cor 15:44). In other words, it was His spiritual body that appeared to His disciple including Paul and encouraged them to embark on and teach His words all over the world (cf. Friedman 1999).

2.9.2.3 2 Corinthians

It seems as if Paul has established a proper relationship with the Corinthians, since he took time to reply to their questions in 1 Corinthians. However, various statements imply that this connection were deteriorating when a 'super apostle' challenged Paul's authority (Duling 2003:206). Hence, 2 Corinthians contains several letter fragments written by Paul to the Church of Corinth to reaffirm what he had already preached (Duling 2003:205). Therefore, in 2 Corinthians, Paul mostly defends his apostleship via attacking those who questioned his righteousness (Taylor 2012:201).

The following are the main elements of 2 Corinthians:

- Paul's defence of his apostleship against the 'super apostle' in different ways (2 Cor 2:14-17; 3:17-18; 4:8-10).
- Paul also stresses the immortality of the soul, stating that *if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!* (2 Cor 5:17).
- Paul's defence against the 'super apostle' implies an important motif. He boasts about his weakness and his sufferings, since Jesus Christ was also crucified in weakness (2 Cor 13:4). This is one of the significant aspects of the manifestations of God that will be discussed later in detail.

2.9.2.4 Galatians

Although there are some similarities between Romans and Galatians, their tones differ considerably. In Galatians, Paul is angry (to some extent) and assertive (Taylor 2012: 143). Hence, without any thanksgiving he starts his letter with criticism on the Galatians while defending his authority, since once again there were people (Judaizers) who challenged his righteousness and legitimacy.

Some scholars believe that Galatians is a portrait of Paul's life and his experience. Hence, through the whole epistle he tries to find an identification between his previous life and the people of Galatia who were deceived by a false preacher that misled them

to believe that observing the Jewish law will lead them to salvation and prosperity (Koptak 1990).

The following are the main features of this letter:

- Paul indicates to the Galatians that his gospel is not artificial but is rather a revelation of God (Gal 1:12).
- Paul emphasises the fact that, through Jesus Christ, humankind is freed from bondage and slavery. This is the reason why this epistle is called 'the epistle of freedom' (Duling 2003:220).
- Galatians 2:1-10: The Jerusalem Conference and its consequences.
- Galatians 2:11-14: A reference to one of the controversial motifs of Church History, namely the Antioch Incident and his quarrel with Peter.
- Galatians 2:15-21: Justification by faith was one of the most significant aspects of Paul's theology.
- Pauls relies on the Scriptures to prove the accuracy of his gospel and his position. This referencing occurs in various parts of Paul's epistles where he wants to reaffirm his righteousness. The justification by faith of Abraham's children and their freedom from the Jewish law is also a case in point (Gal 3:6-26).
- The Torah and the Jewish law were later added to the covenant of Abraham due to the transgressions of God's people (Gal 3:19). It was a just means to guarantee the salvation of the Jews while they were awaiting the appearance of the promised One.
- Baptism was a symbolic action for new believers/proselytes to wash off their sins and get rid of the old self, and *for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Gal 3:27-28).
- Through faith in Jesus Christ who is the Son of God, believers are considered as adopted children of God. In other words, there is an inherited kinship among followers, Christ, and God (Gal 4:1-11).

- Galatians 4:21-31 reminds the Jews that they are the descendants of a freed woman – Sarah. According to Paul, Sarah represents the freedom from the Jewish law (Duling 2003:229).
- Galatians 5:1 and 6:10 stimulate the Galatians to treasure the freedom that they have gained through their faith in Jesus Christ.
- Galatians 5:19-24 is all about living in the spirit and not the flesh.
- Galatians 6:15 refers to the uselessness of circumcision for salvation.

2.9.2.5 *Philippians*

Philippi, located in eastern Macedonia, was the first European city that Paul has entered, and despite being mistreated by nonbelievers, he established a close relationship with the congregation of this city (Taylor 2012:256). As with 2 Corinthians, Philippians contains letter fragments – probably two or three fragments – since it reviews distinct motifs through the epistle (Duling 2003:210).

The following are some of the main features of this epistle:

- The call for unity among believers is found in different part of the letter (Php 1:27-28; 2:1-5; 3:15; 4:2).
- Jesus Christ came from God, but he took on the form of a human/slave (Php 2:5-11). This is an important concept regarding the manifestation of God that will be elaborated on in the following chapters.
- Every single suffering that believers endure, will be reversed by the return of Christ (Php 3:20-21).
- Here Paul warns the Philippians of the dangers of the ‘circumcision party’ (Php 3:1-4).
- Philippians 4:2 refers to the leadership of two women in this congregation, named Euodia and Syntyche.

2.9.2.6 *1 Thessalonians*

After Philippi, Paul and his companions Silas and Timothy, went to Thessalonica (Taylor 2012:189), a city that became the capital of Macedonia. Much like in Philippi, they were

mistreated but surprisingly this time his opponents were among the Gentiles who not only persecuted Paul, but they also tortured their fellow citizen who were converted to Christianity (1 Th 1:2-10; 2:2; 2:13-14; 3:9-10). However, their loyalty and respect towards Paul, notwithstanding some who challenged his apostleship, as well as their expectations and questions, motivated Paul to write an epistle to them that includes all the abovementioned elements.

The following are some main concepts of this letter:

- Much like Jesus and Paul, who were mistreated by the Jews, the Thessalonians were persecuted by their own clan (1 Th 2:14).
- Paul refers to the coming of the *parousia*, as the Thessalonians did not believe in life after death (1 Th 4:13; 5:11).

2.9.2.7 *Philemon*

At first glance, this epistle may seem like a personal letter. However, it includes some public concepts of Christianity in such a way that every reader can assume for themselves to be the addressee of this message. It narrates the story of a master, called Philemon who believed in Jesus and availed his house for local Christian gatherings. The other side of the story is his slave, called Onesimus who fled his master and was now with Paul. As Onesimus knew about the friendship between Paul and Philemon, he expected Paul to intervene and solve the problem between him and his master (Taylor 2012:277-278). In my opinion, this epistle is one of the most unique and emotional letters of Paul. To better perceive Paul's message, this research reviews important aspects of it. For the purposes of the present research, it is important to underscore some of the key point of Paul's message:

- The main focus of the letter is on slavery, particularly while both sides are members of a party that claim *neither slave nor free...in Christ Jesus* (Gal 3:28; Phm 10-19, specifically 16).
- Paul does not command or force Philemon, but he rather appeals to Philemon's free will in a very humble way and 'on the basis of love' (Duling 2003:213; Phm 8; 14).

- Although Paul does not oblige Philemon to forgive/accept Onesimus, his tone encourages the addressee to behave appropriately, in a way that Paul has adopted. This is one of the significant topics that reveals a typical Pauline doctrine and will be discussed later.
- Paul does not claim any authority over his addressee in this letter, despite his status. He clearly wants to teach Philemon some moral lessons. Paul does not regard himself as superior to Philemon, as Christians are not allowed to do so.
- Paul refers to his imprisonment as well. However, he does not identify himself as a prisoner of the emperor. He assumes himself as a prisoner of Jesus Christ (Phm 10).
- Paul calls Onesimus his child. Once again, he reminds Philemon that as soon as people believe in Jesus Christ, they are like family members (Phm 10).

2.9.3 Paul's Disputed Letters or Deutero-Pauline letters³⁷

As mentioned above, although 13 letters bear Paul's name, six of them are not attributed to Paul due to the fact that their style, language, and content are not typical Pauline (Duling 2003:140). In the following sections, these letters are briefly reviewed.

2.9.3.1 2 Thessalonians

There are many similarities between 1 and 2 Thessalonians, specifically on a structural, millennial, and stylistic level. This could bring one to the conclusion that the second epistle was also authored by Paul (Duling 2003:259). However, there are some differences between these two letters regarding the main content of these letters, i.e. the coming of Christ, that support the theory that someone else has written this epistle in Paul's name.

The main focus of the letter is the *parousia*, as already mentioned in 1 Thessalonians where Paul has indicated that the second coming of Jesus Christ, the, will be soon (Duling 2003:260). However, this matter is treated differently in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4:

³⁷ The term 'deutero' means 'secondary.' It was common in antiquity that people wrote anonymous or pseudonymous books. This was even adopted by the members of the Jesus movements (Duling 2003:258).

Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. According to most scholars, Paul nowhere narrates this concept (*parousia*) like it is done here, and therefore, 2 Thessalonians is more likely pseudonymous (Duling 2003:259).

2.9.3.2 *Colossians*

The main reason for suggesting that Colossians may not have been authored by Paul is its linguistic and stylistic features. In fact, it does not contain Paul's main concerns, including justification, salvation, and the Jewish law (Duling 2003:262-263). However, regardless of the authorship, the letter contains some unique concepts. The following are salient features of this letter:

- The writer portrayed Jesus Christ as the 'firstborn of all creation,' and 'a true representation of God' (Col 1:15). In contrast to this, 1 Corinthians 8:6 indicates that God is the goal of creation and we are all created from Him. I will analyse this motif in the following chapters.
- Jesus Christ is the head of the Church (Col 1:18, 24; 2:19; 3:15).
- Through the cross, Jesus Christ has reconciled both Israelites and Gentiles to God in one body (Col 1:19-20).
- Believers are buried with Jesus in baptism and through faith in God and raised again with the Lord (Col 2:12-13). This is in contrast to Paul's interpretation of eschatology in Roman 6 where he has applied a symbolic meaning to Jesus' resurrection.
- In Colossians 3:18-22, the following ethical norms are discussed: *Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands...Husbands, love your wives...Children, obey your parents...Fathers, do not embitter your children...Slaves, obey your earthly masters.* These are different from Paul's statements in Galatians 3:28³⁸ and also

³⁸ *There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

differ from certain important elements in Colossians, providing the basis for the arguments that Paul may not be the author of this letter.

2.9.3.3 *Ephesians*

Although Paul's name is mentioned in the first verse of this letter,³⁹ there is an agreement between most scholars that it cannot be attributed to Paul, since there are 90 words in Ephesians that do not exist in the rest of Paul's corpus (cf. Duling 2003:271). However, a review of this epistle shows that its content harmonises with that of Colossians (cf. Duling 2003:272). One may therefore conclude that the writer of both letters is one person. Here are the main motifs of this letter:

- By grace, believers are saved through faith (Eph 2:1-10).
- Through faith in Jesus, the Israelite and Gentiles are reconciled (Eph 2:11-22).
- The oneness of the Lord, faith, baptism, and the Church (Eph 4:1-16).
- Through baptism, one is transformed to a new life (Eph 4:7-32).
- The Ephesians are urged to stop immoralities and impurities such as fornication that was widespread among some Gentiles (Eph 5:3).
- Specific ethical norms are more clarified/explained here, compared to Colossian (Eph 5:21-33; 6).
 - Women must be subordinate and obedient to men (Eph 5:22).
 - Children must be subordinate and obedient to their fathers (Eph 6:1).
 - Slaves must be subordinate and obedient to their masters (Eph 6:6). This subordination is not something separate and strict. It interweaves love – the love that stems from a sincere faith in Jesus Christ.
 - An important point in these two chapters is the emphasis on the concept of unity, which must start among the Jews and the Gentiles and then penetrate and develop within the household of God i.e. His community (Duling 2003:277).

2.9.4 **The So-Called Pastoral Letters**

³⁹ *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus* (Eph 1:1).

Among the disputed letters there are three that almost all researchers believe that they could not have been authored by Paul, and as such they are categorised as pseudonymous. This is done despite a reference to Paul at the beginning of each letter. The pastoral letters are 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus.⁴⁰ It has been estimated that these three letters have been written between 70 and 100 CE, and since Paul's martyrdom was around 64 CE, this is regarded as a compelling reason to reject the theory that Paul could be the author. However, the similarities between these letters and Paul's concepts reveal Paul's enduring influence on others (Duling 2003:259-277).

2.9.4.1 1 Timothy⁴¹

This letter is a counsel to Timothy regarding various topics. The chief concepts of this document are:

- The Jewish law is good if it is used properly (1 Tim 1:8).
- Jesus Christ was born to save sinners (1 Tim 1:15).
- A recommendation to Timothy to pray for everybody, including kings (1 Tim 2:1-2). This is one of the interesting motifs that have not been mentioned previously.
- Women must subject themselves to their husbands, keep silent, and learn in quietness (1 Tim 2:11-13). This is one of the controversial issues that this research will scrutinise further.
- Counsel regarding the organisation of the Church and the way that bishops and deacons must behave (1 Tim 3:1-14).
- An exhortation to fulfil/maintain the truth while it is surrounded by evil (1 Tim 4).
- Even under the yoke, servants must respect their masters (1 Tim 6:1-3).

2.9.4.2 2 Timothy

⁴⁰ They are given the title 'pastoral' because they are addressed to individuals with a pastoral oversight of Churches, and discuss issues of Christian living, doctrine, and leadership. The term 'pastoral' was popularised in 1703 by Berdot and in 1726 by Paul Anton (Guthrie 2009:19).

⁴¹ Timothy was from the Lycaonian city of Lystra in Asia Minor, born of a Jewish mother who had become a Christian believer, and a Greek father. Paul met him during his second missionary journey and he became Paul's companion and co-worker along with Silas (cf. Ac 16:1-4).

Despite the fact that this document is associated with Paul's name, it could not have been authored by Paul, since its content substantially differs from what Paul had implied in his other epistles. Much like 1 Timothy, this is an exhortation letter with the following as its main elements:

- Timothy is exhorted to be patient under persecution (2 Tim 1:6-15).
- Timothy is encouraged to keep his strength by the power that he has obtained through Jesus (2 Tim 2:1-4).
- A prediction that, during the last days, people would be preoccupied with their passions and immoralities, in other words, virtues would be transformed to chaos and an unrestrained state (2 Tim 3:1-4).
- Timothy should be faithful and loyal to Jesus' teachings, since there would be people who oppose the gospel (2 Tim 4:1-5).

2.9.4.3 *Titus*

With regard to the basic language and content of this letter, the majority of scholars believe that it could not be Paul's letter. One major reason is that it has been estimated that the date of the letter is around 80 CE, which is after Paul's martyrdom (Brown 1997:662).

Titus was a Christian worker in Crete. This letter consists of three chapters:

- Titus 1: Recommendation on the conduct of Church leaders, specifically toward the Jews who were the ardent adherents of the Jewish law, specifically with relation to circumcision.
- Titus 2 contains moral exhortations similar to the concepts mentioned in 1 and 2 Timothy, including the subordination of women to men, and the obedience of slaves to their masters. This chapter can be depicted as a hierarchy system of Christianity.
- Titus 3: Christians should adopt a respect to the rulers and authorities in response to God's grace.

2.9.4.4 *Hebrews*

The final letter, written between 70 and 100 CE, which was traditionally associated with Paul, is the letter to the Hebrews. The Hebrews were the Jews as well as the Jewish members of the Jesus movements (Duling 2003:280). However, as argued in detail by numerous scholars like Duling (2003), nowadays it is accepted that Paul could not have written this letter. Notwithstanding this, for the purposes of the present research, the main features of this document are:

- Jesus is the Son of God and Saviour of all (Heb 1:1; 3:6).
- The Israelites are exhorted in various ways to keep their faith (Heb 2:1-4).
- Moses was the forerunner of Jesus Christ. This is one of the most important issues of all religions, i.e. before the appearance of a new prophet the previous one somehow prophesies about him, whether implicitly or otherwise (Heb 3:4-5).
- Another tradition was the failure of people in trials. This happened during the times of both Moses and Jesus (Heb 3:7-19).
- Christians will endure God's trial if they persist in their beliefs, and as a result they will share the glory of God (Heb 4:3-7; cf. Duling 2003:289).
- Jesus Christ is the High Priest (Heb 4:14; 5:10; 6:20).
- Believers will mature gradually. In my perspective, this statement somehow points to the necessity of the continuation of God's manifestation for each era (cf. Heb 5:11-14). Prophets of God cannot reveal the word of God completely and at once, as people will resist if for nothing else but for the simple fact that their capacity is limited.
- God never breaks His oath (Heb 6:16-19).
- Jesus is the High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek,⁴² that means that Jesus Christ is superior to the Israelite priest (Heb 7:1-28).
- 'Jesus has made the one perfect sacrifice' (Duling 2003:290; Heb 8:1-6).
- Jesus is like a Medium through whom God made a new covenant with people (Heb 8:7-13).
- The Priesthood of Jesus is the perfect one (Heb 9:11-14).

⁴² 'Melchizedek is a king and priest appearing in the Book of Genesis. The name means "King of Righteousness" – a name echoing kingly and priestly functions' (Berlin 1996:59).

- The New Covenant is superior to the old one. It is something natural, since through time, people mature and they require new and more completed principles (Heb 9:15-22).
- Because of Jesus, His followers can enter the Holy Place (Heb 10:19-39).
- Jesus is the Pioneer and Perfecter of faith (Heb 11:1-39).

2.10 Paul's Martyrdom

Almost all the scholars are in agreement that the martyrdom of Paul took place in Rome around 64 CE, in the era of Nero (Durant 1944; Gibbon 2002; Eastman 2014). However, there is a controversy about the cause of his death. Gibbon (2002) indicates that as Rome was burning, the Christians, including Paul were accused of having caused the disaster, were arrested, and sentenced to death.

Eastman (2014) scrutinises the death of Paul from another perspective and renders various reasons for his hypothesis. He believes that jealousy and internal strife in the community of Rome (Jewish Christians) were the reasons for the death of Paul. He argues that Paul's death sentence resulted from a dispute and disagreement that arose among the new Christians, and it consequently resulted in his execution by Nero. Eastman (2014:36) states: 'Traditions concerning the preaching and eventual death of Paul in Rome lie at the heart of the Roman Church's claims to ecclesiastical authority. From a scriptural perspective, Rome began its rise to ecclesiastical prominence at a distinct disadvantage, because its apostolic associations are limited.' Paul has written letters to Rome to endorse them. He even went to this city and preached among them for two years until his martyrdom (Eastman 2014). Reviewing the Christian community of Rome, reveals that they were too insignificant to earn the attention of the Roman authorities, until their internal strife and turmoil were perceived as a threat for the Romans (Eastman 2014:38).

Eastman tries to consider the circumstances in Rome when Paul and Peter started their missionary activities there: 'The Jewish community was in minority and lived in poverty and misery, hence they could not pose a threat for the Romans. The Roman authority

could not distinguish between the Jews and the Christians, until strife and jealousy erupted between the Jewish Christians and the Christians (Eastman 2014:36-40). Eastman postulates that, when Paul entered Rome, 'he [was] accosted by *loudaioi* who beg[ged] him to set Peter straight' (Eastman 2014:51). He then concludes that this dispute has attracted Roman officials to the community of the Christians, which could lead to their conviction by Nero when Rome was on fire.

The abovementioned uncovers a few mysteries: The Jewish Christians who regarded Paul to be inferior to Peter, were those who still lived with the conviction of the Israelite superiority over Gentiles. These Jews were the main cause for the death of Paul (Eastman 2014). The following propositions capture Eastman's hypothesis:

- Paul's epistle to the Romans reveals that he was aware of the atmosphere in the Christian community in Rome. In most chapters of Romans, Paul emphasised the fact that God's blessing and grace are not only applicable to the Jews, but also to those who believe in His prophet (Jesus Christ). In some chapters Paul even implied that the nations (non-Jews) took precedence over the Jews in faith.
- In Romans 9:23-26, Paul stated: *What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory – even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? As he says in Hosea: 'I will call them "my people" who are not my people; and I will call her "my loved one" who is not my loved one,' and, 'In the very place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," there they will be called "children of the living God".'* Paul's words about Jewish disobediences are also mentioned in Romans 10:16-21: *But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our message?' Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: 'Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.' Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, 'I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.' And Isaiah boldly says, 'I was found by those who did not seek me; I*

revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.’ But concerning Israel he says, ‘All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.’ With regard to the abovementioned, Eastman generalises this dispute between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians to several New Testament texts (Eastman 2014:39-40).

- In 1 Corinthians 3:3-5, Paul also indicated conditions in which he felt strife among Christians: *You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, ‘I follow Paul,’ and another, ‘I follow Apollos,’ are you not mere human beings? What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task.*
- In 2 Corinthians 11:26, Paul referred to ‘false believers’ (‘false brothers’) as a threat for his life: *I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers.*
- Another evidence that endorses Eastman’s theory relates to Luke’s silence about the death of both Paul and Peter at the closure of Acts. Eastman (2014:39) claims that ‘Luke is certainly not going to end a work on the expansion of the early Church, with Peter and Paul as the two pillars of that expansion, with the story of how internal disputes provoked their deaths.’
- Paul’s letter to the Philippians contains another indication regarding the ones who are not sincere in their preaching: *It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice (Php 1:15-18).*
- In Philippians 3:1-7 he also warns believers against the ‘dogs’ who obviously were synonym to the ‘false believers/brothers’ and refers to Jewish Christians

who 'were scandalizing the community of Jesus followers' (Eastman 2014:39). Paul asserted: *Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh – though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.*

- In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul countered the ones who questioned his apostleship and authority, referred to himself in the following way: *Paul, an apostle – sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead* (Gal 1:1). In Galatians 2:4 he referred to the 'false believers' who tried to counter his mission: *This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves.*

- Another piece of evidence that Eastman relied on to underpin his theory is a kind of analogy:

He repeats the story of Cain and Abel from Gen 4:3-8, ending at the death of Abel and not including God's question to Cain about what had happened to his brother. Second is the story of Jacob and Esau from Gen 27:1-45, in which Jacob steals his brother's birthright and has to flee for his life. Third is the story of Joseph, who was thrown into a pit and then sold to some passing Midianites by his brothers in Gen 37:1-28. These first three examples all specifically involve brothers turning against their own brothers, revealing the disastrous effects of jealousy within the same family. The story of jealousy towards Moses by his own fellow Israelites, Aaron and Miriam and so many others that reveal in most cases

strife and enmity towards the chief apostles and the sincere ones, were from the close relatives and brothers (Eastman 2014:43-44).

- Eastman draws another argument from Paul's epistle to Timothy to prove his assumption regarding the death of Paul (Eastman 2014:49).⁴³

In summary we can state that Eastman has the conviction that Paul was challenged by those within his community who questioned his claims to have a special privilege or authority in the community of Rome. Those people argued that Paul has confronted his attackers from inside, calling them 'false brothers' or 'dogs.' Eastman suggests that these animosities originated from the Jewish Christians who could not tolerate Paul's victory and achievements. These people also attacked Peter who acknowledged Paul's apostleship. This strife attracted Roman officials and many innocent Christians, including Paul and Peter, and when Rome was on fire, all of them were arrested and convicted to death (Eastman 2014).

Authors like Lohse (1991) believe that Paul and Peter were not the founders of the Church in Rome. Paul went first to Rome and after his letter to the Romans, Peter arrived. He also believes that Paul and Peter were not martyred together, but that Paul was martyred first, followed, after some time, by Peter (Lohse 1991).

An important fact that almost all historians agree on is that Paul was martyred in Rome. Both Paul and Peter preached and suffered and, in the end, were condemned to death for the sake of the same goal i.e. Jesus Christ. The New Testament does not mention where either of them died. Ratzinger (2009) alleges:

According to this legend, after Paul was decapitated, his severed head rebounded three times, giving rise to a source of water each time that it touched the ground, which is how the place earned the name 'San Paolo alle Tre Fontane' ('St Paul at the Three Fountains').

⁴³ *Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message (2 Tim 4:14-15).*

Also according to legend, Paul's body was buried outside the walls of Rome, at the second mile on the Via Ostiensis, on the estate owned by a Christian woman named Lucina. It was here, in the fourth century, that the Emperor Constantine built a first church. Then, between the fourth and fifth centuries it was considerably enlarged by the Emperors Valentinian I, Valentinian II, Theodosius I, and Arcadius. The present-day Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls was built there in 1800.

2.11 Summary

Exploring Paul's life before his conversion and then his ceaseless efforts in spreading Christianity (for almost 30 years), depicts magnificent aspects of his personality that can only be seen in a special light. In fact, his pure heart, his persistence in pursuing God's will, his thought and unmovable determination to achieve his aims, his extraordinary patience and tolerance in difficulties and perilous situations, his unconditional love for all people, his dominating leadership during these years and his equal treatment of people (Jews, Gentiles, and Pagans), and more importantly his universal perspective towards faith, are just a few features of Paul's character that can rarely be gathered in one person, which eventually changed the picture and the destination of Christianity for good. Paul's preaching about Christianity was in accordance with what Jesus Christ has missioned him to promote, and he performed this main work through his gospel, his untiring missionary trips around different areas, and his masterpiece and insightful epistles, each containing valuable lessons for human beings.

In general, Paul's inclusive theology that included all humans, regardless of their ethnic (circumcised or not), religious (Jews and non-Jews), gender (men and women), or cultural background, broke the conventional ties with Judaism and removed circumcision as a preliminary condition for conversion. This revolutionised the foundation of Christianity. Paul's theology was rooted in various factors, including the place and culture that he was born in and was brought up (Hellenistic), being taught under the supervision of an open-minded Rabbi, Gamaliel, his life-changing experience (conversion),

his deep insight from his mission, and more significantly his inner instinct that guided him as an apostle. This is the reason why most scholars recognise him as the most influential character in Church History. However, Paul's liberal approaches also brought him enemies whom he had to deal with until his martyrdom in Rome.

The next chapter will focus on the life and beliefs of Jenab-i Táhirih.

CHAPTER 3

JENAB-I TÁHIRIH

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter (Chapter 2) studied Paul's life and pondered his faith in Christ, which can be assumed as a turning point in the history of Christianity. The apostle's faith was so influential that he was accepted as a Gentile apostle, and his preaching achievements were so undeniable that they provoked much opposition among both the Jews and Gentiles. Most of the achievements of this indefatigable apostle are described in detail in his epistles, which constitute most of the New Testament.

Chapter 3 provides a review of Táhirih's life, although, in my perspective, only future historians will be able to fully judge and appreciate the existence of a character like Táhirih. Reviewing the history of the Qajar dynasty and focusing on the status of women during that era, reveal that Táhirih was like a beautiful growing 'lotus' in a nasty 'lagoon,' which, for some time, was in its natural purity, but in the end could not bear this impurity and was sentenced to death. However, during her short but precious life, she put her permanent mark on the soul of people who surrounded her, including her friends and her enemies.

In this chapter, I will offer a background to her personal and religious life before and after her conversion, that has lifted up the status of females. Her impetuous actions were magnificent fruits for a Babi woman, and depicted her theology from her manuscripts and some main events of her life with the focus on Baha'i Scriptures.

3.2 Táhirih's Background

The Baha'i writings show that there are various documents regarding Táhirih and almost all of them have the same opinion regarding her life, belief, and background before and after her conversion to the Babi faith.

The first category consists of the holy manuscripts of the Báb (the founder prophet of the Babi faith), Bahá'u'lláh (the founder prophet of the Baha'i faith), Abd'ul-Bahá (the interpreter of the Baha'i writings), and Shoghi Effendi (the guardian of the Baha'i faith). Similar to the holy Bible, the authenticity of these Scriptures is accepted as unquestionable. I will rely primarily on these sources in this dissertation.

The second category was rendered by Baha'i scholars and historians like Johnson (1982), Fadil Mazandarani (2009), Mohammad Hosseini (2000), Momen (2003), and Shahrokh (2018). They agree that Táhirih was born in a rich Muslim family in Qazvin and from her childhood she was different from all her siblings. Her intelligence and sagacity caused her fascination with the new manifestation i.e. the Báb who had declared himself as the promised one of the day of the end. Without any physical encounter, she became a believer and an ardent follower, and finally she dedicated her very life to the path of her belief.

3.2.1 Her Biography

Táhirih was born in 1817 in Qazvin, a religious city that was a significant centre of Islam during the Qajar dynasty and even before it (Shahrokh 2018). She was named after her grandmother *Fatimih*, but due to respect to her grandmother, she was called Ummay-Salmay. Later she was titled Zarrin-Taj which means 'the golden crown' (Shahrokh 2018). However, through time as she started communicating with Sayyid Kazim Rashti, he addressed her as 'Qurratu'l-'Ayn' which means 'solace of the eye' (Shahrokh 2018).

It has been said that Táhirih was intelligent. She started talking when she was only 7 months and proved that God created and appointed her for significant affairs (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:146). As she grew up, the sign of sagacity appeared in her in a way, causing her father to wish that she was a boy so that she could replace him in his position one day (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:150).

To better perceive the religious life of Táhirih, it would be useful to review her family and their religious background. At that time (during the Qajar era), there were three rival schools of law in Shi'ism:

- the Usulis;
- the Akhbaris; and
- the Shaykhi.

In contrast to the Akhbaris, who clung to the Qu'ran and the tradition of Imams for setting law, the Usulis widened the bases of religious law by maintaining that rulings could also be given, based on the principles of consensus and on the application of reason (Momen 2003:36). On the other side were the Shaykhis, 'based on the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i (1753-1826), which was to become an important foundation for the movement of the Báb (1819-50)' (Momen 2003:36).

From her paternal side, all of them were pious Usulis clergy. Her great ancestor was Mulla Muhammad-Kazim, Baraghani, a Turkish well-off farmer who was a well-known cleric of Safavid dynasty, while her grandfather, Mulla Muhammad Baraghani was also one of the literary men of his time (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:115).

Mulla Muhammad had three sons. The oldest one was Mulla Muhammad Taqi who was also Táhirih's father-in-law and will be discussed later in detail. Suffice here to mention that he was addressed as 'the ignorant tyrant' by Abd'ul-Bahá (1971). The second son was Shaykh Muhammad Salih, Táhirih's father who was a moderate clergyman and was praised by Abd'ul-Bahá in Baha'i Scriptures (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:126). The last son was Shaykh Muhammad Ali, the younger uncle of Táhirih, who tended to the Shaykhi movement and consequently the movement of Babi (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:115-116).

Reviewing her maternal side will also depict that they belonged to a religious and pious family tradition.

Aminih Khanum, the mother of Táhirih, descended from some of the leading families of Qazvin. Aminih's mother was Fatimih who was a member of a distinguished Qazvin family of Sayyids (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad) and 'ulama. They trace their ancestors to the Imam Husayn and from him to Fatimih, Prophet Muhammad's daughter, and Imam 'Ali, and hence to the Prophet Muhammad himself (Momen 2003:36).

Thus, one realises that Táhirih whose Babi regard her as the return of Fatimih, was a real descendant of the Prophet Mohammad's daughter (Momen 2003:36). This rich and religious family were originally from Tabriz, but they moved to Qazvin during the Safavid era. Hence, Fatimih, Táhirih's grandmother, was born in Qazvin and subsequently also Aminih and her daughter Táhirih (Momen 2003:36-37).

As a woman, Fatimih studied under the supervision of her father and uncle and finally got married to her paternal cousin, Shaykh Mohammad Ali Qazvini who was also one of the learned u'lama of Qazvin (Momen 2003:37). It is recorded that Fatimih and Shaykh Mohammad Ali had six children – four sons and two daughters. 'The most well-known of their sons was Mulla 'Abdu'l-Wahhab Sharif Qazvini. The designation "Sharif" after his name indicates that his mother was a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad' (Momen 2003:39). Then there were Haji Rida, Mulla 'Abdu'l-Karim, known as Haji Aqa or Haj Karim, and Mulla 'Ali Mardan' who was also a cleric. Fifth was

Aminih, Táhirih's mother who was also an educated woman [and] continued her studies in the women's section of her husband's religious college, the Salihyyih, learning religious jurisprudence from her husband and his brother, and philosophy and mystical philosophy from her husband's cousin, Mulla Aqa Hakami (Momen 2003:40).

Lastly, although the name of Táhirih's aunt is never mentioned in any of the sources, it is definite that Aminih had at least one sister, 'since the son of that sister, Mulla Javad Vilyani, played a role in Táhirih's story and in Babi history' (Momen 2003:40).

Based on the abovementioned sources, one can infer that in contrast to the social conditions of that era, Táhirih was raised in a family who cared about the education and training of females. This was a prominent feature that later influenced Táhirih's life trajectory.

3.2.2 Her Siblings

It was common among Muslim males to have more than one wife and Mulla Salih (Táhirih's father) was no exception (Momen 2003:42). Hence, Táhirih had many brothers and sisters.⁴⁴ However, Aminih Khanum and Mulla Salih had only three children. Táhirih therefore had one sister and one brother. Her sister was Mardiyiyh Khanum. Táhirih had strong ties and connections to her. She was married to Mirza Muhammad 'Ali, the oldest son of her maternal uncle, Mulla 'Abdu'l-Wahhab. Mardiyeh and her husband accompanied Táhirih to Iraq and both of them became followers of the Báb (Momen 2003:43). Her brother was Mirza 'Abdu'l-Wahhab. According to Nabil – the most authoritative historian of the Babi era – he believed in the Báb, but failed to express a sincere act (Momen 2003:43). He married his paternal cousin, Umm Kulthum, the daughter of Mullah Muhammad Taqi Baraghani who was fond of Táhirih (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:148).

3.2.3 Táhirih's Education

Even non-Baha'i sources that tried to humiliate Táhirih's character and dismissed her accomplishments, admitted to her knowledge⁴⁵ and the education that she had received by her parents and relatives (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:36).

⁴⁴ Cf. Momen (2003).

⁴⁵ 'Táhirih's towering Intellectual abilities had been acknowledged by in accounts written by Shi'i clerics antagonistic to the Babi and Baha'i Faiths' (Momen 2003:52).

As a girl who was raised in a literate and religious family, she was 'educated in theology, jurisprudence, Persian literature, and poetry' (Fadil Mazandarani 2009). Moreover, her extraordinary memory enabled her not only to memorise the holy Qu'ran, but she was also allowed to undertake Islamic studies. She was permitted to hold religious classes behind the curtain for even Muslim males which was something unprecedented at that time⁴⁶ (Johnson 1982:9). 'Hence, under the supervision of her father, brothers and paternal uncles, Táhirih learned religious jurisprudence, the principles of jurisprudence, the Islamic Traditions and the Qur'an and its commentary' (Momen 2003:46-47). However, surprisingly, during this education 'she found out that her family was confused about religion, and did not really understand its spiritual meaning. When she discovered this, she began to study religion for herself' (Johnson 1982:5).

Beside her religious teaching, under the observation of her mother, Aminih Khanum she had lessons in literature and poetry (Momen 2003:47). According to Momen (2003:47), 'Táhirih also studied philosophy (*falsafa*) and mystical philosophy (*ḥikmat* and *'irfān*) with her paternal relatives.' After she had finished her studies, she became a knowledgeable woman whom almost nobody could challenge. Even one of her brothers admitted this fact that wherever Táhirih was present, he preferred to keep quiet (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:158).

As mentioned before, Táhirih's father was from a Turkish tribe, hence, their family mother tongue was Turkish. However, it did not stop Táhirih to acquire both Persian and Arabic languages so well as to compose prose in these languages (Momen 2003:47).

In the following section, I will argue how much and in what way all this knowledge influenced her and shaped her evolution of beliefs.

⁴⁶ For two years, Táhirih held Islamic classes in her father's religious college and mosque named Salihyyih (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:110).

3.2.4 Her Life, Character, and Faith as a Muslim Woman

When it comes to religion, it may be argued that people are of three types: The first group is composed of those who just carry the name and title to have the label of that faith. Put differently, they only value their association with the faith concerned. The second group performs the required acts and keep the outward principles without knowing the wisdom and logic of such acts. In other words, they stick to the letter of the laws more than its substance. The last category is those whose words are compatible with their acts. They have a deep insight from the holy words and use it in their actions and personal life.

Táhirih's relatives primarily belonged to the second group. As mentioned before, although Táhirih received professional learning from both her paternal and maternal family members, she realised that they were not fully aware of what they believed and did not really appreciate the spiritual meanings of much of their beliefs (Johnson 1982:7). Táhirih had an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and spent most of her time in her father's library (Johnson 1982:6). She started to deepen her knowledge on the holy Qu'ran and other forms of literature.

There are two different opinion regarding Táhirih's educational attainments. Some researchers, including Mohammad Hosseini (2000) believe that, despite her extraordinary talent, she could not receive religious certification from clerics. As women were regarded as inferior creatures in comparison to men, they were not treated equally. However, some others have argued that although it was contrary to the custom, when Táhirih graduated from seminary, she received a diploma: 'In fact, her attainments were so extraordinary that they were obliged to give her a diploma' (Fadil Mazandarani 2009:1).

Whether she got her diploma in theology or not, what is not in dispute is the fact that she became well-known for her deep knowledge, insight, eloquence, and religious interpretations. Those who knew her, admitted that her education inspired many women later in Qazvin (Amanat 1989).

Reviewing different sources, confirms that she exerted a powerful charm and impression on everybody who visited her. This was largely due to her physical beauty,⁴⁷ her intelligence, and magnetism. I will be discussed later how these features affected her life and her future mission.

3.2.5 Her Marriage

Táhirih finished her formal education at the age of 13 or 14 and as was, common to that era, forced to accept a marriage with her cousin, Mulla Muhammad Taqi, the son of her elder uncle (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:154). Although this pre-arranged marriage brought children, it was not successful since there was no spiritual bond between her and her husband, which led to their eventual break-up (Momen & Lawson 2004). Momen (2003:49) refer to Baha'i sources⁴⁸ that indicate that Táhirih had three children – two boys and a girl – but allege that she actually had four. The first two were boys, born while she and her husband were in Karbala, then a girl when they were in Najaf, and finally a boy when they had returned to Qazvin.⁴⁹ Momen's claim appears to be closer to the truth since he reviewed some documents that had been obtained from a relative of Táhirih.

Her eldest son was Shaykh Esma'il, who was well educated under the supervision of both his parents and his grandfathers (Momen 2003:49-50). He further received religious certification from clerics. He did not believe in the Babi faith and died in Baraghan (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:154). Her second son, Shaykh Ibrahim studied philosophy and mystical philosophy, like his older brother, under his uncle, Mirza 'Abdu'l-Wahhab Baraghani and under Mulla Aqa Hakami (Momen 2003:49-50). However, in contrary to Esma'il who kept silent regarding his mother and her belief, he criticised the Báb and tried to deny his relationship to his mother (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:155). It has been said that, like his mother, he was a wonderful orator and a religious leader. After his

⁴⁷ The British professor, Edward Browne who spoke to a great number of her contemporaries, wrote that she was renowned for her 'marvelous beauty' (Root 1938:9).

⁴⁸ Abd'ul-Bahá, in one of his tablets, declared that Táhirih had two sons and one daughter, none of whom recognised the truth of the cause (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:157).

⁴⁹ Ali Wardi declared that Táhirih had three sons. The last one was Ishaq who was born when Táhirih came back to Qazvin in 1841 (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:157).

father's death, he was selected as a leader of mid-day congregational Friday prayers of Qazvin for a while. He stayed in Baraghan until his death (Momen 2003:49-50)

According to Moojan Momen (2003), Zaynab, who some sources named Sara,⁵⁰ was the only daughter of Táhirih. Like her mother she studied in the women's section in Salihyyih. She accompanied her mother on her trips and engaged to Seyyid Abdul'Hadi Qazvini who believed in the Báb and later became one of the devoted followers of Táhirih. Just like her brothers, she did not believe in the Babi faith and died soon after her mother's martyrdom (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:156). Saykh Ishaq, the youngest son of Táhirih, was born in Qazvin and, like his siblings took lessons in philosophy and mystical philosophy and later became a religious authority in Qazvin (Momen 2003:50). He also did not believe in the Babi faith.

The fact that Táhirih could not influence one her own children or her parents, seems ironic since she later taught many people among whom were famous shi'i clerics. Momen (2003) relates that although her children could not recognise the truth that their mother sacrificed her life for, some of her grandchildren succeeded in knowing the new faith and even, after the Bab's martyrdom believed in Bahá'u'lláh.⁵¹ Hence, it may be argued that no matter how much a person is close to the source of truth, faith and belief require special conditions without which one may be deprived from this blessing.

3.3 Inception of New Chapter in Táhirih's Life

As mentioned above, contrary to the Muslim traditions who looked down upon women and did not pay attention to their education, Táhirih received a proper education. However, seemingly it did not satisfy her thirst. Therefore, she did not stop studying and scrutinising religious literature, until one day when she found something that changed her life for good.

⁵⁰ Táhirih had one daughter named Sara, who was also called Asiyeh (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:156).

⁵¹ Shaykh Isma'il had a grandson, Sayyid Ni'matu'llah who encountered the Baha'i faith and became a Baha'i. He was a poet and wrote more than 10,000 verses of poetry (Momen 2003:48-49).

Researchers agree that Táhirih's acquaintance with the Shaykhi belief occurred at the home of one of her maternal cousins Mulla Javad Valiyani. When she was searching through his library, she found a document regarding the teaching of Shaykh Ahmad Ahsa'i that really attracted her attention. Despite his cousin's reluctance, she borrowed the Shaykhi sources from him and soon after she recognised the rightfulness of their teachings, she submitted to the Babi faith (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:163-164).

3.3.1 Her Attraction to the Shaykhi Belief

As mentioned before, Táhirih's maternal family inclined to the Akhbari School and later Shaykhi. One of her uncles invited Shaykh Ahmad Ahsa'i to Qazvin when Táhirih was five or six years old (Momem 2003:46). This tendency in the family had contradictory consequences. On the one hand, it arose enmity between the maternal and paternal uncles of Táhirih who were inclined to opposite Schools: The Usulis accepted her younger paternal uncle, Mulla Muhammad Ali who was later attracted to the Shaykhi movement. On the other hand, it had a special impact on young Táhirih who became familiar to both of these belief systems, which encouraged her to search the truth on her own.

When Táhirih perceived the reality of the Shaykhi's teachings, she started communicating with Siyyid Kazim Rashti who was the successor of Shaykh Ahmad Ahsa'i. Táhirih's treatises in supporting the teaching of Shaykh Ahmad, attracted Siyyid Kazim's attention who gave her the confirmation that she truly understood Shaykh's teachings.

As a response, Siyyid Kazim sent a letter to Táhirih which began with '*Ya Qurratu'l-'Ayn-i-Va Ruhu l- Fu'adi*' (*O solace of my eyes and the joy of my heart*). From that time on, Táhirih became known as Qurrat al-'Ayn, the name by which she is still most commonly known among Iranians (Shahrokh 2018:4).

At this point it is worth to elaborate on the Shaykhi's beliefs and their differences from the Usulis.

According to the Shi'i Islam, they have five principles of religion: Monotheism, prophecy, imamat,⁵² justice, and resurrection. Shaykh Ahmad Ahsa'i believed that justice is one of God's attributes, while the insertion of divine attributes does not have a conceptual meaning in the principles of religion. He also asserts that the resurrection is one of the teachings of the Qur'an. Hence, it can be omitted from the principles of religion. However, he pointed to another principle: 'The deputy of the imam.' Therefore, according to the Shaykhis, there are four principles of religion: Monotheism, prophecy, imamat, and the deputy of Imam.

Shaykh Ahmad explained that even manifestations of God (God's messengers) are not able to understand the real essence of God. Therefore, everybody who is eager to know God, should know his prophets since they reflect his attributes. Shaykh Ahmad also believed that after accepting the existence of the divine nature, prophecy, and imamat, a true Shi'i believer should testify to the fourth pillar which is like an intermediate between the Imam and the believers. The position of the fourth pillar which is a complete Shi'i, is lower than the Imam but higher than the normal believers (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:161-162).

Shaykh Ahmad's views regarding resurrection, qa'im, and prophecy were unique and were distinct from what the Usulis and the rest of the Shi'i sects proposed. Here is a brief summary of Shaykh Ahmad's doctrines:

The resurrection is not that of rising of the body, but spiritual in nature...The Promised One, the Qa'im, (meaning Him Who Shall Rise), would be born of a mother, and he would not be coming out of one thousand years of hiding as Muslims believed and expected. And also that the appearance of the Qa'im was near...God shall continue to send educators to mankind. This was somewhat different

⁵² 'Imamat' means leadership and is a concept in Twelver theology as well as the Shaykhi's belief. The twelve Imams are the spiritual and political successors of Muhammad the Prophet of Islam. They are appointed by God Almighty and they are the vice-prophets. Imams are infallible in their decrees and will guide people in the absence of Muhammad the Prophet. The last Imam is Imam Mahdi (Qu'im), who, according to Muslims, is hidden (Momen 1985:173).

from what Muslims believed; that Muhammad was the Seal of the Prophets and after Him no other Messenger of God would appear (Shahrokh 2018:3-4).

These teachings were against the Usulis School and it became clear why Táhirih's elder uncle, Mulla Taqi issued a decree against Shaykh Ahmad of *takfir* – a declaration that someone is an unbeliever (Momen 2003:46). However, Táhirih who was famous for her courage and bravery, was not afraid of her uncle's opposition and threat. Therefore, despite her cousin's warning, she started reading Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kazim's treatises and converted to the Shaykhi's belief when she was only 19 years old. From that time on, she frankly challenged her husband and uncle, causing disputes which complicated the enmity between the couple, which ended in their divorce.

It is worth noting that Táhirih's conversion to the Shaykhism should not be assumed as an ordinary or simple act, especially when one studies the history of that era in light of the status of women in the society of that time, where they were assumed as second citizens and deprived from their natural privileges. She voiced her beliefs in such a firm way, which most of her Shaykhi relatives⁵³ did not even dare to admit.

3.3.2 Her Travel to Karbila

What motivated Táhirih for going to Karbala, was her thirst to meet the Shaykhi leaders who were the source of the inspiring words that she has read – the Shaykhi doctrines. Hence, once again she behaved differently: She abandoned her husband and her two sons and accompanied her sister, Mardiyih and her brother-in-law, Mirza Muhammad 'Ali – both of them were Shaykhis – to Karbala (Momen 2003:48). However, it was not destined for Táhirih to visit her teacher, since Siyyid Kazim had passed away just ten days before her arrival in January 1844. However, nothing could quench her desire not to declare what she had already found.

⁵³ It is worth to mention the fact that Táhirih's maternal family, including her mother and uncle, inclined to shaykhi. However, Táhirih had received no words of Shaykh Ahmad's teachings, since her elder uncle silenced all supporters of Shaykh Ahmad (Momen 2003:47).

Táhirih did not waste time. She took extraordinary action. With the permission of Siyyid's widow who admired Táhirih's character, she held religious classes in Siyyid Kazim's house and many Shaykhis including Siyyid Kazim's fans attended her classes.⁵⁴ This type of conduct (holding religious classes for the students of Siyyid) can be interpreted that Táhirih became his successor,⁵⁵ although she did not claim such a position since, by studying Siyyid Kazim's teachings, she recognised that the appearance of Qa'im – Mahdi the Promised One – who would appear at the end of time, was close (Maneck 1989:2 of 10).

In Karbila, the students of Siyyid Kazim were divided into two groups. The first group was those who perceived the mystical and charismatic aspects of Shaykhi teachings. Hence, they scattered to find the truth that Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kazim gave tidings to. i.e. Qa'im. Mulla Husayn Bushru'i was one of those clerics who did not waste time and worked according to his master's will. Later, he became the first follower of the Báb (Maneck 1989).

The second group consisted of conservative followers who preferred to observe Shi'i teachings to keep their legitimacy (Maneck 1989:2 of 10). Mirza Mohit-e Kermani was reprehensive of such clerics who later did not believe in the Báb (Wikipedia 2019a). Obviously, Táhirih joined the first group. She stayed in Karbila for three years where she prepared herself and became well equipped for her tremendous task that was to follow (Maneck 1989:2 of 10).

3.3.3 Her Conversion (Becoming Babi)

Conversion is a polyhedral phenomenon which can also be called a double-edged sword. It impresses all aspects of a person's life. On the one hand, it revolutionises and destroys all the previous beliefs that one considered as a firm pillar of one's life, while

⁵⁴ Many famous clerics were attracted by her knowledge and listened to her lectures behind the curtain (Momen 2003:43), among whom were Shaykh Muhammad Shabal Baghdadi, Shaykh Salih Karimi, Agha Siyyid Ahmad Yazdi, Siyyid Muhammad Bikani, Shaykh Sultan Karbila'i, and Mulla Ibrahim Mahallati. All of them believed that Táhirih deserves to be Siyyid Kazim's successor (Muhammad Husseini 2000:171).

⁵⁵ However, there were some people who were not happy about Táhirih's fame and courage. Among them was Siyyid Kazim's son, Mulla Ahmad who wanted to succeed his father (Maneck 1989:2 of 10).

on the other hand, it impresses and changes one's relationship with others, whether for better or for worse. It opens a new world for the person which is full of joy, but also full of challenges and difficulties. Táhirih was not excluded from these adventures. In fact, she experienced all of them and went through all trials associated with the process.

As stated before, by studying the Shaykhi's Scriptures, Táhirih realised that the appearance of the Promised One was close. Hence, she mediated and recited verses and prayers day and night in preparation to recognise him.

There are two narratives regarding Táhirih's conversion: Historians like Jenab-e Abu'l Fazael maintain that, while Mulla Ali-i Bastami (a follower of the Báb) arrived in Karbila, he offered some of the Báb's Scriptures to Táhirih and as soon as she studied those holy words, she believed in the Báb as the Qa'im. In fact, after the Báb's declaration, and by reciting his words, Táhirih attested to the truth of the Báb and started teaching (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:176). Sources like the *Dawn Breaker* (1932) and the *Memorials of the Faithful* (1971) narrate the story differently, as they indicate that Táhirih started believing in the Báb through a dream. In *Memorials of the Faithful*, Abd'ul-Bahá elaborates on her vision:

Not long before his death the Siyyid had shared with his disciples the good news that the promised Advent was at hand. 'Go forth,' he repeatedly told them, 'and seek out your Lord.' Thus the most distinguished of his followers gathered for retirement and prayer, for fasts and vigils, in the Masjid-i-Kúfih, while some awaited the Advent in Karbilá. Among these was Ṭáhirih, fasting by day, practicing religious disciplines, and spending the night in vigils, and chanting prayers. One night when it was getting along toward dawn she laid her head on her pillow, lost all awareness of this earthly life, and dreamed a dream; in her vision a youth, a Siyyid, wearing a black cloak and a green turban, appeared to her in the heavens; he was standing in the air, reciting verses and praying with his hands

upraised. At once, she memorized one of those verses, and wrote it down in her notebook when she awoke. After the Báb had declared His mission, and His first book, 'The Best of Stories,' was circulated, Táhiriḥ was reading a section of the text one day, and she came upon that same verse, which she had noted down from the dream. Instantly offering thanks, she fell to her knees and bowed her forehead to the ground, convinced that the Báb's message was truth (Abd'ul-Bahá 1971:69-70).

From Abd'ul-Bahá's words one can infer that Táhiriḥ started to believe in the Báb through a dream and after reciting his texts, her conviction just strengthened. However, Abd'ul-Bahá also reaffirms that the verses that Táhiriḥ heard in her dream were some parts of the *Ahsanu'l-Qisas*⁵⁶ (*The best of stories*) which is also known as *Qayyumu'l-Asma*, or the commentary on Surih of Joseph (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:177).

It may be argued that the conversion of Táhiriḥ occurred before meeting Mullá 'Alíy-i-Bastámí and receiving the Báb's writings because a short while before the arrival of Mullá 'Alíy-i-Bastámí, Táhiriḥ sent a letter to her sister's husband, Mulla Ali to deliver it to the Qa'im. Loyal Mulla Ali visited the Báb in Shiraz and delivered Táhiriḥ's message to him. The Báb then accepted her as a 'Letter of the Living' (a title bestowed on the first 18 believers who recognised the truth of the Báb's station as the promised Qa'im). She was the only woman, the seventeenth 'Letter of the Living,'⁵⁷ just before the last one, Quddús. This happened in August 1844 (Shahrokh 2018:5). Thus, as she was accepted as one of the 'Letters of the Living' before the arrival of Mullá 'Alíy-i-Bastámí, it becomes clear that she had already believed in Qa'im.

Táhiriḥ also told Mulla Ali (her brother-in-law), that he will definitely visit the Promised One. She related, 'When you meet Him, on my behalf tell Him, "The effulgence of Thy

⁵⁶ *Ahsanu'l-Qisas* (*The Best of Stories*) is also known as *Qayyumu'l-Asma*, or the commentary on Surih of Joseph. It has 111 chapters, the first of which was revealed to Mulla Husayn on the night of the Declaration of the Báb (Shahrokh 2018:5)

⁵⁷ The 'Letters of the Living' was a title provided by the Báb to the first 18 disciples of the Babi religion.

face flashed forth, and the rays of Thy visage arose high; then speak the word, Am I not your Lord? Thou art, thou art,” we will all reply’ (Shahrokh 2018:5). This statement reveals the fact that Táhirih may have seen him in her dream or somehow connected to him before Mullá ‘Alfí-i-Bastámi’s arrival.

Through her conversion, a new chapter began in Táhirih’s life. She as a woman achieved heights and rendered services that till today remain the source of inspiration for multitudes of females as well as men.

3.4 Táhirih’s Exile and Her Missionary Travels

Before reviewing Táhirih’s travels and her role in teaching and spreading the New Cause, it is worth to state the fact that, unlike all other ‘Letters of the Living,’ she had not received any specific mission from the Báb. However, she was destined to travel to various places and accomplished her mission in the best way possible. Hence, Táhirih’s travels may be regarded as missionary travels.

Táhirih’s conversion raised a tumult in Karbila, since she embarked upon some radical actions that were not acceptable for the narrow-minded society of that era, especially when initiated by a woman. Táhirih did not waste any time. With her resolute conviction and bewildering eloquence, she began to teach the new faith (Shahrokh 2018:5). At first, she informed Siyyid Kazim’s wife regarding the appearance of the Qa’im and she accepted it.

Then she expanded her classes. As mentioned above, many Shi’i clerics attended her classes as she spoke from behind the curtains. Now, she held classes for three separate groups⁵⁸ and it has been stated that she removed the veil from her face in front of males that resulted in a controversy among both the Shi’is and the Shaykhis⁵⁹ (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:178). She even went beyond the religious tradition. There is a

⁵⁸ These groups were: A class for the Babi males, a class for the Babi females, and a class for close and special followers in which she proposed Shaykhi and Babi teachings (MacEoin 2009).

⁵⁹ Some Shi’i clerics believed that the appearance of an unveiled Táhirih was against Islamic law. However, some others thought that even Muslim women did not cover their face in front of the Prophet Muhammad (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:178).

custom among Shi'ism that they should mourn for Imam Hussayn during Muharram. Instead, Táhirih and her sister, Mardiyih celebrated the first day of Muharram which coincides with the birth of the Báb⁶⁰ (Shahrokh 2018:6).

This unconventional behaviour resulted in reactionary responses from the clerics of Karbila who considered such actions as unforgiveable. They reported her actions to the government and demanded her punishment from the authority (Johnson 1982:10-11). Their hostile intentions and persistent pursuits finally placed Táhirih's house under surveillance by Karbila's governmental authority. Táhirih was confined to her house for three months and after a while was told to leave Karbila for Baghdad where again her activities and teaching caused turmoil and finally led to her exile from the Arab world. She then returned to Iran.

3.4.1 Her Trip to Baghdad

Although the Qurratu'l-'Ayn's enemies in Karbila feared both her reputation and brave activities, they were eager to keep her in Karbila to punish her (Johnson 1982:13). However, they did not succeed as Táhirih outmanoeuvred them:

As soon as she received the news that the Báb had called for a conference of the leading Bábís in the province of Khurásán in Írán, she wrote a letter to the Governor and told him that she was leaving Karbilá for Baghdád. Baghdád was still in 'Iráq, but nearer the Iranian border, and therefore on her way to the conference (Johnson 1982: 13).

⁶⁰ Samandar writes in his history that usually in the month of Muharram, Muslims gathered in the house of Siyyid Kazim for the commemoration of the martyrs of Imam Hussayn. However, since the Báb's birthday coincided with the first day of Muharram (which was Imam Hussayn's martyrdom), Táhirih and her sister, Mardiyeh wore colourful clothes and forbid the use of coffee and hookah (since the Báb prohibited its usage). It is clear that their behaviour caused confusion and riots among Shi'i clerics (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:178).

Eventually, Táhirih received the permission from government to leave Karbila for Baghdad. She left the city while hostile adversaries threw stones at her and her companions⁶¹ (Shahrokh 2018:6).

Just like in Karbila, residing in a Mufti's house, presented her with the opportunity to teach the cause in Baghdad. Many people with different backgrounds came to hear her lectures from behind the curtain. Like in Kabila,⁶² she also invited the priest and the clerics to inform them about the new faith, but all of them made an excuse not to participate (Johnson 1982:14).

Being in the Mufti's house for three months, Táhirih left a good impression on him. The Mufti soon was captivated: 'He later admitted that he had never met a woman more pure, nor one who had more knowledge. No woman was braver or more eager to give her life to a cause' (Johnson 1982:14). Some sources indicate that he believed in the New Cause⁶³ and that the Báb sent him a letter and invited him to accept the new faith (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:187). Whether he has accepted the new faith or not, he was attracted to his prisoner's character and spirit.

The judge of Baghdad was not the only person who had been impressed by Táhirih's magic words; there was also a Jewish doctor (Dr Hakim Masih)⁶⁴ 'who was on pilgrimage, and heard about Táhirih's lectures and with curiosity attended a few lectures, accepted its truth and taught large number of Jews in Persia' (Shahrokh 2018:6).

Despite the fact that she freely held her classes in the Mufti's house, she still was a prisoner. However, the moment that she received the Sultan's decree that she was free

⁶¹ 'Her companions were the mother and sister of Mulla Husayn, Shams-i Duha, Mírzá Muḥammad 'Alí, the sixteenth Letter of the Living who had delivered her message to the Báb and so many Arabs and Persian believers who adored her personality' (Johnson 1982:14).

⁶² Táhirih wrote a letter to the high priests of Karbila, inviting and encouraging them to come and discuss the new faith, but they refused to confront Táhirih (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:187).

⁶³ Jenabe Abull-Fazael mentioned that one day the Mufti stated his belief towards Táhirih, when he said, 'Qurat al-Ayn, I am with you, but I am afraid of Ottaman's sword' (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:187).

⁶⁴ 'He was Dr Lutfullah Hakim's grandfather, a physician to Muhammad-Shah' (Shahrokh 2018:6).

to leave the country, she did not waste time and was ready to embark upon her journey to the place that her beloved commanded her to go, i.e. Khurasan.

3.4.2 Her Return to Iran

Táhirih entered the Arab world as a Shaykhi person and left it as a passionate female Babi believer who demonstrated her firm conviction to the New Cause. She and her companions, who were around 30 people including Arab and Persian Babi believers with ten horseman under the command of a general from the judge, commenced their journey to Iran (Johnson 1982:15).

Through the power that she had acquired from the holy words, she started teaching openly in every place that they entered. The first city where they stepped in was Karand, where they stayed for three days: 'It has been said that in this village almost twelve hundred thousand people volunteered to follow Táhirih and do her bidding'⁶⁵ (Johnson 1982:15).

Kermanshah was her second destination. There Táhirih had been welcomed by both religious leaders and politicians. Many clerics and princes had been fascinated by her, and the governor and her family became her followers. However, once again, due to jealousy and enmity of some Shi'i clerics (Ulama), she was forced to leave Kermanshah (Shahrokh 2018:7). However, this time, as the governor became an admirer of Táhirih, they asked her father to remove her from the city. After Táhirih and her contingent had been attacked by a hostile mob and robbed of their property, they had been thrown out of the city without any food and clothing (Johnson 1982:15-16).

In Hamadan, Táhirih stayed for two months. Just like in Kermanshah, the Shi'a clerics opposed her, since she taught the Báb's teachings which challenged the Muslim

⁶⁵ 'In Karand, Táhirih's eloquence and charm impressed the chiefs of that area who offered to place 12,000 armed men under her command to follow her wherever she went. Táhirih blessed them and said to stay at their homes' (Shahrokh 2018:7).

beliefs.⁶⁶ The hostile clerics who feared the governor's reaction, tried to discharge her from the city and finally attained their end when Táhirih's relatives brought her back to her hometown of Qazvin.

3.5 The Impact of Táhirih's Faith on Her Family

Táhirih reluctantly returned to Qazvin as she was eager to go to Khurasan according to the Báb's commandment. She was also planning to go to Tehran and tell the king (Muhammad Shah) about the teachings of the Báb, but this did not happen (Shahrokh 2018:8). Hence, she came back to Qazvin as per her father's will. In contrast to the custom of that era, she decided not to go to her husband. She entered her father's home and openly expressed her adherence to the Báb's teachings in the gathering that was held upon the first night of her arrival (Johnson 1982:16).

The group's reactions were predictable. Her father, Mulla Salih was excited and surprisingly stated that if she herself, with all knowledge, claimed such a great status (to be the Qa'im), he would immediately believe in her but he cannot accept a young man (i.e. the Báb) as a Qa'im (Johnson 1982:17). Her husband and her father-in-Law got furious and started insulting everything that Táhirih admired. Mulla Taqi lost his temper and hit Táhirih several times. However, Táhirih remained calm and said these words which further put her in trouble, 'O Uncle, I see your mouth filling with blood' (Johnson 1982:17).

From that night the relationship between these two families has changed and darkened forever. The gap even got worse when Táhirih refused her husband's order to get back home, since in her opinion this marriage had been finished many years ago⁶⁷ and

⁶⁶ Táhirih believed that the Báb was the Qa'im that the Muslims had been awaiting for so many years (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:182).

⁶⁷ Táhirih said the following to the ladies who came from her husband: 'Tell my proud and false-hearted husband, "If you had really wanted to be a faithful husband and companion to me, you would have hurried to see me in Karbilá, and would have guided my carriage on foot all the way back to your home. If you had done that, I would have awakened you from your sleep of heedlessness while we travelled, and shown you the way to Truth. But this was not meant to be. We have been apart for three years. Neither in this world nor in the next can I ever again be with you. I have put you out of my life forever' (Johnson 1982:17).

transformed to a severe enmity and division, when Mulla Taqi had been killed by a Shaykhi believer⁶⁸ (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:210).

3.6 Táhirih's Departure from Qazvin to Tehran

Táhirih's conversion on the one hand, and her uncle's murder on the other, put her in trouble, since her ex-husband accused her of his father's death. She had been acquitted by Mulla Abdu'llah's confession and her father's intervention, 'but her ex-husband did not accept this confession since he could not forget Táhirih's words to his father during the family gathering at the first night of her arrival in Qazvin. Hence, he succeeded in having her placed under strict guard in her own father's home' (Johnson 1982:18).

Mulla Muhammad (Táhirih's ex-husband) did not contend with the real murderer's blood. He continued his agitations against the Babis in the city. Many innocent Babis were arrested and killed, including Shaykh Salih, the Arab companion of Táhirih (Shahrokh 2018:9). However, his main target was Táhirih, whom he regarded as the true murderer of his father. Intuitively, Táhirih was aware of her ex-husband's intention. Therefore, she sent him a letter. In it, she made a bold prediction, stating:

If my Cause be the Cause of Truth, if the Lord whom I worship be none other than the one true God, He will deliver me from this house before nine days have passed. If God does not deliver me from here you are free to do what you wish with me (Johnson 1982:19).

Some sources mention that Mulla Muhammad hid the letter. Perhaps he was afraid of this bold challenge that his ex-wife offered him. Meanwhile her prediction came true. Despite Mulla Muhammad's observation and guards who controlled Táhirih's place, a representative from Bahá'u'lláh, with the assistance of a lady called Khatun-jan delivered her to Tehran, where she remained for a while as the guest of Bahá'u'lláh who

⁶⁸ This man was Mulla Abdu'llah who could not bear Mulla Taqi's insults towards Siyyid Kazim and Shaykh Ahmad. Therefore, one Friday he stabbed him in the mouth and vitals and escaped (Shahrokh 2018:9).

by then was increasingly regarded as the leader of the Babi community, whilst the Báb was banished to a remote mountainous region and kept in prison by the government (Johnson 1982:19-20).

Táhirih was the guest of Bahá'u'lláh for five or six months and by the same intuition that led her to testify to the truthfulness of Siyyid Kazim's belief and later recognise the Báb's position, also perceived the station of Bahá'u'lláh and the glory of his future (Shahrokh 2018:10).

During these years, according to the commandment of the Báb, who was imprisoned in Mah-Ku and later in Chihriq, the 'Letters of the Living' scattered around the region and were preaching his cause. Táhirih, who by now got rid of her husband and was safe in Bahá'u'lláh's house, decided to go to Mah-Ku. However, Bahá'u'lláh dissuaded her and advised her to go to Khurasan where many prominent Babi leaders such as Quddús and Mulla Husayn were expected to be present at what subsequently became known as the Badasht Conference (Shahrokh 2018:11). Hence, Táhirih prepared for a trip that happened to be a defining episode in her life journey, overshadowing all her other achievements.

3.7 Táhirih's Role in the Badasht Conference⁶⁹

In retrospect, Táhirih's life story and her accomplishments reached its peak during the Badasht Conference. According to Baha'i and non-Baha'i records, during this event, Táhirih did something that was not only regarded unconventional and brave for its time, but also arguably had a great impact on societies and nations for many years to come. There are diverse commentaries on the purpose of the Badasht Conference. Baha'i history sources such as Mohammad Hosseini (2000:238-239) have suggested that this conference had two significant objectives: 1) To initiate a complete break in the Babi

⁶⁹ 'In June-July 1848 over a period of 3 weeks, a number of Bábí leaders met in the village of Badasht at a conference, organized in part and financed by Bahá'u'lláh, centered on Táhirih and Quddús, that set in motion the public existence and promulgation of the Bábí religion. Around eighty men and Táhirih attended the conference. The conference is considered by Bábís and Bahá'ís as a signal moment that demonstrated that Islamic Sharia law had been abrogated and superseded by Bábí law, as well as a key demonstration of the thrust of raising the social position of women' (Maneck 1994:4-5; cf. Momen 1983:157-183; Momen & Lawson 2004:355-356).

community with the Islamic past; and 2) to find a way to free the Báb from the prison of Chiriq. Whilst the first aim was achieved, the second was not. 'Some non-Baha'i sources states that there was no doubt that prominent Babi leaders wanted to plan an armed revolt' (Bayat 1982:118). This assertion does not accord with what subsequently came to pass in the Babi history.

In June/July 1848, according to the Báb's commandment in the village of Badasht, a conference was held that changed the direction of the Babi movement. Bahá'u'lláh, as a respected Babi leader, played a critical role in this conference, both spiritually and logistically.

81 Babi believers were gathered in Badasht for 21 days. 'Bahá'u'lláh rented three gardens. One was for Quddús,⁷⁰ the leader of the Bábís. The second was for Qurratu'l-'Ayn and her servant, and the third was for Himself' (Johnson 1982:23). Bahá'u'lláh discharged effective leadership during this gathering. In effect, he was the head of this gathering. Every day, he revealed a new Tablet and gave prominent Babis each a new title. He himself accepted the name 'Baha' which the Báb had already given to him, and to Qurratu'l-'Ayn he gave the title 'Táhirih' which means the 'pure one.' To Mullá Muḥammad 'Alí-i-Bárfurúshi he gave the title 'Quddús' (Mohammad Hosseini 2000: 253). In retrospect, Bahá'u'lláh seemed to provide a favourable condition for the changes that were set to come.

It is noteworthy that the Badasht Conference was convened at a time when the Babi community was in a state of organisational disorder and spiritual confusion. The imprisonment of the movement's leader, the Báb, and the nationwide hostilities and violent attacks on its members, had caused frustrations and confusion among the zealous growing community of the Babis. Different ideological camps had emerged within the community (Mottahedeh 1997). In this context, the Badasht Conference had three key figures, representing diverse groupings:

⁷⁰ According to Abdul'-Baha's words in *Memorials of the Faithful*, Quddús secretly resided in his garden. Close believers knew his place and referred to him (Abd'ul-Bahá 1971:104).

- Táhirih, the representative of the revolutionary Babis;
- Quddús, the representative of a cautious, if not conservative group; and
- Bahá'u'lláh, representing an impartial group that only focused on the spiritual significance of the moment.

Whilst consultations and controversies filled the conference day after day, there came a watershed moment at the Badasht Conference. Johnson explains:

Then, on a certain day, Bahá'u'lláh was ill and stayed in His tent – and indeed there was a wisdom in this. Quddús came out of his own garden and went immediately to see Bahá'u'lláh. Soon, the others gathered around Bahá'u'lláh's tent – all the believers, except Táhirih. Being a woman, she was not permitted to be in the presence of the men, unless she stayed behind a curtain where no one could see her. While everyone was gathered around Bahá'u'lláh, Táhirih sent a message to Quddús to come to see her in her garden. Quddús refused to go. This did not surprise anyone, but what happened next surprised everyone. Because Quddús would not come to see her, she came to see him! And not only did she come into the garden of Bahá'u'lláh where all the men were – but she came without her veil, and beautifully dressed! Quietly, silently, and with the greatest calm and dignity, Táhirih stepped forward and seated herself beside Quddús (Johnson 1982:24-25).

Then Táhirih, without any attention to the anger of Quddús⁷¹ and fear of others, began speaking words that sounded like the style of the holy Qur'an – and nobody had heard such beautiful words before. Then she bravely addressed all men and said: 'I am the "Blast of the Trumpet." I am the "Call of the Bugle." I am the "Word" which the Qa'im is to utter, the Word which shall put to flight the chiefs and nobles of the earth. This day is

⁷¹ 'In the meantime, Quddús remained seated in his place, but his face was very angry. It seemed that at any moment he would lift the sword in his hand and kill her' (Johnson 1982:25).

the day on which the fetters of the past are burst asunder.’ She concluded her speech with a verse from the Qur’an, ‘Verily, amid gardens and rivers shall the pious dwell in the seat of truth in the presence of the potent King’” (Shahrokh 2018:12).

Even currently (in the 21st century), in many Muslim societies, seating a Muslim woman beside a Muslim man is considered unconventional and unacceptable. Back in the middle of the 19th century, this was regarded as sinful, un-Islamic, and punishable. As such, the gathering’s reaction was somehow familiar and predictable. Some conservative Babis were shocked and confused. One of them, named Abdu’l-Khaliq Isfahani made cuts in his own throat and left the conference with a few others (Shahrokh 2018:11). They assumed Táhirih as the return of Hadrat-e Fatimih, the daughter of Muhammad the prophet (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:255). Therefore, they could not accept that she crossed the line and appeared without the Hijab (veil). Indeed, according to the testimony of Nabil, the authoritative historian of the Babi era, ‘They viewed the unprecedented action of Táhirih in discarding the veil as a signal to transgress the bounds of moderation and to gratify their selfish desires’ (Muhammad-i-Zarandi 1932:298).

However, some others remembered that, according to the Qur’an, Fatimih will remove her veil and will pass through the ‘Righteous Bridge’⁷² on the Resurrection Day. Therefore, they were even more assured and convinced that the New Age had come (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:255).

After Táhirih’s speech, Bahá’u’lláh asked someone to read the Súrih of the Inevitable from the Qur’án, which tells of the Day of Resurrection (Johnson 1982:25). All of these signs (Táhirih’s removing veil, her speech, and Bahá’u’lláh’s reaction) collectively referred to the fact that the Resurrection Day and the much-anticipated Qa’im had appeared and he would revolutionise all spiritual bases and social structures.

⁷² ‘According to Qu’ran in the Day of Resurrection, only righteous can cross from this bridge to Paradise’ (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:255).

Then, after a quarrel that occurred between her and Quddús,⁷³ which had to be peacefully resolved with the interference of Bahá'u'lláh, Táhirih turned to the attendants and said: 'This is the day to be happy. It is the day when everything in the past is forgotten. Let all of us who have shared this great occasion arise and embrace each other' (Johnson 1982:26).

To better contextualise why Táhirih had been selected for such a momentous mission, it is important to highlight some significant points:

- First of all, whilst the duration of the Báb's mission was short – a mere nine years – the Báb did not declare his status all at once. First, he declared himself to be the Báb (the Gate), implying that he was not the Promised One, rather the forerunner to the imminent appearance of the Promised One (the Qa'im). The Báb then announced himself as the anticipated Qa'im, whose coming the Muslims had awaited for well over 12 centuries. There was therefore a confusions among the followers of the Báb about his status and as a corollary whether the Babis were another sect of Islam or a new and independent community following a new religion altogether. Whilst the Báb was in prison, the prominent responsibility of clarifying the Bab's true status had been left on the shoulder of Bahá'u'lláh, Quddús, and Táhirih to resolve. After all, these three were the most prominent Babi leaders who were aware of the Báb's real status.⁷⁴ They were also capable of discharging such a huge and risky mission in the best way possible.
- Before the Conference of Badasht, most people assumed that the Babi movement was a branch of the Shaykhi belief and considered the Báb as an agent or intermediary of Qa'im. Therefore, they have observed the Islamic law and were loyal to its commandments (Mohammad Hosseini 2000). It is evident that a revolutionary action – like that of Táhirih – was an imperative to announce

⁷³ 'According to Baha'i documents there was an argument between Táhirih and Quddús. Táhirih turned her face toward Quddús and said, "You were not very careful about the way you served the Faith in Khurásán." Quddús answered, "I can do as I think best. I do not have to follow the will and the good-pleasure of my fellow disciples"' (Johnson 1982:26).

⁷⁴ Mulla Husayn Boshru'i, also known by the honorific name, *Jináb-i Bábu'i-Báb* was the first person who believed in the Báb, and recognised the Báb as the promised 'Mahdi' of Islam and a Manifestation of God, founding a new independent religion (Muhammad-i-Zarandi 1932:63).

the independence of the Báb's cause. After all, what better way than to use a woman to pronounce it? Symbolically, it was the most powerful means, given that women had been systematically and legally undermined by men up to then.

- The decision of Bahá'u'lláh to utilise a woman for manifesting the abrogation of Islamic law, was one of the greatest decisions that had been made, with two implicit and powerful messages, namely:
 - The appearance of an unveiled Táhirih, who was the only woman attending the Conference of Badasht, was a loud inauguration of the New Era. It meant that from this moment all ties with Islam were severed and Qa'im will have his own specific laws and principles.
 - Choosing a woman for such a momentous responsibility was a vivid testimony that females would no longer be treated as the inferior sex. They would rather fulfil their role in this New Age at par with men.
- Some sources suggest that after the consultation among Bahá'u'lláh, Táhirih, and Quddús, Táhirih volunteered to appear unveiled since, according to the Islamic law, contrary to a man, if a Muslim woman utter blasphemy and then repent, her repentance will be accepted. Therefore, she agreed to declare the independence of the Báb from Islam and in case it caused riots, she would then repent and would get away with it.

The Conference of Badasht had many consequences. The following two consequences were key among them: 1) The appearance of an unveiled Táhirih caused a great test among the Babis. As indicated before, a few of them thought that it would be wrong to throw aside their old laws and therefore they left the conference. The second group turned to Táhirih and accepted her judgement and conduct, whilst the third group followed Quddús and regarded him as the suitable person because Quddús showed clarity of thought and leadership when he disagreed with what Táhirih had done (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:253). Probably they had difficulty to abandon their belief in the superiority of men over women. The fourth group believed that both Quddús and Táhirih were right and that this conference was meant to be a test of their faith. 2) Although Bahá'u'lláh neither took the side of Táhirih nor Quddús, he played a prominent

role during the whole incident. He was the person who accepted all expenses of this gathering, and on that specific day he wisely healed the wounds of the shocked and the confused Babi participants,⁷⁵ bringing reconciliation between Táhirih and Quddús (Shahrokh 2018:12). It is safe to argue that, without him none of these would be possible. Furthermore, it is evident that during the Badasht gathering, especially at that particular day involving the appearance of an unveiled Táhirih, the status of Bahá'u'lláh had also become clear, at least for some Babis who could perceive Bahá'u'lláh's spiritual powers and influence on all opposing groupings.

To further contextualise this matter, it would be helpful to review some important points and synthesise some potentially interrelated events leading to the Badasht Conference. As mentioned before, Táhirih's conduct and radical actions caused turmoil in Baghdad and Karbila. Some Shaykhi⁷⁶ believers complained about her to the Báb. He fully supported her on all occasions (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:191).

Even after the Conference of Badasht, some strict and traditional Babis reported Táhirih's unseemly behaviour to the Báb whilst in prison, accusing Táhirih of pursuing her worldly desires. The Báb, however, replied: 'What am I to say regarding her whom the Tongue of Power and Glory names Táhirih?' (Shahrokh 2018:12).

This was an explicit reference to the title 'Táhirih,' bestowed by Bahá'u'lláh on her. This was also a great testimony from the Báb, pointing to Bahá'u'lláh's outstanding status. As such, in the follow-up processes after the Badasht Conference, a number of confusing subjects, such as the independence of the Babi faith from Islam, the status of women, and the spiritual leadership of Bahá'u'lláh received direct and categoric resolutions. As history subsequently showed, in 1963, Bahá'u'lláh openly declared his own mission, fulfilling the Báb's promise of the appearance of him whom God shall make manifest.

⁷⁵ Mulla Abdu'l Khaliq who cut his throat, through the guidance of Bahá'u'lláh returned to the Conference and was martyred in the Tabarsi castle (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:266).

⁷⁶ Mullá Ahmad Hesari was one of the chief Shaykhi's who could not tolerate Táhirih's revolutionary action (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:191).

Referring to the Conference of Badasht where Táhirih removed her veil from her face and chanted a verse from the Qur'an, Baha'i scholars argue that Táhirih's statement acted as a pioneer statement to the fulfillment of the Qur'anic prophecy⁷⁷ (Johnson 1982:25).

On another occasion, when Táhirih was the guest of Bahá'u'lláh in Tehran, she postponed her appointment with Vahid,⁷⁸ as she has held Abd'ul-Bahá for a long while on her lap. She then proudly told her assistant that she would not leave the protector of the cause to see one of the followers of the cause (Johnson 1982:21).

After 21 days, the Conference that was held under the spiritual leadership of Bahá'u'lláh and was marked by the revolutionary act of Táhirih, and involved the cooperation and participation of Quddús, achieved its most important aim which was the proclaiming of the New Age and the independence of the Babi faith from Islam. According to Momen and Lawson (2004:355-356), 'The conference of Badasht was a signal moment that demonstrated that the Sharia had been abrogated and superseded by Bábí law.' However, some misunderstood this abrogation. The appearance of an unveiled Táhirih induced some of the Babis that they are now free to follow their self-desire and passion. Hence, some adherents of the faith engaged in immoral acts in such a way that they 'openly broke with Islamic practice, either to "gratify their selfish desires," or as a deliberate act to proclaim the new day' (Smith 1996:34).

After the Conference, Táhirih, Quddús, and Bahá'u'lláh turned to Mazindaran, where they were attacked by some hostile people in Niyala. This meeting of them was destined to be the last time they would physically meet (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:258).

⁷⁷ They argued this way, because the Islamic narrative stated that Fatima (the daughter of Muhammad the Prophet), will cross the Sarat Bridge without the veil on the Day of Judgment (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:255).

⁷⁸ 'Vahid was one of the most learned early Babi believers who was later martyred in Nayríz' (Johnson 1982:21).

3.8 Táhirih's Imprisonment in Tehran

When in Niyala, Táhirih had been arrested by the king's officials and was taken back to Tehran to Mahmud-Khan (the mayor of Tehran). Her enemies had hoped that it would be her end, but it was not to be. Táhirih's imprisonment in Mahmud-Khan's house lasted almost two years, and despite his severe restrictions, she left her influence on people who surrounded her, including Mahmud-Khan and his family.

At first, Táhirih was placed in an upstairs room. Therefore, she had to use a ladder each time she went out or came in (Johnson 1982:27). However, later Mahmud-Khan's wife was captivated by Táhirih's inner charm and spirit and so her restrictions were removed (Shahrokh 2018:13). Táhirih had many visitors during this period. From Babi female believers to the Qajar royalty members. One of these princesses, Shams-Jahan, was so much impressed by Táhirih that she started to believe in the Báb and praised Táhirih's beauty, knowledge, and courage (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:276).

Táhirih was also brought to the court of the 18-year-old monarch of Persia, Nasser-al-Din-Shah. The young king was captivated by her beauty and her eloquence, upon which he remarked, 'I like her looks, leave her, and let her be' (Root 1938:14). However, even this statement from the Shah could not stop the prime minister, Mirza Taqi-Khan-i-Amir Kabir to orchestrate the killing of Táhirih, although he postponed her martyrdom (Shahrokh 2018:13).

Most of the sources mention that Nasser-al-Din-Shah sent her a letter and promised her that, if she denied the Báb, he would marry her and would give her an exalted place as the guardian of the ladies of his household (Root 1938:14). The English translation of Táhirih's response which was in the form of a poem, is as follows:

*Kingdom, wealth and ruling be for thee,
Wandering, becoming a poor dervish and calamity be for me.
If that station is good, let it be for thee,
And if this station is bad, I long for it, let it be for me!*

After the Sháh read this, he commented on her wonderful spirit and her courage, stating, 'So far history has not shown such a woman to us' (Root 1938:14).

During these years, Táhirih met with many people and left her magical impression on them. Mahmud-Khan's wife, Tehran's mayoress was also thoroughly attracted to her character. In the wedding ceremony of Kalantar's son, where many ladies of the aristocracy, princesses, and wives of ministers were present, the presence of Táhirih transformed the wedding to a speech gathering. Since she incepted her talk, everybody left music and dancing and spent the rest of the time listening to her (Johnson 1982:28).

The king's mother, Mahd-e Uliya also met Táhirih (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:278). The king stated that she who had a severe enmity towards the Báb, one day invited Táhirih to her court in order to humiliate her. However, contrary to her malicious intention, Táhirih left her good and magical impression on those who were present there. This period of imprisonment has been considered as the most fruitful of Táhirih's life in her service to her faith. It lasted three years as her life was getting close to its end in August 1952, much as she had wished (Johnson 1982:28).

3.9 Táhirih's Martyrdom

Táhirih's martyrdom, much like her life, was not an ordinary death. Curiously she had already foreseen, and she also prepared herself for this cruel death for some time. Similar to the way that he had treated the Báb, so as to secure his 'death sentence' from two famous clerics, the Prime minister⁷⁹ sent two famous priests to visit Táhirih in order to find out what she was teaching. These two priests⁸⁰ visited Táhirih seven times and did their best to dissuade her from the new faith, but none of them succeeded to convince her. Finally, they accused Táhirih of blasphemy and heretical beliefs and sentenced her to death in the name of the holy Qur'an (Johnson 1982:29).

⁷⁹ Mirza Taqi-Khan-i-Amir Kabir was the Prime Minister who issued the commandment that the Báb, Táhirih, and many other Babis should die. Then he visited Táhirih and encouraged her to renounce her belief. However, she proved the rightfulness of the Báb and his teachings eloquently in a way that Amir Kabir admitted that she would convince him to become a Babi if he did not leave the meeting (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:279).

⁸⁰ These two were Mulla Ali Kani and Mulla Muhammad Andarmani (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:291).

According to Abd'ul-Bahá in his 'Memorials of the Faithful,' the morning that King's officials were about to come and take Táhirih, she bathed, dressed her best gown, like a bride who dressed up for her wedding, used rose water and said goodbye to everybody in the house announcing to them that in the evening she was going on a long journey, her prophetic soul had made her aware. She was ready and went with them when they came for her that night. They took her to a garden. The executioners hesitated for a while to carry out the orders issued for her death and even refused to do it. Then they found a negro slave who was drunk; he put a handkerchief into Táhirih's mouth and strangled her. Afterwards they threw her down into a well in the garden, and threw stones and rubbish on her (Abd'ul-Bahá 1971:309-320).

Muhammad-i-Zarandi (1932:518-520) also offers quotations from the mayor's wife and her son who accompanied Táhirih until the last moment of her life that concur with Abd'ul-Bahá's explanation. When the wife of the Kalantar saw Táhirih in a white silk dress and scented with heavenly perfumes, she was surprised. The following are the last conversation between Táhirih and the wife of the Kalantar:

I showed my surprise about the unusual sight. She said, 'I have bathed and am preparing to meet my beloved. I wish to free you from the care and anxiety of my imprisonment.' She said, 'I broke into tears but Táhirih said, "Do not weep, the time of your lamentation has not yet come. The time of my martyrdom is fast approaching. My last wishes are that you send your son with me to make sure they don't force me to divest myself from this attire, and my body should be thrown into a pit and covered with earth and stones. Also please lock the door, and do not let anyone disturb my devotion. This day I shall fast until I am face-to-face with my Beloved. Three days after my

death a woman will come to visit you. Give her this package”
(Shahrokh 2018:14).

According to the wife of Kalantar's, after four hours, governmental police guards came and took Táhirih. The son of the Kalantar went with her as she wished. He was the last person that witnessed her cruel death. Afterwards he narrated the details of the event to her mother:

From our house, we went straight away to the Ílkhání garden, outside the gate of the city. The Chief of police who was drunk called to a servant and said, ‘Take this handkerchief and twist it around the neck of this Bábí woman, and choke her to death. When the servant came near to Táhirih, she said a few words. He suddenly turned around and walked backed and disappeared. Táhirih then asked me to request the Chief of police to use her own silk handkerchief to strangle her and they did what she wished. In the end I buried her body in the pit and filled it with stones (Johnson 1982:32-33).

This was the end of the impressive life of Táhirih, a brave woman who insisted on her belief and eventually sacrificed her life while she was only 36 years old. From the time that she recognised the Báb as the true manifestation till her martyrdom was only nine years, but she carried out her mission in such a dazzling way that has inspired many people regardless of their faith and belief.

3.10 Discussing Táhirih's Writings

Táhirih was a poet, a writer, a theological essayist and a translator of some of the Báb's writings (Bafa 2010). Although most of her manuscripts disappeared or were annihilated, they were for years recited orally (Maneck 1989:5 of 10). As there remained some precious documents from her – both poems and prose – this research will review some of them.

3.10.1 Táhirih's Poems

Before reviewing Táhirih's poems, it is worth to mention that this research does not intend to review all her poems, since there are many authors that discuss it in detail.⁸¹ I will just focus on their general theme and the theology that exists behind them, which once again manifest her intelligence, her knowledge, and deep insight that were unparalleled in that era and distinguished her from her contemporaries – both male and female.

One of the special and obvious features of Táhirih's poems is where she expresses her radical theology and character. Amin Banani who gathered some of her poems, distinguishes between her words and voices. He relates that although her prose is very unique, it generally includes Islamic judicious examinations and analytic interpretations. However, her voices that provide us with a portrait of her person and her passion, do not rely upon Islamic principles,⁸² but rather insist on the inspiration of the spirit for its power and legitimacy (Lee 2016:2-3).

Scrutinising the theme of Táhirih's poems, depicts her tendency to 'mysticism'⁸³ that apparently is not the product of her academic teachings, but rather roots in her personal inspiration and revelation (Lee 2016:3). Here she made use of her mystical experience to justify her actions and break with the Islamic tradition and principles (Lee 2016:3). Obviously, some of the significant places where she parted with Islam, were the abrogation of *Hijab*, the custom of dissimulation,⁸⁴ and attacking the Shi'i clerics'⁸⁵ position that resulted in the opposition of not only the clergy, but also some cautious

⁸¹ Cf. Muhammad Hussein (2000) and Hatcher and Hemmat (2011).

⁸² Although Táhirih's poems somehow tried to break its bond from the Islamic tradition, she repeatedly invoked Qur'anic concepts, for example, she uses terms like *Day of Alast* which was an Islamic statement, but at the same time, she offered a new interpretation for these religious metaphors. In her view, the *Day of Alast* was the day that a new manifestation would appear and announce a new dispensation (Lee 2016:13-14).

⁸³ 'As mentioned before, Táhirih was inclined to Sufi tradition and she used its metaphors in her poems, including wine, fire, light, madness, sexuality, love, etc. All as metaphors for the spirit' (Lee 2016:11). She also referred to 'Fana,' which is a mystical metaphor (Lee 2016:11-12).

⁸⁴ Taqiyyah is the practice of concealing one's belief and foregoing ordinary religious duties when under threat of death or injury (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2020).

⁸⁵ By attacking the Ulama and despotism of this cast, she in fact implied one of the main Baha'i principles, i.e. 'searching the truth' (Lee 2016:7).

and traditional Babis such as Mullá Ahmad Khurasani. His dispute with Táhirih was later dissolved by the Báb himself (Lee 2016:4).

Táhirih proposed concepts that were not discussed previously. For instance, in her poems she discussed the concepts of universal love, equality, social justice, and world peace. The following is one of her poems that includes the abovementioned concepts:

*Look up! Our dawning day draws its first breath!
The world grows light! Our souls begin to glow
No ranting shaykh rules from his pulpit throne
No mosque hawks holiness it does not know
No sham, no pious fraud, no priest commands!
The turban's knot cut to its root below!
No more conjurations! No spells! No ghosts!
Good riddance! We are done with folly's show!
The search for Truth shall drive out ignorance
Equality shall strike the despots low
Let warring ways be banished from the world
Let Justice everywhere its carpet throw
May Friendship ancient hatreds reconcile
May love grow from the seed of love we sow! (Lee 2016:6-7).*

Apart from the concepts mentioned above, which are not even found in Babi accounts and mostly had a Baha'i meaning, she declared that the 'Day of Alast' (*Day of Pre-existence*) is equal to the day of the declaration of the manifestation of God that will abolish all old principles with his resurrection. She embraced a new manifestation of God and called him her true beloved (Lee 2016:5-11).

In the following poem she indicated this new manifestation. The poem is called *The Báb*:

*The arches of his eyes will make the feuds
Of warring faiths and creeds to disappear.
Moses and Jesus in heaven are stunned,
And all the holy ones are lost down here.
Two thousand Muhammads hear thunderbolts,
They wrap themselves in cloaks, tremble in fear (Lee 2016:5).*

Femininity and beauty as the sources of power, were repeatedly used in Táhirih's voices (Lee 2016:15). In the era that patriarchy and the male domain prevailed in the society and penetrated in all aspects of the community, Táhirih vehemently deified male power and conquered it in different circumstances. Her poem with the title *Just let the wind* narrates her awareness and confidence:

*Just let the wind untie my perfumed hair,
my net would capture every wild gazelle.
Just let me paint my flashing eyes with black,
and I would make the world as dark as hell.
Yearning, each dawn, to see my dazzling face,
the heaven lifts its golden looking-glass.
If I should pass a church by chance today,
Christ's own virgins would rush to my gospel (Lee 2016:15).*

The abovementioned poems were just a few examples of her corpus that was translated from Persian into English. John Hatcher and Amrollah Hemmat (2011) have translated 42 of her poems to English that, according to 'Shahbaz Fatheazam's view is one the best collection of Táhirih's corpus due to its simplicity, conjunction and homogeneity in the operation of a poet's mind' (Fatheazam 2015).

3.10.2 Táhirih's Prose

Considering Táhirih's documents reveals that she was a professional author in both Arabic and Persian. It narrates and reaffirms her supernatural ability and her deep conversance on religious concepts of that time.

Obviously, her first treatise was written when she started communicating with Siyyid Kazim. The Baha'i chronicles (cf. Mohammad Hosseini 2000; Johnson 1982) mention that during her communication with Siyyid Kazim, she authored a paper in defence of Shaykh Ahmad's teachings and principles that was so intelligent and brilliant that Siyyid Kazim, in response bestowed the title of Qurratu'l-'Ayn⁸⁶ on her.

After her arrival to Karbila and visiting Mulla Ali Bastami⁸⁷ (one of the 'Letters of the Living'), she translated Qayyumu'l-Asma into Arabic, which was one of the Báb's manuscript that was written in Persian (Shahrokh 2018:5). Pondering on Táhirih's treatises and epistles, depicts that she was thoroughly aware of the statuses of both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

She authored many papers with different motifs about the Báb, ranging from a defence of his legitimacy and his doctrine, relying on holy verses as a main reason for his righteousness, to stating the Bab's grandeur that reveals her thorough understanding of his theology (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:372-373). She applied the traditional conventions of Islamic jurisprudence and theology in these documents (Lee 2016:2).

As it is indicated above, she was fully aware of Bahá'u'lláh's role and his position. She wrote several papers that reflected this awareness. In one of these treatises, she

⁸⁶ Siyyid Kázim wrote her a letter which started with these words: 'O thou who art the solace of mine eyes, and the joy of my heart!' The phrase 'solace of my eyes' in Persian is 'Qurratu'l-'Ayn' – and from then on Zarrín-Táj became known by the name 'Qurratu'l-'Ayn' (Johnson 1982:7).

⁸⁷ 'Mulla Alii-Bastami, the fourth Letter of the Living, was the first Babi who was martyred. When he arrived at Karbila, he brought a copy of Ahsanu'l-Qisas (*The best of stories*) which is also known as Qayyumu'l-Asma, or the commentary on Surih of Joseph with himself. It has one hundred eleven chapters, the first of which was revealed to Mulla Husayn on the night of the Declaration of the Báb and Táhirih discovered that the same verse that she had heard in her dream was in that manuscript' (Shahrokh 2018:5).

repeated the name of Baha and its derivations several times (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:373).

In addition to what is mentioned above, she also authored many public and private epistles. Her personal letters are:

- An epistle in response to Mulla Javad Valliyani's objections who was hindered to recognise the Báb's righteousness due to his shaky belief.
- Letters to her father and uncle that persuaded them to believe in the Báb (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:378).

The followings are some of her public letters and prayers with different motifs:

- Her letter to the Babi believers that persuaded them to go to Khorasan to assist Mulla Hussayn.
- A letter containing encouragement for the Babi followers to love truth and each other.
- Encouraging companions and those who objected the Báb to pray and strive after the path of God.
- Her prayers that are full of mystical and philosophical concepts (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:375-378).

3.11 Summary

It is an undeniable fact that in the history of religion, there were many women who have impressed their societies and made some precious differences. However, Táhirih presented a stunning contrast to her previous models. She played various roles simultaneously. She was a mother, wife, daughter, and an assertive religious innovator who served both Babi and Baha'i faiths through her actions (Maneck 1989:1 of 10). More importantly, she rendered an 'ideal' paradigm of a woman and her real status in the Baha'i faith, during the dispensation in which females were disregarded, scorned, and assumed as an ignorant gender.

Being raised in a prejudiced Muslim family and society could not prevent her from searching the truth. She has received a proper education and then got familiar to the Shaykhi belief. Being Shaykhi without visiting the founders of the Shaykhi belief (Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kazim) and consequently recognising the Báb through a dream, narrated her strong desire and her sharp intuition that was never seen before in the history of religions among women. After believing in the new manifestation, she initiated some vast and odd actions that produced various enemies for her from both inside and outside.

First of all, she removed the Hijab from her face which was an unbearable action for even Babi followers and caused many Babis to report her to the Báb. The situation even got worse when she celebrated the Báb's birthday that coincided with the anniversary of Imam Hussayn's martyrdom. In that incidence, the government got involved and she was obliged to leave the Iraq territory. However, reviewing her life, depicts that she was not afraid of animosity or disapproval of the public. She made use of this exile as she knew that her mission would finish in Iraq. Hence, on her way to Iran, as she entered different cities, she started preaching and teaching the new faith relentlessly. Nothing could stop her on this path, as she knew what she was up to.

Táhirih's return to her birthplace as a Babi woman whose reputation has spread in the Arab world, had created an unpleasant atmosphere before. One can imagine how much the circumstances got worst as she challenged her own family, including her husband and her father-in-law who previously revealed their enmity to Shaykhi and consequently the Babi belief. Táhirih had to choose between her family life and her belief, and of course she chose the latter. But the turmoil that Táhirih had already started could not be silenced. In fact, the killing of her uncle kindled the flame of enmity that had arisen between Táhirih and her ex-husband who was seeking an opportunity to hurt her and her followers. Táhirih was sentenced and could not communicate to her friends. However, eventually everything happened in her favour. She was magically rescued from her domestic prison by Bahá'u'lláh's plan and was brought to Tehran where she got closer to the source of her future changes. Táhirih's mission reached its peak

through the Badasht Conference. She accomplished this tremendous action – removing her Hijab – according to Bahá'u'lláh's plan and definitely with the assistance of Quddús who also received a title from Bahá'u'lláh just like Táhirih. However, as long as worldly peace was not destined for Táhirih, she was once again put into jail. The house of Mahmud-Khan-e Kalantar, was specified as her last residence. However, nobody could resist all her charm and attraction. The mayor's wife was attracted to her and during these more than three years, Táhirih was permitted to accept various visitors including the king of Iran, Naser-Din-Shah who could not succeed in convincing her to abandon her faith and loyalty to the Báb. Her confrontation with two prominent Shi'i clerics during this important visit perhaps resulted in her death sentence.

Pondering on Táhirih's accounts, depicts a magnificent reality about her. Not only was she fully recognised by the Báb as the Promised One, but she also perceived Bahá'u'lláh's position and his future role (Hatcher & Hemmat 2008:8).

Táhirih was the first Muslim woman who suffered martyrdom for her belief. The last almost nine years of her short life spanned from believing in the Báb till the day of her martyrdom. It can be depicted as tragic and eventful. She accomplished her dazzling career in the best way and put her own mark not only on the history of the Baha'i faith, but all over the world.

In the next chapter, I will focus on the status and influence of Paul and Táhirih respectively, in the history of religion.

CHAPTER 4

POSITION, ROLE, AND INFLUENCE IN THE HISTORY

4.1 Introduction

The third chapter studied the events of Táhirih's life as a Muslim woman and showed how her acquaintance with the teachings of the Shaykhi and consequently of the Babi faith led her to abandon her Islamic belief and consequently her family and hometown. It was also stated that her faith in the Báb, her personality, and her radical behaviour brought about dramatic cultural and religious changes to society.

In this chapter, I intend to present the various perspectives regarding Paul and Táhirih and recognise how the different faiths portrayed the status, actions, and influences of both of them. It is clear from the different perspectives that there are contradictory opinions regarding these two historical figures.

I will group the different opinions in two sections: Negative and positive. However, to avoid a judgemental approach and keep the neutrality of the research intact, I will only render these different views and then leave the responsibility of judging and inferring to the reader. I will also include Scriptures and discuss its influences on the history of religions.

In the second section of this chapter, the legacy and the most prominent influences of both Paul and Táhirih will be examined. My emphasis will be on the manner in which they differed from their contemporaries that made their names special in the history of religions.

4.2 Paul's Position and Influence According to Different Religions

There are two opposite views regarding Paul. Some scholars value him in a positive light, while others refer to him as a misguided person who betrayed Jesus by his wrong and misled inferences, teachings, and statements. To better perceive and get familiar

with these two contrary perspectives, this research will examine different Scriptures and discuss both opinions and will include Christian and non-Christians sources, as well as Islamic and Baha'i authors.

4.2.1 Positive Views Regarding Paul the Apostle

The first group of scholars regard Paul as the major player in the Jesus movement. His letters form a significant part of the New Testament, and in terms of belief, his epistles form the foundation of Christian theology. In addition, Paul's epistles inspired many people who later became influential thinkers and reformers such as John Calvin, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and Augustine of Hippo (Duling 2003:139). Augustine has declared and admitted that Paul and his theory, specifically mentioned in his letter to the Romans, was the most influential apostle in Christianity (Taylor 2012:3).

Noss (1949) and Durant (1944) depict Paul as the second founder of Christianity after Jesus Christ and argue that his hardship in the formation and development of Christianity was noticeable and prominent since he proposed the special principles and religious theology that caused Christianity to transform to a universal religion. Beade (1988) also testifies that Paul was the second establisher of Christianity, since he introduced concepts in Christian literature that were both unique and profound in its kind and were later regarded as basis for Christian followers.

Krister Stendahl hails 'Paul as a hero of the introspective conscience' (Stendahl 1963:199) and a hero that still provides answers on human difficulties through his theology that is available in his documents (Stendahl 1963:200). With regard to the motif of leadership in Christianity, John Roulet claims that Paul provides the greatest example of leadership in the history of religions, whose leadership strength is without compare (Roulet n.d.:1).

The renowned German scholar, Adolf Deissmann, declares that '[t]here is no single person since Nero's days who has left such permanent marks on the souls of men as Paul the New Man' (Jackson 2019). James Stalker refers to Paul as one of the most

influential teachers of mankind and adopted his methods of thinking (Jackson 2019). Bruce assumes Paul's conversion as the most significant event after Jesus Christ's resurrection. He and Lyman Abbott both declare that Paul's epistles are 'richly rewarding' in comparison to any other writer (Jackson 2019).

Muslim scholars such as Javad Ayar and Majid Mollayousefi (2013) also acknowledge Paul as the founder of the Christian Church and innovator of the divinity of Jesus Christ on whom all teachings of Jesus Christ are based. Ahmed Deedat concurs, claiming that modern Christianity is not based on Jesus but on the teachings of Paul (Green 2016:1).

Stalker (2007) has proposed a detailed review of Paul's status. He compares Paul to Luther, Calvin, Knox, and Zwingli since all of these men perceived the need of their time and influenced their societies with their actions. However, he avers that Paul was above all of these Reformers, as the impression produced by Paul's life was more than that of the others. Through endowment and inspiration, Paul gave Christianity what it needed at that moment. Stalker also states that Christianity revealed its strength and perfection through Paul who was thoroughly aware of this fact.⁸⁸ Furthermore, he claims that Paul's conversion was an unquestionable testimony of the force of Christianity as its power even overcame the great prejudiced Paul. Hence, through the power that he obtained from Christianity, he transformed to a strong man to manifest the glory and majesty of the Father after Jesus and unfolded secrets that Jesus was supposed to declare⁸⁹ (Stalker 2007). To sum up, according to Stalker, Paul fulfilled Jesus' mission and applied principles of Christianity in the best way that he could.

In contrast with Islamic chronicles who denounce Paul, the Baha'i faith has adopted positive views of him. In Baha'i writings, the divine inspiration of Paul that was fulfilled in

⁸⁸ Paul admits with modesty, 'For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me as chief might Jesus Christ show forth all His long-suffering for an ensample of them who should hereafter believe in Him to everlasting life' (Stalker 2007).

⁸⁹ 'Christ had manifested forth the glory of the Father once for all and completed his atoning work. But this was not enough. It was necessary that the meaning of his appearance should be explained to the world by someone else, and Paul the apostle carried out this mission' (Stalker 2007).

2 Thessalonians 2 had been approved and explained by Effendi (Buck, Cole, & Hatcher 1979).

Bahá'u'lláh, in his epistle of *the Son of the Wolf*, declared that just as Táhirih proclaims the emancipation of the Báb from Islam, Paul announced the separation of Christianity from Judaism. He also approves the doctrine of 'blood atonement' that was proposed by Paul (Buck *et al.* 1979).

In his writings, Abd'ul-Bahá calls Paul 'the great Apostle,' a 'celestial Bird,' a 'divine Philosopher,' and a 'heavenly' doctor among the Jews who suffered for the 'Cause of God' (Buck *et al.* 1979:5). He states that there were many doctors among the Jews, but they were all earthly, whereas only Paul was heavenly since he could fly upwards. However, unfortunately, only a few people duly recognised his position (Buck *et al.* 1979).

Furthermore, he approved some of the changes that Paul introduced into Christianity, including the theory of Paul regarding Jesus' death as a sacrificial atonement, his liberal and non-prejudiced view regarding non-Jews that resulted in facing Gentiles and pagans into Christianity, which transformed it into a universal and very populated faith and more importantly, reaffirmed Paul's egalitarian's view of males and females (Borovicka 2016:45-52). However, among the Baha'is, there are some who, despite Effendi's disapproval of the Nazarenes,⁹⁰ followed their belief and disrespected Paul's character, believing that he deformed the character of the revelation of Christ (Buck *et al.* 1979:6).

To sum up, in the total Baha'i religion, more significantly in Abd'ul-Bahá's writings, Paul's personality and his influences are praised and reviewed with respect.

⁹⁰ 'Nazarenes' is a term that refers to a sect of Jewish Christians who continued to observe the Torah and over time they became similar to the Ebionites who considered themselves Jewish and adherents of the Torah laws (Sim 1998:182; Krauss 2007).

4.2.2 Negative Views regarding Paul the Apostle

Generally, the opposition to Paul dates back to the 1st century and continues till the modern era (Gray 2016). Reviewing various biblical Scriptures, reveals that Paul's foes belonged to different groups. Both Jews and Muslims are currently Paul's arch enemies (Fredriksen 2019; Gray 2016:1). However, the enmity is not confined to these two groups. History reveals that from the beginning of Christianity, among Jewish Christians,⁹¹ there were some people who have questioned Paul's teachings and presumed him to be a misguided apostle. Paul was accused by religious traditionalists too. Just like the Jewish Christians, some Muslims and their historians put emphasis on observing the Jewish principles such as circumcision as a compulsory preliminary condition for becoming a member of their religion. Hence, they condemn Paul for his 'transgression' and ignoring this law (Gray 2016:117)

Anti-Pauline groups are extended to philosophers, historians, and writers as well. Patrick Gray (2016)⁹² supplies various examples of these groups, whose main charges against Paul include that he has perverted Jesus' gospel with his gospel. The followings are brief quotations of these opposite perspectives regarding Paul:⁹³

- According to Grant (1914:375), 'Paul has been treated as a hidebound legalist who adulterated the pure stream of Christian teaching with his alien element.'
- Paul is called a betrayer for many reasons, including neglecting the Jewish law and denigrating the Torah as a path to righteousness, insisting on the irrelevance of circumcision, speaking to Israel as God's enemies, and allegedly making a complete contrast between the Torah and Christ (Jipp 2017:84).
- In some writings Paul is hailed a 'usurper' who had never experienced a vision of Christ and was not correctly listed among the apostles. According to this view, Paul was the 'arch-heretic' of that dispensation (Buck *et al.* 1979:5).
- Some scholars state that 'Paul departed from Jesus' teaching, corrupted them and subverted them' (Gray 2016:1).

⁹¹ According to the New Testament, the apostle James opposed Paul's theory about justification by faith alone (Gray 2016:21).

⁹² Gray reviews different views regarding Paul and his place in history (Gray 2016).

⁹³ Gray (2016) reviews various anti-Pauline perspectives.

- According to George Shaw, Paul ‘does nothing that Jesus would have done, and says nothing that Jesus would have said’ (Gray 2016:3).
- Robert Frost writes that Paul ‘is the fellow who theologizes Christ almost out of Christianity’ (Gray 2016:4).
- Pfeleiderer who suggests that ‘Paul’s theology would not have been what it is, if he had not drawn deeply on Greek wisdom as this was made available to him through the Hellenized Judaism of Alexandria’ (Smith 2013:4).
- Edward Brown⁹⁴ also follows Islamic writers and links the perversion of Christianity to Paul (Buck *et al.* 1979:6).

The abovementioned references are some illustrative cases of negative perspectives and accusations that are proposed regarding Paul, and most of them reach the conclusion that he has distanced himself from Jesus Christ and His real gospel.

In the following section, I will focus on Islamic documents and review some accusations of Muslims against Paul.

4.2.2.1 *Islamic documents*

Before focusing on Islamic documents regarding Paul’s position, we should first discuss a misunderstanding that may arise among Christians regarding Islam as a sacred religion. It is necessary to mention that there are no negative sentences about Jesus Christ or His disciples in any Islamic documents (cf. Beheshti 1979). The Qur’an shows respect for Jesus Christ and adores His disciples. Concerning Paul, there are Muslim historians who, because of many reasons, express negative arguments about him, but these are contrary to the Qur’an. Unfortunately, these interpretations prevail among certain Islamic scholars.

Some Muslim scholars attribute nasty characteristics to Paul, calling him a liar, a traitor who betrayed and abused other disciples’ trust, and one who altered the Christian’s

⁹⁴ ‘Edward Granville Brown (1862-1926) was a British Orientalist, who published manifold articles and books in the areas of history and literatures’ (Buck 2014:17).

foundation with his fake beliefs (Fakhrol Eslam 2012:213). Fakhrol Eslam generalises his opinion to all Muslims and claims that 'Paul is repudiated among Muslims and assumed as a juggler. He appeared in the first century and misled Jesus Christ's disciples and this aberration remained among Christians up until now. Hence, we can assume Paul the chief of misled' (Fakhrol Eslam 2012:213). In his book, Fakhrol Eslam provides many reasons to prove his opinion about Paul (Fakhrol Eslam 2012:213).

Scrutinising Islamic literature reveals that Paul has no status in Muslim manuscripts and all his contributions are ignored. They even go so far as to call him an apostate (Farhat 2011) – a person who occupied Peter's position with his forged theology. They assert that Paul did not understand the essence of Jesus Christ's message, deviated from the right path, and invented his own cult (Fakhrol Eslam 2012).

4.3 Paul's Influence and Legacy in the History of Religions

To better conceive and get familiar with Paul's marks and influence in the history of religion, it would be necessary to take note of the circumstances and conditions where he had grown up as well as the forces that shaped him. Scrutinising these factors will assist us to perceive the process that Paul went through as a fanatic Hellenistic Jew who later transformed to a devoted Christian apostle.

As a Hellenistic Jew who lived among Gentiles, Paul was a man of three worlds: A Jewish, Greek, and Roman world. Hence, he was well qualified to bridge the gap to the Jewish and Gentile Christianity (Shelley 2013:21). In other words, he acquired beneficial aspects of each culture and applied it during his life.

In the following section, I will review impacts of these three worlds on Paul that shaped his character and eventually affected his legacy.

4.4 The Impact of Jewish Faith, Greek, and Roman Culture on Paul the Apostle

As a Jew who had studied under Gamaliel in Jerusalem, Paul was deeply familiar with the doctrines and principles of the Old Testament. This training prepared him for his

future mission among Gentiles. As an apostle of the Gentiles, he expressed and interpreted the Christian teachings among groups who were foreign to these laws and principles, and then connected the basis of the Jewish principles to Jesus' words in such a unique way that it became understandable for these Gentiles. Paul did this (mission) through his conversance with Greek thoughts, literature, and philosophy. In fact, he applied Greek means to convey Christian concepts such as monotheism and the resurrection. Moreover, he was a Roman citizen, and this prepared him for the opportunity to enjoy special freedom and protection of movement and travel within higher levels of society (Shelley 2013:9, 21). With these three privileges, Paul was well qualified to embark on his journey as a Christian.

To better perceive Paul's marks and legacy, this research will categorise it under the following sections.

4.4.1 Paul's Historical/Cultural Legacy

Paul's historical role was decisive in the early Christian movement. First, he championed the Christian mission to the Gentiles and finally won the acceptance of the Jerusalem Church and its pillars. Second, despite various obstacles that Paul encountered during his mission and declaring his gospel, he eventually united the Jews and Gentiles in many instances, and established peace among various converted people. He achieved this purpose via his constant touch with both sides i.e. the mother Church in Jerusalem and the Gentile Church, also gathering money from the Gentile Christians to support the needs of the poor Christians in Judea. Meanwhile he regularly underlined the importance of Christianity in his letters (Dowley 2018:9). Third, Paul's theology, stating that 'I have become all things to all people,' gave him this perception to preach his gospel to all people regardless of their background. Hence, he easily travelled between the synagogue and Greco-Roman societies where the gospel received its greatest response. Fourth, Paul provided an example of self-support (tent-making) for both other apostles and foreigners. I will later discuss how this invoked his opposition. Walker, Norris, Lotz, and Handy (1985:110) summarise his legacy, stating:

By 64...the new religious movement had taken root. Without detracting from the work of Peter, John, and other disciples in the decade following the crucifixion, the credit belongs to Paul. Jesus was indeed the very ground of his being, but Paul had never experienced Jesus' ministry, and his interpretation of it gave Jesus' message a new and unexpected dimension. He transformed the proclamation of God's kingdom to 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matt. 15:24) into a world movement.

4.4.2 Leadership Legacy

Paul was born a leader. His epistles demonstrate that he had many qualities unmatched by the other disciples, except Peter. The following are some of Paul's leadership qualities:

- Boldness and persistence amid attacks and opposition are some of Paul's leadership characteristics. Acts refers to various situations where Paul was mistreated, beaten, and imprisoned by different enemies. Yet he remained bold in declaring the gospel (Ac 16:19-24, 37; Whittington, Pitts, Kageler, & Goodwin 2005:754-755).
- Paul's self-awareness: After his conversion, Paul lived for one aim, and that was to act according to his Lord's words, and this needed making peace with himself in his personal life, which happened during his journey to Arabia.
- In 1 Corinthians 9:26-27, he explained that a true leader perceives his purposes deeply and assumes himself as a means to serve Christianity. He therefore led with a purpose rather than to 'run like someone running aimlessly:' *Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*
- Active and not passive: Paul's letters contain several features that narrate his firm determination to nurse the children of God. Naturally, like a loving parent, this nursing and trainings were mixed with both affection and discipline (1 Th

2:11-12).⁹⁵ Paul's active manner followed a wide variety of transactional and transformational behaviours as well. His epistles reveal that, on some occasions, Paul encourages, rewards, punishes, and avoids all passive action (transactional behaviour) while, at other occasions, he tries to act as a source of inspiration and motivation for his followers (transformational behaviour) (Whittington *et al.* 2005:758-759).

- His capability of changing lives: With this quality, one can measure the effectiveness of Paul's leadership. Previously, it was mentioned that Paul's gospel and trainings caused other people to also become devoted and to make their mark on spreading Christianity⁹⁶ (Whittington *et al.* 2005:759).
- To seize an opportunity, is another quality of Paul's leadership that he extensively utilised during his mission. His epistle to Philemon is the best example of this.
- Paul also benefited from Gentile and pagan cults to develop the Christian belief, despite opposition and attacks that Paul encountered from Jewish-Christian opponents who have decided to malign Paul's character. This helped him to apply various concepts beside the Jewish teachings. Paul's words and gospel penetrated into the hearts of Gentiles and pagans. According to Shelley (2013:23),

[t]hey were local cults based on legends of gods who were reborn every spring: Hercules, Dionysius, Isis, Mithras, and others. Although their cultural beliefs were based on the fertility cycle of nature, the mystery cults embraced a number of sophisticated ideas, including those of immortality, resurrection, and the struggle between good and evil. This superficial similarity to Christian beliefs was useful to Paul in explaining the message of Jesus to pagans.

⁹⁵ 1 Corinthians is one of Paul's epistles that contains both moral and ethical exhortation as well as discipline.

⁹⁶ Priscilla and Aquila, as well as Lydia in Philippi, are examples of Gentile-Christians whose lives were impressed by Paul's way of living.

- Pure motives that consequently resulted in pure methods:⁹⁷ Being influential, sincere, and affectionate, and possessing so many other traits, can be counted as Paul's leadership legacy. However, in my perspective, above all, the highest level of Paul's legacy is creating a model that is *worthy to be imitated*: 'Paul created a self-perpetuating model of leadership. His leadership style was one that intentionally created other leaders, who in turn created other leaders' (Whittington *et al.* 2005:753). When Paul entered a city and won through proclaiming the gospel, he encouraged believers to found a Church. Then, through his epistles that contained guidelines and exhortations, he prepared the proselytised to follow the new gospel in his absence. In other words, Paul raised people who imitated his method and style in teachings and then became ready to raise other believers who were also able to present guidelines for the maturation of other believers. This is definitely the highest level of leadership, to teach others in order to become leaders themselves (Whittington *et al.* 2005:752-753). In 2 Thessalonians 3:9, Philippians 3:17, and 4:9, Paul introduced himself as a model that is worthy to be imitated, and in doing so, the believers also become examples for others to follow, making it a continuous process.

4.4.3 Geographical Legacy

Without any exaggeration or detracting the work of Peter or other apostles, for various reasons Christianity owes its most geographical development to Paul. A few decades after Jesus' crucifixion, through Paul's effort and persistence, Christianity was recognised by the Roman authorities as a predominantly Gentile movement (Whittington *et al.* 2005:751). Additionally, Paul brought Christianity to various territories. From Asia Minor to Southwestern Asia, and from Syria to Italy in Europe. In fact, it was Paul who, for the first time, brought the gospel to a European territory – Macedonia (Duling 2003:208).

According to historical documents, through Paul's hardship, the religious documents that were in Aramaic, were translated to Greek (Whittington *et al.* 2005:751). Also, in less than ten years, Paul established the Church in four provinces of the Roman

⁹⁷ Paul's ultimate desire was to do what Jesus called him to do (Whittington *et al.* 2005:760).

Empire: Galatia, Achaia, Asia, and Macedonia in Philippi (Duling 2003:208). However, Paul's geographical achievement was not restricted to territorial or physical spaces. His achievements through his missionary travels in the Roman Empire, and his epistles depict that Paul kept to two main rules in spreading the gospel: *Extension and strengthening* – and he performed these acts via two means: Travel and responding to questions.

Paul's journeys, specifically his second and third trips, illustrate that he was not satisfied with geographical expansion alone. When he succeeded in his preaching and attracted hearts of believers and founded the Church (*extension*), he felt responsible to also support them spiritually (*strengthening*). This is the reason why he returned to cities that he had visited before. The following is a short implication of this motif:

Paul incepted his second journey by revisiting churches in the founding of which he had taken part. Beginning at Antioch and proceeding in a northwesterly direction, he did this work in Syria, Cilicia and other parts, till he reached the center of Asia Minor, where the primary object of his journey was completed (Stalker 2007).

Hence, it is not surprising when one reviews Paul's travels, to discern that he did not restrict his mission to opening new spots, as his whole mission was about planting, watering, and organising the Churches and communities that he had established before (Grant 1914:376). As it is implied above, he did this through physical visits and answering their queries with his epistles. Tarsus, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Antioch, Lystra, and Traos are examples of places that Paul visited more than once. The epistles to the Ephesians, Corinthians, and Thessalonians are some of Paul letters that he wrote and proposed important Christological concepts and theology.

4.4.4 Theological Legacy

The imprint that Paul left on the theology of Christianity is undeniable, while some researchers believe that the Pauline theology is even responsible for radical changes in

the last centuries (Farnell 2005:190). Paul's Christology forms the centre of his theological thoughts. The followings are some of his concepts:

- Paul is the first to raise Christ to the position of God. In Philippians 2:5-7, he stated: *In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.* Hence, according to Paul, Jesus Christ had two sides. As the Messenger of God connected to the divine world, He accepted the form of God and reflected His features, and as His mission was to guide humanity, He appeared in the form of a human being.
- Justification can only be obtained through God's grace and not through human merit. In Romans 11:5-6 he explained this concept vividly: *So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.*
- The theory of atonement: Paul claimed that Jesus Christ sacrificed his life in order to redeem us from the curse of the Jewish law (Gal 3:13-14).
- The function of the Jewish law was to be the Jews' guardian till Christ came. After Christ has come, the guardian was no longer needed or necessary (Gal 3:24-25).
- The salvation that Paul promised in his epistles was an individual, timeless, and spiritual one (Smith 2013:5).
- Paul placed the entire value of a Christian's faith upon the resurrection. According to him, in 1 Corinthians 15:23-30,⁹⁸ if there is no resurrection, there is no reason to worry about living this life well (Byler 2016:60-61).

⁹⁸ *But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he 'has put everything under his feet.' Now when it says that 'everything' has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them? And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour?*

- The heart of Paul's theology is not only 'justification by faith alone,' but also 'participation in faith, or as Sanders proposed being in Christ' (Moore 2014:2-3). I will elaborate on this in the next chapter.

In summary, what made Paul's theology special and sometimes controversial is his use of a different tone and style. On most occasions, Paul stated theological concepts in a new form, including examples and comparisons which were inductive or by analogy. Perhaps 1 Corinthians is one of the best examples where one can discover the meaning of 'resurrection' via these abovementioned forms.

4.4.5 Ethical Legacy

According to Bruce (1977:15), Paul's letters are rich and rewarding and also depict some other aspects of his legacy. For 33 years, Paul taught valuable ethical lessons to his addressees that would act as the source of inspiration for multitudes and generations. Being persistent and patient in difficulties, courageous, humble, and uncompromising, particularly in defence of Gentile-Christian rights, yielding, being moral, and ethical⁹⁹ in preaching his gospel and forgiveness, are only a brief collection of Paul's ethical traits (Jackson 2019).

In Romans, Paul tried to stabilise and undergird respect and mutual understanding as two significant features, between the Jews and Gentile-Christians (Rm 14-16). As indicated, Paul was a man of three worlds: Jewish, Greek, and Roman. Therefore, he was a leader who was uniquely qualified to bridge the gap between Jewish and Gentile Christianity (Shelley 2013:21). He did this through various actions. After his conversion, Paul retained certain features of these three worlds that shaped his identity. He also added a new identity, and that was 'to be in Christ.' In Ephesians, Paul used this expression 27 times. He also used this statement in Romans 8:1-2 where he averred: *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.* Hence, 'to be in Christ' (according to Paul) is a common point between

⁹⁹ The epistle to Philemon illustrated Paul's morality in the best way (Jackson 2019).

the Jews and Gentiles. In other words, despite different social, racial, and cultural identities, faith in Jesus Christ will gather all the believers under the same flag and eliminate all their differences. This new approach reprimanded those who felt superior over others through their race and religion, and taught them that ethnicity and spirituality matter to God.

It may be argued that Paul's ethical legacy mostly manifested itself in the domain of the Jewish law. Like Jesus Christ, Paul withdrew from the ceremonial requirements of the law and focused on the superiority of moral laws. Indeed, Paul followed his Lord's style and eliminated the formal requirements of the law and instead rationalised and spiritualised its content¹⁰⁰ (Gould 1899:184-186).

4.5 Táhirih's Position and Influences According to Different Religions

While describing the position of Táhirih in the history of religions, it is enough to mention that she gained her privilege to be admired by the founder of the Babi faith as well as Bahá'u'lláh, Abd'ul-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi, the guardian of the Baha'i faith. Moreover, although it has not been a long time since her martyrdom, she is well-known all over the world and is even admired by those who oppose her beliefs and theology (Root 1938:1).

Different manuscripts reveal that there are various perspectives regarding Táhirih. For the sake of brevity, this research will allude to some of these statements under three categories.

¹⁰⁰ The main controversy between Paul and Jerusalem was about two matters. They reached an agreement that circumcision should not be demanded for Gentile-Christians, but they should abstain from things (foods) that were offered to idols. However, Paul simply taught that the domain of morals did not extend to the matter of food and that to eat things offered in sacrifice to idols was morally quite an indifferent matter (Gould 1899:186).

4.5.1 Within Religious Scriptures

4.5.1.1 *The word of four central figures of the Baha'i faith*

The 'four central figures' of the Baha'i faith are the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, Abd'ul-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi, who each had a unique role in the Apostolic Age of the Baha'i faith. Táhirih had the privilege of meeting two of them in person. According to the Baha'i historians, although Táhirih did not succeed to visit her beloved (the Báb), a kind of spiritual mutual tie was created between them. It had been recorded that those Babis who could not endure Táhirih's radical behaviour, such as opposing the custom of *Taqiyyah* and abolishing the veil or Hijab, wrote to the Báb and complained about her. The following are words that the Báb applied to explain Táhirih's status which indicates her as a plenipotentiary: 'Be aware that she believed in her God and opposed her soul, fearing the justice of God and observing the day of the Lord's visit. What is revealed in the verses, the news, and the works is from us. I don't want anyone to deny her, even if her words are far from your mind...it is incumbent for everyone to obey her.' There also remained various tablets from the Báb, issued in honour of Táhirih, that allude to her astonishing power in attracting great clerics (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:317). According to the Báb, Táhirih was a symbol of righteousness, knowledge, and wisdom, and the Báb repeated this several times in his documents (Lawson 1990).

Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Baha'i faith, defended Táhirih on various occasions from the beginning of the Babi dispensation. His house became her residence for some while, and he also praised her personality and bestowed upon her the title of Táhirih at the Badasht Conference (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:250).

In his two books (*Memorials of the Faithful* 1971:191-204; *A Traveler's Narrative* 1890:32-34), Abd'ul-Bahá, the interpreter of the word of God, placed her status on the level of Sarah, the virgin Mary, and Fatimih (Shahrokh 2018:2), and he allocated a separate chapter to her. In other instances, Abd'ul-Bahá introduced her as a sample of courage, magnanimity, and a true heroine that, through her tremendous knowledge, vanquished all learned men in controversies (Root 1938:1).

Shoghi Effendi portrayed 'Táhirih as a young poet from a prominent family, the owner of beauty and rhetoric enchanting, invincible spirit, bold theories and extremely courageous behavior'¹⁰¹ (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:5).

4.5.1.2 *Other Baha'i historians*

Beside the abovementioned documents, Táhirih's life, actions, and accomplishments had been considered by different historians. There are ample quotations from first Babi believers who visited her or those who were in touch with these people. Mohammad Hosseini (2000), Nabil's narrative (Zarandi 1932), Root's history (Root 1938), and Fadil Mazandarani (1944) are just a few examples of these historic records that studied Táhirih and offered insightful information regarding her short but inspiring life.

The following is written under the signature of Jináb-i-Adib,¹⁰² where he states that he was an intimate friend of Quli who came with Táhirih to Tehran. I only quote the part about Táhirih's martyrdom:

[I]n every meeting held in Tehrán, both women and men were speaking in Táhirih's praise and honor. Many high-born, loving women came to her and were filled with joy because of her hopeful words. All were attracted by her eloquence and people of all classes, even the royalty and ministers of state on entering her presence humbly bowed before her. Her speeches and explanations were spread all over Iran, and no one had the least doubt about her erudition and scientific knowledge (Root 1938:16).

Laura Barney, a leading American Baha'i scholar and philanthropist, in her book *God's heroes: A drama in five acts* (Barney 1910) allocates chapters to Táhirih, praises her, and assumes her as an example of 'the disciple of truth' (Barney 1910:viii), who

¹⁰¹ Effendi (1944) renders a detail biography of Táhirih's life and her influences.

¹⁰² This was the old and famous Bahá'í teacher who had visited Bahá'u'lláh in 'Akká. Formerly, Jináb-i-Adib had been a university professor and later he founded the Tarbiyat school for boys in Tehran. His father was a teacher in the family of Fath 'Ali Sháh (Root 1938:16).

succeeded in the publication of the truth, despite the violence and persecution that she received from enemies' (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:34).

4.5.2 Non-Baha'i Documents

Reviewing different documents regarding Táhirih, depicts that even those who had enmity with the Báb and the Baha'i faith, could not stop adorning Táhirih's character, her role, and influence on spreading the Babi faith, as well as her promotion on improving the position of a woman. Through the volumes written by the opponents that mingled prejudice and superstitions regarding the Babi faith, there is a repeated admission to an incredible woman who was unique in her time. According to a non-Baha'i scholar, Táhirih's understanding and ability to interpret philosophy, Arab literature, and religious science, particularly in jurisprudence principles, were unparalleled (Sarafraz 2010). Even Ahmad Kasravi, an Iranian Muslim historian, who never spoke well of the Babi and the Baha'i faith, wrote these words about Táhirih: 'This educated woman was considered one of the wise characters of her era' (Sarafraz 2010) and a 'woman who is undoubtedly one of the pioneers of the Iranian women's movement for freedom and legal equality. A woman who was raised in the Babi School and became its symbol' (Sarafraz 2010).

Mahmood Kavir wrote these words about Táhirih:

Táhirih was one of the pioneers of religious reform and the messenger of women's liberation. A flower that was filled with salt and blood in the salt marshes of Iran. Táhirih is the first Iranian woman to appear on the social life scene as a woman...The first women who broke decayed and painful historical traditions (Sarafraz 2010).

Táhirih's fame was not limited to the Eastern world either. There are ample articles, books, and even films that review Táhirih's life and narrate her eloquences and impressions from various perspectives. Almost all of these sources are in agreement that she was always bright and enthusiastic and even when she was in grave danger herself,

she was inspiring others with courage. Besides being a martyr, she was a smiling, joyful young woman (Root 1938:15).

Among the Western scholars of the Qajar era, there are some who resided in Tehran and followed the incidents of the Babi faith, including Táhirih's activities and her martyrdom. A French diplomat, le Comte de Gobineau, studied the Babi movement and has written about Táhirih, describing her as follows:

Táhirih (Qurrat al-'Ayn) was considered the most amazing and interesting figure of this religion...She was considered one of the most scientific figures of Babi...She was the one who stood up in the plain of Badasht against the hijab and bigamy...The Muslims were upset and many others came out in support (Root 1938:18).

Lord Curzon, who was not very happy with the situation of the Iranians at that time, wrote about Táhirih: 'The story of this woman is the saddest event in the history of contemporary history' (Sarafraz 2010). Moreover, in his book, *Persia and Persian questions*, Curzon states,

Beauty and the female sex also lent their consecration to the new creed, and the heroism of the lovely but ill-fated poetess of Qazvin, Zarrin-Taj (Crown of Gold) or Qurratu'l-'Ayn (Solace of the Eyes), who throwing off the veil, carried the missionary torch far and wide, is one of the most affecting episodes in modern history (Curzon 2005:497).

Naser-al-Din Shah Qajar's doctor, Dr Polak, who witnessed Táhirih's execution, testified that 'she was considered one of the "most scientific women in the country" in her speech' (Root 1938:15). Root (1938:18) goes on: 'Sir Francis Younghusband in his book "The Gleam," pages 202, 203, comments: "Almost the most remarkable figure in the whole Movement was the poetess, Qurratu'l-'Ayn".'

Sarah Bernhart, a French actress has requested the playwright, Catulle Mendes to write a dramatised version of Táhirih's life. Catulle Mendes describes Táhirih as 'the Persian Joan of Arc, the leader of emancipation for women of the Orient who bore resemblance both to the mediaeval Heloise and the neo-platonic Hypatia' (Maneck 1989:7). According to Denis Makayoun, Táhirih was the most influential figure in the Báb movement after Siyyid Ali Mohammad Báb (MacEoin 2009:6).

Sulaymán Názim Big, the great author and poet of Turkey said in his book *Násiri'd-Din Sháh and the Bábis*: 'O Táhirih, you are worth a thousand Násiri'd-Din Sháhs!' (Root 1938:18). Ali Al-Wardi, a professor of sociology at Baghdad University, claims that, due to her utmost beauty, excessive intelligence, strength of character, and eloquent language, Táhirih was one of the people who have changed the course of history. Al-Wardi writes that 'Táhirih did not belong to her time. She appeared at least a hundred years early. Perhaps if she had appeared in our time, she would have been the greatest lady of the Christianity in the twentieth century' (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:6).

Among Arab personalities and scholars, there were also people who visited Táhirih and admired her. Shahab al-Din Mahmud Alusi, the Mufti of Baghdad, used Táhirih's presence while she resided in Baghdad, testified to her purity, piety, knowledge, and wisdom, orally and in his writings (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:6). Allameh Mohammad Iqbal Lahori calls her 'Khatun Ajam'¹⁰³ and 'a princess of Qajar,' while Shams Jahan calls her 'lady of the world' which narrates their respect and admiration to Táhirih (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:6).

Marianna Hainisch of Vienna, the mother of the President of Austria, stated these words regarding Táhirih:

The greatest ideal of womanhood all my life has been Táhirih
(Qurratu'l-'Ayn) of Qazvin, Irán. I was only seventeen years old when

¹⁰³ It means the 'lady of Persia.' 'Khatoon' was a title that was basically given to noble ladies, as it was a title showing respect.

I heard of her life and her martyrdom, but I said: 'I shall try to do for the women of Austria what Táhirih gave her life to do for women of Persia. No woman in Austria has done so much for freedom and education for women as has Mrs Hainisch' (Shahrokh 2018:2).

Edward Browne, the Cambridge University Orientalist wrote about Táhirih:

The appearance of such a woman as Kurratu'l-'Ayn is in any country and any age a rare phenomenon, but in such a country as Persia it is a prodigy – nay, almost a miracle. Alike in virtue of her marvellous beauty, her rare intellectual gifts, her fervid eloquence, her fearless devotion, and her glorious martyrdom, she stands forth incomparable and immortal amidst her countrywomen. Had the Bábí religion no other claim to greatness, this were sufficient – that it produced a heroine like Kurratu'l-'Ayn (Maneck 1989:7 of 10).

However, among Muslim polemicists, who assumed women as secondary sex citizens, humiliated them, denied them education, and subdued them, Táhirih was portrayed differently. Through their perspectives, she was the paradigm of the dangerous and seductive whore, an object-lesson in the dangers of allowing women too much freedom (Maneck 1989:7 of 10). However, as indicated before, among these antagonist, some official historians of the Qajar court, like Sepehr, Hedayat, and Haghghat Negar, despite their hostility to the Babi faith and Táhirih, admitted to her fabulous beauty, perfection, and her power of argument and reasoning (Muhammad Hossein 2000:6).

Chin, a British cleric has claimed that Táhirih was the innovator of social reform in Iran. He states: 'The seed that Táhirih sowed in the Islamic land is gradually turning green, and the result will be known one or two centuries later. The honor of this great Iranian lady is that social reforms of Iran were initiated by her for the first time' (Sarafraz 2010). Gerard Ajan, a member of the French Academy in the late 19th century argues: 'In the Christian world, there were women who did great things side by side with men, and

Qurat al-Ain alone in the Islamic world' (Sarafraz 2010). Lowell Johnson, an American-South African author, in his book on Táhirih, describes her status with these words: 'For a long time in Iran women and mothers have been telling their daughters that if you want to be like Táhirih, you have to study. Táhirih was a symbol of perfection and beauty' (Sarafraz 2010).

All the abovementioned opinions regarding Táhirih point to an astonishing fact which is her unquestionable fame among people – people with different tendencies. This again narrates her deep impression and social impact during a short period of time. In the following section, her influence and legacy will be discussed more elaboratively.

4.6 Táhirih's Legacy in History

This research does not intend to review the history of Iran and the condition of women in that country, as that would be outside the scope of the main discussion. However, to understand Táhirih's legacy, what she left behind, her impact and the value of her actions, one should contextualise her life within the social and cultural circumstances of Iran in the 19th century. In what follows, I will categorise her accomplishments.

4.6.1 Ethical Legacy

Almost all documents highlight Táhirih's tremendous and boundless courage. Abdu'l Bahá expresses an eloquent tribute to her: 'Among the women of our own age is Qurratu'l-'Ayn, the daughter of a Muhammadan priest. At the time of the appearance of the Báb she showed such tremendous courage and power that all who heard her were astonished' (Root 1938:1).

While she resided in the Mufti's house in Baghdad, the son of the Mufti admired Táhirih's character and noted the following traits of her: 'Beside her immeasurable knowledge, I see in her such knowledge, education, politeness and good character as I have not seen in any great men of this century' (Root 1938:8). Nabil refers to her as follows in *The dawn-breakers*, 'When Táhirih entered Kirmanshah, Princes, 'ulamás and government officials who hastened to visit her, were greatly impressed by her

eloquence, her fearlessness, her extensive knowledge and the force of her character' (Root 1938:8).

During her imprisonment in Kalantar's home in Tehran, one of the Qajar Princesses succeeded to meet her and was enchanted by her. She explained that 'Táhirih seemed radiantly happy.' According to historic records, everyone who spoke to her and everywhere that her name was mentioned, her name was synonymous with enthusiasm and joy in religion that astonished her addressees, as they could not fathom the source of this happiness (Root 1938:14).

Chastity and purity were also virtues of Táhirih. It is sufficient to mention that the title of Táhirih (*pure*) that was bestowed upon her by Bahá'u'lláh underscores this fact (Shahrokh2018:1). Susan Maneck (1989:2 of 10) also refers to Táhirih's qualities: Táhirih presented the Baha'is with a paradigm of the ideal woman who is 'assertive, intelligent, eloquent, passionately devoted to causes, and yet, still beautiful' (Maneck 1989:2 of 10).

4.6.2 Cultural Legacy

Táhirih was one of the forerunners of cultural reforms in Iran, despite the fact that she was raised in a religiously fundamentalist family, as was the case with women in the 19th-century Iran.¹⁰⁴ However, Táhirih tore all these obstacles apart. As a child, she manifested such a great intelligence that her father could not prevent her from studying, which was in contrast to the social and religious norms of that time. Her next step was teaching religious courses behind the curtain. According to Baha'i documents and historic records, in the era that women were forced to stay home and raise children, Táhirih spurned this tradition and incepted her classes for both male and female students in her father's school¹⁰⁵ (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:110-111).

¹⁰⁴ In the 19th century, women were considered as means of production. They were obliged to give in to prearranged marriages and were deprived from studying and learning (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:95).

¹⁰⁵ Mulla Salih, Táhirih's father was the founder of the Salehieh school. Táhirih studied Islamic teachings in this school as well as education. She has been teaching at that great Islamic university for two years (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:110).

However, this did not quench her thirst completely. Therefore, as soon as she heard about Shaykhi and later the new faith, she left her husband and children and went to Iraq to visit Siyyid Kazim, which was considered to be an extraordinary act, in direct opposition to her social and religious culture.

She continued her anti-cultural behaviour after her arrival in Iraq. There she won the approval of Siyyid Kazim's adherents, resided in Siyyid's house, and held her classes in place of those that were offered by the Shaykhi leader, which was much to the chagrin of Kazim's son, Mullá Ahmad who wished to succeed his father (Maneck 1989:2 of 10). All these changes were considered as an invasion of the male domain and it was in contrast to the cultural tradition of that time.

4.6.3 Freedom Legacy

Arguably, the main benefit and consequence of Táhirih's cultural changes were her quest for freedom. This freedom can be considered from various perspectives. As stated before, in a society where seeing the shadow of a women was considered a great sin, Táhirih removed her veil on different occasions and disregarded this socio-religious custom. Hence, she was one of the first women fighters to stand up for her rights and freedom from the veil, and she can be considered to be one of the founders of the abolition of the hijab (Sarafraz 2010). However, this action (removing the hijab) was interpreted as a dangerous and seductive manner by the Muslim polemicists (Maneck 1989:7 of 10).

Abd'ul-Bahá describes this matter in one of his lectures as follows:

She threw aside her veil despite the immemorial custom of the women of Irán, and although it was considered impolite to speak with men, this heroic woman carried on controversies with the most learned men, and in every meeting she vanquished them. The Iránian Government took her prisoner; she was stoned in the streets, anathematized, exiled from town to town, threatened with death, but

she never failed in her determination to work for the freedom of her sisters. She bore persecution and suffering with the greatest heroism; even in prison she gained believers. To a Minister of Irán, in whose house she was imprisoned, she said: 'You can kill me as soon as you like but you cannot stop the emancipation of women.' At last the end of her tragic life came; she was carried into a garden and strangled. However, she put on her very best robes as if she were going to join a bridal party. With such magnanimity and courage she gave her life, startling and enchanting all who saw her. She was truly a great heroine (Root 1938:1).

Another aspect of Táhirih's quest for liberty was freedom from the religious principles that rooted in past faiths (Islam and others). In Karbila, Táhirih began some innovations. Without any direct instruction from the Báb, she felt that it was time to cast off some religious traditions including dissimulation and the abrogation of the Islamic law (the *shari'a*). This was while the Báb admonished the Babis to strictly observe the Shi'i convention of *Taqiyyah* (Lee 2016:4).

Pondering on Táhirih's actions and the bonds that she tore apart, points to various facts. In contrast to most believers, she recognised the Báb as an independent manifestation. She was fully aware of the changes that were about to occur, and above all, in every era, there are some characters that do not wait for commands. They themselves become the source of changes without much hesitation, like Táhirih.

History may remember Táhirih as the first woman who suffered martyrdom for the sake of the emancipation of women. As mentioned above: 'On one account, her last words have been recorded as follows: "You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women"' (Johnson 1982:28).

4.6.4 Womanhood/Femininity Legacy

Táhirih manifested a unique appearance of an ideal woman in a patriarchal society where women were humiliated for decades. She accomplished this aim through her feminine power (Lee 2016:15). According to Lee (2016), Táhirih discarded her traditional roles as daughter, wife, and mother, invaded the male space and became an effective social change agent and a leader of the Babi community in her own right. These were actions that were unprecedented even among Baha'i heroines, including Bahiyih Khanum, the daughter of Bahá'u'lláh, known as the Greatest Holy Leaf; Khadijih Bagum, the wife of the Báb; Asiyih Khanum, the wife of Bahá'u'lláh; and Munirih Khanum, the wife of Abd'ul-Bahá. Unlike Táhirih, all these female characters were loyal to their traditional roles as daughter, mother, and wife (Lee 2016:1-2).

Táhirih invaded the male domain as an educated woman, yet she remained loyal to her gender. She was exactly aware of her capabilities as a woman and declared that through this strength, she could subdue the world and she did. Her feminine power had two distinct sides i.e. physical beauty and inner strength.

Reviewing certain events of Táhirih's life, depicts that she never relied on her physical beauty to achieve her goals and serve the new faith, even when she could. It is stated before that Naser-al-Din Shah, the then sitting monarch, was attracted to both her looks as well as her modesty and dignity. Even though he promised her the highest position in his harem, she refused. She was determined to reveal attributes that had not been recognised before and she succeeded.

As already mentioned above, the mother of the President of Austria, said in 1925:

The greatest ideal of womanhood all my life has been Táhirih (Qurratu'l-'Ayn) of Qazvín, Írán. I was only seventeen years old when I heard of her life and her martyrdom, but I said: 'I shall try to do for the women of Austria what Táhirih gave her life to do for women of Persia' (Johnson 1982:32-33).

Mahmood Kavir also declared: 'Táhirih is the first Iranian woman to appear on the social life scene as a woman' (Sarafraz 2010).

4.6.5 Leadership Legacy

Like Paul, Táhirih represented an impressive form of leadership. As mentioned before, when she went to Karbila, she held her religious classes in Siyyid Kazim's house. Most of them were learned clerics who accepted Táhirih as a divine theological source after Siyyid Kazim, and considered her leadership as incumbent¹⁰⁶ (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:170-171). However, among them were those who were claimants of the leadership after Siyyid Kazim and who opposed her radical actions.¹⁰⁷

According to the Baha'i Scriptures, in Badasht, Táhirih and Quddús acted pre-arranged roles according to Bahá'u'lláh's guidance and leadership, when she was appointed to take the initiative and appear unveiled to address the audience with her fiery speech, including Quddús.

It was a very extraordinary thing for a woman to be chosen to announce the New Age to the followers of the Báb. It showed, indeed, that the New Age was to be completely different from the past. It showed that the discrimination between sexes was to end, and that women should be enabled to reveal their hidden capabilities.

Táhirih's leadership resulted from various sources. First of all, the Báb himself gave her this authority and advised others to fully obey her.¹⁰⁸ Second, as it has been stated before, much like Paul, Táhirih differed from her contemporaries in many ways. She was not that kind of personality to wait for instruction and follow others. According to her brother's testimony, when Táhirih was present in a meeting or even a family gathering, nobody dared to speak a word, not even the learned men. Her eloquence, knowledge,

¹⁰⁶ Shaykh Mohammad Shabal Baghdadi, Shaykh Salih Karimi, Siyyid Ahmad Yazdi, Siyyid Mohammad Bikani, Shaykh Sultan Karbala'i, and Mullah Ibrahim Mahallati can be named (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:172).

¹⁰⁷ Mirza Hassan Gohar and Mirza Mohit-e Kermani assumed themselves as the successors of Siyyid Kazim (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:171).

¹⁰⁸ 'There are various sources from the Báb that indicated Táhirih's authority' (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:191-192).

and character all intimidated even great clerics of that era and they all shied away and hesitated to opine in her presence (Sarafraz 2010).

4.6.6 Literature Legacy

Perhaps Táhirih's most important legacy is the corpus of literature left by her. Her writings, prose, and poems reveal much about her. Among what remained from her, there are many tablets and poems that contained her profound and mystical theology. Today, she is mostly known for her inspiring and mystical poems. Although most of her manuscripts disappeared, the remnant of her literary legacy continues as a source of inspiration for various people.

Táhirih's lyrics were collected in English by John Hatcher and Amrollay Hemmat under the title *The Poetry of Táhirih* (Hatcher & Hemmat 2002). They went on to publish her lyrics in two volumes under the titles *Adam's wish: Unknown poetry of Táhirih* (Hatcher & Hemmat 2008) and *The quickening: Unknown poetry of Táhirih* (Hatcher & Hemmat 2011).

4.7 Summary

Reviewing the status and impression of both Paul and Táhirih in the history of religions, revealed various aspects of their characters and consequences that are similar in many respects. They confronted both a positive and a negative reflection from their contemporaries and displayed hallmarks of brave and creative leadership.

Both Táhirih and Paul established a new form of leadership that was mostly based upon their knowledge, intuition, and strong ability and determination. Through this leadership that Jesus Christ and the Báb bestowed upon them, they began their respective spiritual enterprises and became innovators of major transformation. However, this leadership had fundamental differences from what one notices in political or even some religious leaders. Tremendous courage, determination, devotion, and so many other ethical qualities that each of them displayed, provided powerful examples for all people over the centuries.

They have also revolutionised their respective societies in various ways. Paul challenged the chief pillars and pronounced the equality between the Jews and the uncircumcised by removing the obstacle of circumcision as a preliminary condition for his gospel and conversion. Indeed, he gave the Gentiles the respect that they never experienced before then. Táhirih also deified great Shi'i clerics and attacked male domain and questioned many Islamic principles such as dissimulation and the hijab.

The cultural legacy of both Paul and Táhirih is remarkable. In a society where the Jewish Christians felt superior over the converted Gentiles and pagans and refused to even eat with them, Paul not only defended them, but he also mingled with them and treated them as equals. Táhirih, on the other hand, started a fight against gender discrimination and strove to establish female rights, privileges, and freedom that women were deprived of for centuries. She declared an equality between genders in a unique style and represented a new picture of a woman.

To summarise, Paul and Táhirih sowed a seed, ploughed, and watered it, while the fruits of these only bore many centuries later, in the years after their martyrdom. They proposed motifs that had not been recognised by most of the people at that time, and through time, many of their followers and contemporaries collected their writings and unfolded secrets that they both sacrificed their life for.

The next chapter will explore and categorise the similarities of Paul and Táhirih.

CHAPTER 5

EXPLORING THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN PAUL AND TÁHIRIH

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 examined the status of both Paul and Táhirih as portrayed in different documents. It also discussed the marks that they made and their influences on the history and development of their respective religions, and revealed that, despite the different times, cultures, and religions that they lived in, there are many similarities between them.

Chapter 5 explores these similarities between Paul and Táhirih. At first glance, the comparison may seem surprising, if not peculiar. They have evident dissimilarities of gender, religion, historic periods, geography, and cultures. However, upon deeper reflections and based on a careful analysis of their theological and social histories, they have much in common. In what follows, the focus will be on a critical comparison between these two spiritual giants in their respective eras.

5.2 Reviewing Similar Elements between Paul and Táhirih

- Both Qazvin and Tarsus, where Táhirih and Paul were born, were cities with various cultures and religions inside them. Hence, both of them were raised in multicultural societies which affected their future missions.¹⁰⁹
- Both of them had a vision of the manifestation of God before their conversion. As indicated before, Paul was a zealous enemy of Christianity and he persecuted and tortured its followers wherever he found them. According to his testimony in 2 Corinthians, he vividly saw Jesus Christ on his way to Damascus. This vision was so powerful that it influenced him physically and spiritually and transformed him thoroughly: 'From a persecutor of the Jesus-movement, Paul became a persecuted follower of Jesus Christ' (Borovicka 2016:39-40). According to Abd'ul-

¹⁰⁹ Just like in Tarsus, different sects resided in Qazvin. Jews, Christians, and various Islamic branches including Sunni, Shiite, Esmaeili, etc. (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:109).

Bahá,¹¹⁰ Táhirih also had a vision of the Báb in a dream that further resulted in her conversion and assurance to the new movement.

- Although neither Táhirih nor Paul ever saw the Báb and Jesus Christ physically, Táhirih was appointed as one of the 18 Letters of the Living and Paul as the apostle of Jesus. The former received her position through a letter from the Báb, while the latter, through his vision on his way to Damascus. Abd'ul-Bahá acknowledged this authority when he states:

His physical nearness or remoteness (to the manifestation) is of no importance; the essential fact is the spiritual affinity and ideal nearness. Judas Iscariot was for a long time favored in the holy court of His Holiness Christ, yet he was entirely far and remote; while Paul, the apostle, was in close embrace with Holiness (Borovicka 2016:40).

- Both Paul and Táhirih were vilified by insiders. There were common actions that the followers of a new faith would be accused and persecuted by those outside that faith. Paul and Táhirih were not excluded from this treatment. Paul's perspectives and conduct towards Christianity have been questioned by those outside Christianity, mostly the Jews, while Táhirih had been attacked by Muslims who could not endure her revolutionary behaviour. However, being vilified by their co-religionists was something that had set both Táhirih and Paul apart from their contemporaries (Borovicka 2016:47). The enmity against and humiliation of Paul by the Jewish Christians are well-illustrated in the New Testament. Paul had to endure much disaffection and unkindness from his co-religionists. Reflecting on Táhirih, even before the Badasht Conference, she had been blamed for her revolutionary methods of teaching the new faith and had been condemned by her fellow-religionist for immorality and unrestrained behaviours. Therefore, both of them suffered from outsiders and were accused from within.

¹¹⁰ 'Táhirih saw a Siyyid wearing a black cloak and a green turban, appeared to her in the heavens; he was standing in the air, reciting verses and praying with his hands upraised' (Borovicka 2016:38-39).

- They were both rescued by a small group of their fellow-religionists. Although they had been harassed by some of their co-religionists, there was also a small band of believers who assisted them when they found themselves in trouble. After Paul's conversion, while he was teaching the new faith in Damascus, some of the Christians learned that the governor was following Paul in order to kill him. Paul's followers informed him, put him in a basket, and got him out of the city. In fact, they rescued Paul from a certain death. Táhirih experienced the same situation. When she was under house arrest in Qazvin (by her husband), she was sentenced to death by Mulla Taqi's heirs. As indicated before, by the guidance of Bahá'u'lláh, some of her fellow believers rescued her and got her to Tehran in the dark of the night (Borovicka 2016:49-50).
- They were both proficient in the divine Scriptures of their age. Paul had, due to his training, a significant knowledge of the Old Testament, including its phraseology, prophecy, Jewish law, the prophets, and Psalms (Stalker 2007). Táhirih's writings of both poems and prose, reveal that on various occasions, she used and relied on Islamic traditions and divine verses in her documents, and nobody could oppose her (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:379-383).
- Paul and Táhirih respectively used Jewish and Islamic theology in their corpus. Lee (2016) asserts that Táhirih wrote many treatises in defence of the Báb and the Babi doctrines in which she made use of the traditional conventions of Islamic jurisprudence and theology. Needless to repeat that Paul also used and reaffirmed Jewish examples in his epistles. For example, in Romans 9:7-9, Paul quoted from Genesis 21:12, when he referred to Abraham's sons and God's promises to Sarah.¹¹¹
- There was a similar and universal belief among the Jews that the Messiah will only come to a nation that is keeping the Jewish law fervently (Stalker 2007). Táhirih was also surrounded by Muslims who firmly believed that her radical actions, such as appearing unveiled in public, was contrary to Muslim culture and principles.

¹¹¹ 'Romans 9 became a mosaic of Old Testament thought that highlights figures and events of the Old Testament as examples and specifically mentions teachings by the prophets Moses, Hosea, and Isaiah' (Ludlow 2006).

- Both Táhirih and Paul utilised a house of a follower for religious classes and gatherings. It is noticeable that before founding the Church as we see it today, Paul gathered people in houses and started preaching and evangelising. These 'house churches' that later transformed into Churches, had their special functions. It developed a real relationship among people who gathered there and enhanced the communication of both people with each other and Paul with all of them (Taylor 2012:92). In the same manner, when Táhirih arrived in Karbila, she held her religious classes in Siyyed Kazim's house (Mohammad Hosseini 2000: 171). In Baghdad, she also began to teach the cause every day and so many people, including the Babi and Muslims came to listen to her lectures (Johnson 1982:14).
- Both of them passed through various tests and trials. Paul endured a number of physical difficulties, including stoning, suffering shipwreck, and beating with a rod (2 Cor 11:24-25). He was also several times mistreated and condemned by the Jewish Christians who questioned his authority and gospel. The New Testament is full of examples of the agitation of the Jewish mobs who accused Paul of blasphemy and stirred up people to harass him. What happened in Antioch and Pisidia, forced Paul and his company to leave the city. Perhaps an ordinary person would naturally reciprocate, but Paul just prayed for his enemies and asked forgiveness on their behalf (Stalker 2007). Táhirih was also stoned by prejudiced and hostile people. It may be argued that she went through an unusual and painful test. During her cause to follow the path of her beloved, she even gave up her children.
- Táhirih suffered martyrdom. Tradition holds that Paul was also martyred. Both of them were arrested and martyred during the hostilities that affected most of their contemporary believers. Táhirih was martyred in 1852 in Tehran when some Babis attacked the Shah. Many believers were sentenced to death due to this action. Paul suffered martyrdom around 64 CE, during the burning of Rome in the fire and slaughtering of the Christians by Nero (Borovicka 2016:54-55).
- Perhaps an interesting similarity between Paul and Táhirih was the failure of their tribes. There was a covenant between Yahweh and Abraham's descendants

(Israelites) that they had a mission to be the light to the nations, and if this people disobeyed the covenant, Yahweh would punish them (Duling 2003:34). Later, the rejection of the Jewish mob and acceptance of the nations (Gentiles and pagans) occurred – it was detailed by Paul in the New Testament. In Islamic manuscripts one finds a similar concept. There is a verse in the Qur'an addressed to the Arabs telling the Muslims that if they turn away, or if they fail to practice divine commandments, God will replace them with another people who will become independent of them because of the law. Islamic interpreters commonly agree that the 'another people' was a reference to non-Arabs/Persians, since Muhammad the Prophet pointed to Salman-e Farsi (who was a Persian believer) while he was chanting this verse (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:175). Prophet Muhammad's prediction also came to pass when many great Arab Mullas and Shi'i clerics refused to accept the Báb as the Promised One, whilst others such as Mulla Hossayn, Quddús, and Táhirih recognised him as an anticipated manifestation. Nearly all of those who recognised the Báb were of Persian origin.

All the abovementioned similarities are but some of the parallels between Paul and Táhirih that made them different from their contemporaries and forever distinguished their names in religious history.

5.3 Categorising their Characteristic Similarities

- Both Paul and Táhirih were social activists. Considering the history of their lives, demonstrates that after their conversion, they could not stop preaching the truth that they acquired (Stalker 2007; Mohammad Hosseini 2000:177-179).
- After their conversions, they both immediately embarked on actions. As soon as Táhirih was familiar with the Shaykhi doctrine and later the Babi faith, she did not hesitate to act. As mentioned before, she conducted classes and sermons as soon as she reached Karbila in Siyyid Kazim's home, right after his death. Paul's travel to Arabia after his conversion did not mean that he was silent for three years. According to the geographical divisions of that time, Arabia meant 'eastern places' (Ac 2:9-11), including the 'Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the

dwellers of Mesopotamia' (Briggs 1913:257). Therefore, first he turned to the east to teach his next of kin – Abraham's descendants – and when his mission did not bare any fruit, he went to the western parts,¹¹² i.e. spreading the message among the Gentiles.

- Both Paul and Táhirih made personal judgements whenever they deemed necessary. Rudolf Bultmann, a professor of New Testament at the Marburg University (1921-1951), perhaps the most influential interpreter of Paul in the 20th century, believed that Paul was a man of personal decision (Bultmann 1951). He adduced some reasons for his claim. As Paul's gospel was influenced by the Greek culture, it was thoroughly different from the kingdom of God that was proclaimed by Jesus. In fact, Paul refuted the hope of Israel to resort in the Promised Land under the leadership of the Messiah, and further he invited non-Jews for spiritual salvation (cf. Smith 2013:5). Táhirih also instinctively knew that the appearance of the Báb was the inception of the new era and the end of the old dispensation. Hence, although she had not received any instruction from her Lord, she herself decided to inaugurate changes in the cause, and she spread it abroad. One of these central changes was the established veiling of the Mohammedan women and their non-association with men. She neglected this practice on different occasions as mentioned before in detail (Fadil Mazandarani 2009).
- Both Paul and Táhirih were brilliant communicators and writers. Paul's missionary travels brought an impressive written outcome. He spread Christianity through the Roman Empire and established a multiple of Churches in different cities. He also communicated with the proselytes and Jews through letters of which at least seven of them are authentic, while all these documents are currently considered as part of a precious corpus. Táhirih, on the other hand, was an eloquent lecturer, remarkable writer, and genuine poet. Her missionary travels were not as broad as Paul's, but during a short time, she left her indelible influence on both the Arab and Persian societies. Effendi summarises Táhirih's

¹¹² 'The Western Dispersion included Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and sojourners from Rome' (Briggs 1913:257).

diverse legacies as follows: 'Through her eloquent pleadings, her fearless denunciations, her dissertations, poems and translations, her commentaries and correspondence, she persisted in firing the imagination, enlisting the allegiance of Arabs and Persians alike to the new Revelation' (Borovicka 2016:46).

- Both Paul and Táhirih were great leaders and had their own followers. While Táhirih was in Iraq, many men and women joined her classes and were even ready to sacrifice their lives for the faith that she propagated (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:200-201). Even at the Badasht Conference, she appeared so strong, which proved her leadership among many Babi male-believers who initially regarded her as a simple woman. The leadership of Paul was also made clear in his epistles. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, he encourages his listeners to be his imitators just as he was an imitator of Christ. His influence resulted in many followers. In the Antioch incident when Peter refused to eat his meals with Gentiles, Paul challenged him and blamed him for his wrong actions¹¹³ – just as Táhirih who confronted Quddús in Badasht and revealed her courage by both her actions and statements.

Notably, whilst they were both recognised as leaders among their followers, they did not misuse their positions to impose their own will on others. In 1 Thessalonians 1:2 and 2:12, Paul explained the purpose of his leadership. It was for the maturation of both the young Church and individual believers (Whittington *et al.* 2005:751-752). Similarly, Táhirih did not seek to use her status to satisfy her own ambitions. In her trip from Baghdad on her way back to Iran (Qazvin), in Karand, many people (estimated at around 1,200) were ready to join her and assist her in her mission, but she refused. She rather prayed for them and encouraged them to serve the faith in their city (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:199).

- Neither Paul nor Táhirih ever retreated from their belief. In fact, their rich lives were full of many examples that testify to their unwavering commitment. The

¹¹³ Paul narrated the story in Galatians 2:11-14: *When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, 'You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?'*

following cases illustrate this point. In the Jerusalem Conference, Paul insisted that circumcision should be removed for Gentiles. He defended this matter, despite some vacillation and opposition that were later issued under different circumstances by other apostles. Táhirih also showed her unshakable belief in various situations. In Karbila, when one of the Babis asked her to withdraw her revolutionary behaviour, she rejected his request.¹¹⁴

- One of the interesting similarities between Paul and Táhirih is their radical and bold behaviour, especially in public. Táhirih's actions in Badasht were shocking and unexpected for almost the entire audience. Paul's conduct in the Jerusalem Conference in front of the senior apostles (Peter, James, and John) and his reaction to Peter's behaviour in Antioch, underscore his boldness amid opposition. All of these resulted in the assumption that 'Paul intentionally cut the Christian faith off from its roots in Jewish apocalyptic eschatology and, turning to the Hellenistic mystery religions...Pfleiderer also stated that Paul's gospel was a radical departure from the teaching of Jesus' (Smith 2013:4).
- Paul and Táhirih both appealed to the government of the day. One of the salient traits of Paul and Táhirih was their communication with their respective governments, something that testifies to their courage and self-confidence. Three times Táhirih appealed to governmental officials and each time she received a successful response: 'First, she wrote to the Governor of Karbilá informing him of her location when she learned that the authorities had arrested Shamsu'd-Duhá, believing Shams was Táhirih. In this case, Shams was released and Táhirih was arrested as she requested' (Borovicka 2016:48). For the second time Táhirih wrote a letter to the Governor of Karbila and requested to go to Baghdad and awaited the government's response. Once again, the Governor gave his consent. The third appeal was to the Governor of Kermanshah when Táhirih and her companions were assaulted and their property was stolen by rascals of the city.

¹¹⁴ 'In Karbila, without any explicit instructions from the Báb (though she may have interpreted some of his verses very expansively, even esoterically) Táhirih decided to cast off the pretense of dissimulation and openly proclaim the abrogation of the Islamic law (that is, the *shari'a*). As shocking, as radical, and as dangerous as such a move was, Táhirih felt confident that she could ground such a theological stance on pure inspiration. Even other prominent Babis in Karbila were shocked. One of them, Mullá Ahmad Khurasani, argued with her vigorously' (Lee 2016:4).

He commanded the return of their belongings and they were permitted to continue their journey (Borovicka 2016:48).

Paul's three appeals were recorded in Acts. In Philippi, Paul and Silas were arrested without trial and while they were set free because of a mysterious earthquake, Paul refused to abandon the jail. He rather sent a message to the magistrates upon which they came to appease Paul and Silas and escorted them from the prison. His second appeal was to the Roman governor in Jerusalem. Paul's teachings caused turmoil among the Jewish community. As a consequence, he was arrested by the Roman guards. Paul wrote a letter and challenged the authority asking: *Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?* As a result, he was taken to Caesarea in safety to await trial before the governor. His last appeal was to the Roman Emperor. While he did not receive his trial in Caesarea, he appealed to be tried before the Emperor in Rome: 'The appeal was granted and Paul was transported to Rome where he was able to teach from "his house" while awaiting trial' (Borovicka 2016:48-49).

- While Táhirih and Paul were in jail, they did not stop communicating with the followers and new visitors. As detailed before, whilst at first Táhirih was kept in a little room under strict observance, gradually, the Mayor's wife was attracted to her character and transferred her to a room with a balcony on the second floor of the house where many women, including Qajar princesses and men were allowed to see her (Johnson 1982:26). While Paul was imprisoned under the Roman Empire decree, he could not help himself not to talk with the Roman soldiers who were watching him day and night. His words penetrated in these hard souls and they were attracted to their prisoners. Therefore, Paul was permitted to accept people who were eager to visit him and drink from the well of his wisdom (Stalker 2007).
- Both Paul and Táhirih relied on their 'inspiration' to justify their boldest acts and radical breaks from Judaism and Islam respectively (Lee 2016:7). Similar to Táhirih, Paul always relied on his inspiration in Damascus when others questioned his authority. In the Baha'i Scriptures, Bahá'u'lláh states: 'One day Paul was

asked a question about philosophy. He said, "Before I knew Jesus, I was a scientist. I was a philosopher. I knew everything. When I knew Jesus, I forgot everything. If you want to know about Christ, ask me. I have no news except him" (Bushrui 2016:198).

- Reviewing the history of their travels and cities that they entered, implies similar facts. Regardless of hardship and suffering that they endured during their missionary travels, they never avoided challenges or feared hardship. In 2 Corinthians 11:23-27, Paul mentioned some of the difficulties that he had been through, one of them being stoned by some evil people in Lystra. Táhirih and her companions also experienced stoning while they were leaving Karbila (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:186). Although they offered the new message to all people without any exception, they neither insisted on a personal perspective, nor did they coerce anyone to join their belief system. It was mentioned before that Paul preached his gospel among the Jews first and when they refused, he turned to the Gentiles and pagans (Duling 2003:158-159). When Táhirih conceived the essence of Shaykh Ahmad's belief and became a Shaykhi, she tried to discuss these teachings with her father, but he was not receptive (Johnson 1982:7). I think this approach has its special advantages: First of all, it extended the domain of their believers since they did not limit their activities to any special group. Second, in this way they demonstrated and proved the universalism of the faith that they were preaching.
- The way in which Paul and Táhirih propagated their faiths respectively and were in touch with people had a lot in common. They both used letters, personal visits, and so on for their communication (Taylor 2012:91-92). Scrutinising historic sources, suggests that there are many personal and public letters from Táhirih that contain different topics and addressees, including exhortations, prayers, love, and responding to questions and queries,¹¹⁵ and as it is discussed before, the content of Paul's epistles have a lot in common with Táhirih's.

¹¹⁵ Some of Táhirih's letters public letters, 1) encouraging companions to love and love the truth, and 2) prayers that involved many mystical and philosophical concepts (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:377-378). Her personal letters included 1) an epistle to her cousin Mulla Javad Vliyani that responded to her

5.4 Discussing Theological Aspects

- The common theological views of Paul and Táhirih: In various epistles, Paul used the phrase ‘to be in Christ,’ which referred to the unity of a person with Jesus Christ. In Romans 8:38-39 for instances, Paul states that in Christ, His followers experience the eternal and unbreakable love of God. In 2 Corinthians 5:17-19 he claimed that in Christ, His followers have been made alive to God, having been made new creatures with new spiritual natures. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, he argued that in Christ, His followers are being progressively transformed into His image and likeness. In one of Táhirih’s poems,¹¹⁶ she also used the same expression with the term ‘Fana,’ which means ‘union with God.’
- Acknowledgment of the independence of Jesus and the Báb from the previous faiths, i.e. Judaism and Islam: Arguably, the most significant parallel between Paul and Táhirih is that they distinguished Christianity and Babism as a singular and separate faith and not as sects of Judaism and Islam. This is an important fact, since the majority of early Christians and Babis were seemingly unable to discern this independence, while they also undermined and scorned those (including Paul and Táhirih) who acted and behaved according to this belief. However, both Táhirih and Paul did not pay attention to these accusations. They rather used every single situation to announce the separation of the new revelation from the old one.

Effendi declared the Badasht Conference as an occasion in which Táhirih announced the end of Islam and the inception of the new dispensation with an expressive and brave action. Paul also carried out this mission i.e. the separation of Christianity from Judaism in his own way. He removed the act of circumcision for the Gentiles who were eager to join Christianity. This abrogation was not bearable for the Jewish Christians who were loyal to their ancestral rituals even after their conversion, and regarded Jesus Christ as someone who was going to

objection, and 2) letters to her close relatives including her father and her uncle (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:373-378).

¹¹⁶ I am the slave on your roof keeping time,
I am the frightened bird snared by your lime,
the nightingale silent in your night-time,
the axis that stands for your name, Sublime
Not I, not we – that agony’s erased (Lee 2016:11-12).

acknowledge and propagate the Mosaic law. Hence, both Paul and Táhirih somehow revolutionised the foundation of Judaism and Islam, the former by removing circumcision as a preliminary condition for Gentiles who joined Christianity and the latter by appearing unveiled in Badasht in front of a gathering.

- Paul and Táhirih respectively assumed Jesus and the Báb as the culmination or end of the Jewish and Islamic law. In each era, when a new messenger or manifestation of God appears, there are a few people who are able to understand that the manifestations of God are independent in thought and action. They do not appear according to public thought and expectation. Hence, there are many who are unable to realise this reality. In Romans 10:4 Paul clearly proclaimed his view towards this topic: *Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes*. Táhirih also believed that, with the appearance of the Báb, the Islamic principles had been abrogated and would no longer be valid (Lee 2016:10).
- Paul and Táhirih recognised the divinity of Jesus Christ and the Báb respectively. In Colossians 1:15-16, Paul states this belief categorically: *The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him*. In the same way Táhirih's documents and poems are full of signs that depict her belief towards the divinity of the Báb as the manifestation of God for her age. In one of her poems, she alludes to her inner conviction, stating:
[B]ecause the spirit of Ahmad appeared in a human temple,
Worlds upon worlds became filled with the Holy Spirit through this human form.
His station is Rabb-i Azam and Rabbi-Ala, the Greatest Lord on High;
He is Rabb-I Akbar, the Garden of Paradise (Hatcher & Hemmat 2008:52).
- They have adapted a similar approach to achieve redemption. For both Paul and Táhirih one cannot reach true righteousness through legalism or seclusion: 'It was the cry of a soul mighty in its spiritual grasp, brave, seriously determined to know the truth of life, to find God and his righteousness' (Grant 1914:379).

- Paul and Táhirih had similar interpretations regarding the suffering of the divine manifestation. One of the main aspects of Paul's theology is his emphasis on Jesus' sufferings as he mentioned this concept on various occasions.¹¹⁷ In brief, Paul proposed that Jesus Christ died for the sins of humankind. Indeed, humankind was the sinner and consigned to death and had no way to stop sinning. Through His grace, Jesus chose to die on humans' behalf and prayed for human forgiveness and emancipation from the burden of their sins. Indeed, He sacrificed His life for the freedom of human beings from sin. This theological concept (Jesus' crucifixion as a redemptive act) is confirmed by the Baha'i revelation¹¹⁸ (Buck *et al.* 1979:6).
- Paul and Táhirih had the same interpretation about resurrection. In the Bible, 1 Corinthians is the best source for reviewing the meaning of resurrection. As it is indicated before, Paul's interpretation of the term 'resurrection' was spiritual and contrary to what was common belief. In 1 Corinthians 15:12-16, Paul declared that if people believe that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can they then deny His resurrection? In fact, what Paul tried to explain is that nobody can believe that Jesus has been raised from the dead and at the same time refute His resurrection. Through these verses he defended the spiritual resurrection. In 1 Corinthians 15:19-22, Paul again emphasised this motif that Jesus was the 'firstfruits' being issued from God, as all mankind were created through Him. This is an important conclusion as it indicates that the manifestations of God are the cause of our physical life, and they are also the reason for our spiritual life since He gave life to those who were spiritually dead (did not believe in Him). In Romans 6:4-12, Paul deals with this matter in detail. Táhirih, on the other hand, adopted Shaykh Ahmad's theory regarding resurrection. The Shakhis believed that 'resurrection is not that of rising the body, but spiritual in nature' (Shahrokh 2018:3). Much like Paul, she believed that every single word that was issued by the manifestation can give life to those who are spiritually dead. In this light, one

¹¹⁷ In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul stated: *God made him who had no sin to be sin[b] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

¹¹⁸ There is a familiar concept in the Babi/Baha'i prayers when Bahá'u'lláh stated that they have accepted jail and imprisonment to emancipate humans.

can understand Jesus Christ's statement in Matthew 8:22: *Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.*

- Paul and Táhirih formed their views on the equality of male and female, based on their inspirations from their respective faiths. Paul's attitude towards women is one of the controversial topics of Church History. Some scholars argue that he degraded the status of women, based on 1 Timothy. Paul seemingly did not believe in the equality between female and male. However, as explained in Chapter 2, he appointed various women as his disciple and deacons.¹¹⁹ Táhirih's approach towards women's rights was vivid from the beginning. We reviewed that she attended her father's religious classes and, unconventional for the women of her time, she left her husband and children to search the truth. Above all, her actions at the Badasht gathering was a path-breaking expression of her strong belief in gender equality.
- Reviewing their documents, shows some attraction to mysticism. This is especially traceable in Táhirih's poems where she talked about her union with God (Lee 2016:3). Paul was also inclined to mysticism. According to Grant (1914:7), 'the center of Paul's theology is his belief in union with the spiritual Christ. All his other doctrines hinge on that.' I will elaborate on this relationship with mysticism in subsequent sections.
- Despite their mystic beliefs, neither Paul nor Táhirih¹²⁰ isolated themselves from the community. Both of them rather firmly believed that it would not be enough for a true apostle to only preach and isolate themselves from the society. They should rather demonstrate their loyalty through action (Third Millennium Ministries 2012:11).
- In various ways, both Paul and Táhirih created a cultural revolution in their respective societies. They undertook to interpret their religions without any spe-

¹¹⁹ 'Saint Paul was the first writer to give ecclesiastical directives about the role of women in the Church' (Wikipedia 2019b). Priscilla, Julia, Tryphena, Phoebe, Junia, Chloe, Euodia, and Syntyche were examples of women whose accomplishments were praise by Paul.

¹²⁰ 'While Táhirih resided in Bahá'u'lláh's house, Vahid one of the famous Babi visited Táhirih. He was reciting and elaborating on some Islamic traditions. She interrupted him by saying, "Oh Yahya! (which was his given name) today is not the time for reciting the traditions. Bring forth an act if you have the knowledge." And we saw how valiantly he gave his life in the struggle of Nayriz' (Shahrokh 2018:10).

cific instructions from Jesus or the Báb respectively. On the basis of inspiration, in Damascus, Paul claimed that he was responsible to guide non-Jews, and later he removed some important rituals of Judaism like circumcision for the Gentile believers, since he firmly believed that Jesus' teachings have removed all these limitations. In similar manner, Táhirih determined to cast off some Islamic customs including dissimulation, which was one of the inseparable aspects of the Muslim life, although the Báb had not yet abrogated it (Lee 2016:4). Paul's teachings (Christian values) were contrary to the Romans' teachings. The Romans were seeking earthy pleasures, while Paul always preached that this physical life is only a preparation for the spiritual life after death. Hence, Paul transformed their perspectives regarding religion and eventually succeeded in attracting the moral Gentiles to the Church (Kreis 2010). Táhirih also revolutionised the Muslim perception regarding women. She forsook her role as a wife and mother and invaded the male space by her radical and rebellious conduct. She took the leadership of the Babi community in her own hands. Leaving her family, traveling to Iraq, holding religious classes for the public, and her prominent role in Badasht are just some examples of her revolutionary actions that established fundamental changes in the Islamic and male domination of that time (Lee 2016:2).

In the following chapter, I will review different opinions regarding these two historic characters and their eternal mark and influence on later generations.

5.5 Summary

An examination of the events that took place in the lives of Paul and Táhirih shows that, regardless of their different religious, cultural, and racial backgrounds, there are striking and undeniable similarities between these two. They displayed the same reaction and behaviour in different circumstances, with similar characteristics, including courage and bravery, determination and stability in problems and challenges, and unconditional love for the truth. Their similar interpretations of the concepts and expressions of the Scriptures point to the unparalleled similarity of these two revolutionary apostles, and it

shows that when one relies on spiritual powers as sources of actions, chronological, cultural, and religious differences will no longer matter and will disappear spontaneously.

Chapter 6 will focus on the mystical perspectives of Paul and Táhirih.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSING THE LIFE OF PAUL AND TÁHIRIH WITH THE FOCUS ON THEIR MYSTICAL PERSPECTIVES

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined the similarities between Paul and Táhirih from different angles and showed that, despite their different religious backgrounds, their theology had a lot in common. In this chapter, I will take another look at the documents of Paul and Táhirih and discuss their theologies from a different perspective, namely with a focus on their *mystical personalities*. As mentioned before, pondering on Paul's epistles and Táhirih's poems, reveals that they proposed new and different concepts in their religions that had not been indicated before.¹²¹ Furthermore, Paul used mystical expressions such as 'union with Christ' or 'living in Christ.' In the same manner, Táhirih's poems have mystical tendencies. She used the term 'Fana' (*union with God*) which had a history in the Sufi literature. However, they both admitted that reaching to this position has its own preliminaries that can be inferred from their documents.

Hence, this section of the research will focus on the mystical dimensions of both Paul and Táhirih, and the stages that they traversed to reach this position (union with God) which they both passed. Moreover, this research will relate these mystical concepts to one of the Baha'i Scriptures that is compatible with the Sufi concepts.

6.2 Focusing on Paul's Mystical Experience and Theology

Bruce (1977:136) relates: 'According to Christian Scriptures, "mysticism" is the name of that organic process which involves the perfect consummation of the Love of God. And through this doctrine (mysticism), the individual can come into immediate contact with God.'

¹²¹ Equality between the Jews and non-Jews is one of these unique concepts.

There are two different perspectives regarding Paul's mystical experiences and theology. According to Stalker (2007), Paul's basic gospel and theology can be pinned down to his conversion and his mystical experience. Through this life-changing experience, Paul eradicated his previous theology. However, Bruce (1977:136) believes that Paul did not base his theology on mystical experiences, but that he aligned his mystical experiences with his theology. Whether the mystical experience of Paul led to the formation of his theology or *vice versa*, what is important is that much of Paul's theology is an expression of his mystical experience.

Paul replaced the theory of 'justification by law' with 'justification by faith.' This theory became the cornerstone of his theology. He also removed the possible misunderstanding that this justification and further redemption can be gained via being isolated or by living in reclusion. According to Grant, Paul adopted a moderate approach to access his intended redemption. Grant (1914:379) illustrates Paul's logic with reference to his words in Romans:

The pernicious thing about 'legalism' is its satisfied resting in the obedience to statutory requirements. But St Paul was dissatisfied, restless – his strong soul was bent upon finding first-hand security against sin and the flesh. It was not the amiable self-satisfaction of the legalist – of the scribes and Pharisees of the Gospels – nor was it the weak morbidness of the recluse that wrung from him the cry.

In Romans 7:24, Paul showed the way of redemption when he cried out: *What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?* Grant relies on Paul's experiences and argues that, in Paul's perspective, neither restricted legalism, nor the so-called mystics can lead to survival and redemption: 'It was the cry of a soul mighty in its spiritual grasp, brave, seriously determined to know the truth of life, to find God and his righteousness' (Grant 1914:379).

Beside 'justification by faith,' Paul applied two other basic mystic phrases, namely 'union with Christ' and 'live in Christ.'¹²² While it may seem impossible for ordinary people, he declared that it is accessible for all who express their faith in the Lord. Pitta (2016) also counted Paul as a mystic and simultaneously an apostle, and provided four arguments in support of that:

- According to Galatians 2:19-20 and Philippians 1:2, Paul's mystical conversion has put him in a direct and continual relationship with Jesus Christ (Pitta 2016:1).
- There is an intermediate called Holy Spirit, who is the principal subject of the Christian life and puts us in direct relationship with Christ. He enables us to dwell in Christ and at the same time he enables Christ to live in us (Pitta 2016:1).
- In line with Grant, Pitta believes that this mystical experience can/should be the everyday experience of everyone. Paul referred to this experience as a normal, dynamic, progressive, ongoing, and never-ending effort for every believer (Pitta 2016:1). However, the uniqueness of such an experience (Paul's apocalyptic experience and his ascendance in to the third heaven [2 Cor 12:2]) should not be undermined. As it will be discussed later, it requires some capabilities that one should acquire.

6.3 Táhirih's Mystical Theology

Inferring Táhirih's mystical theology is not as simple as Paul's, since Táhirih's tendencies to Sufism were basically hidden in her poems that mostly disappeared or were burned by her relatives, while the remnant ones were abused by Muslim poets and were published with the title of Islamic voices (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:319). However, this research will only rely on those ones of which the authenticity was confirmed as it was published by several Baha'i historians.

According to Lee (2016:3), an examination of Táhirih's poems reveals the structure of a mystical theology that is both startling in its modernity and astonishing in its radical implications. This structure does not rely upon Muslim scholarship for its arguments, but

¹²² 'As Paul himself believed who are in Christ are now able to spiritually discern the truth' (Salazar 2019: 6).

rather insists on the inspiration of the spirit for its power and legitimacy. However, like Paul, Táhirih admitted that, what flows out of her pen, is the product of her inspiration, uncluttered by academic conventions, and free of intruders. Táhirih's mystic approaches included various aspects. She abolished the Shi'i convention of *Taqiyyah*¹²³ and explicitly put an emphasis on the absolute. She removed her veil (*chadur*)¹²⁴ and stepped into a community of Babi men to demonstrate her categorical rejection to *Shari'a*. She succeeded in doing this, as it became normative of the Babi position (Lee 2016:5-6). Another Sufi metaphor that Táhirih extensively applied in her poems is 'Fana,' which is a term that in fact belonged to the Sufi faith, and is indeed the highest stage that one can achieve (Lee 2016:12-13), like Táhirih did.

In the following section, this research will consider stages that Paul and Táhirih passed through to achieve this status i.e. an alliance with their true beloved. To achieve this goal, this research will apply one of the Baha'i sources which elaborated different stages that a mystic should traverse in order to unite with the True One.

6.4 Sufism and Seven Valleys

Seven Valleys is the title of an epistle that was written in mystical style by Bahá'u'lláh when he had returned from the Sulaymaniyah region in Iraqi Kurdistan, where he anonymously spent two years with various Sufi sheikhs (Smith 2008). It was written in response to the question of Shaykh Muhyi'd-Din, a judge who was a follower of the Qádiríyyih order of Sufism. According to Taherzadeh (1976:96-99; original emphasis), 'The book follows the path of the soul on a spiritual journey passing through different stages, from this world to other realms which are closer to God, as first described by the 12th Century Muslim Sufi poet Farid al-Din Attar in his *Conference of the Birds*.'

Abd'ul-Bahá explained that the *Seven Valleys* is a guide for human conduct as it motivates people to search for their imperfections and focus on their shortcomings (Abd'ul-Bahá 1912). According to Effendi, this work is the 'greatest mystical composi-

¹²³ However, the Báb had repeatedly admonished the Babis to strictly observe the Shi'i convention of *Taqiyyah* (Lee 2016:4).

¹²⁴ Spiritual nudity as a symbol of purity is a Sufi metaphor.

tion' (Effendi 1944:9). In this book, Bahá'u'lláh portrayed a spiritual journey through different stages (seven stages) from this world to other realms which are closer to God, as first described by the 12th-century Sufi poet, Farid al-Din Attar in his *Conference of the Birds* (Taherzadeh 1976). The goal of this journey is to find the right path, abandon this worldly life, and unite with the beloved, which an eager wayfarer could attain.

6.5 Paul and Táhirih's Mystical Experience with Reference to the Seven Valleys

Before discussing the *Seven Valleys*, it should be noted that, after the valley of search, which is the main condition for entering this spiritual journey, the order of the other valleys is not very important. In addition, none of these valleys have an end, except the valley of search. For example, it cannot be said that the seeker is no longer in love after crossing the second valley (the valley of love) and has completed this valley. Rather, in every valley, the seeker's feelings are deepening. Finally, according to Bahá'u'lláh (2005:27),

[t]hese journeys have no visible ending in the world of time, but the severed wayfarer – if invisible confirmation descend upon him and the Guardian of the Cause assist him – may cross these seven stages in seven steps, nay rather in seven breaths, nay rather in a single breath, if God will and desire it. And this is of 'His grace on such of His servants as He pleaseth.'

6.5.1 The First Valley: The Valley of Search

In this valley, a true seeker should display a strong patience to reach the heavenly homeland. However, it is incumbent for a servant to clean the heart and turn away from imitation and obsolete prejudices and shut the door of friendliness and enmity to all the people of the earth (Bahá'u'lláh 2005:4-5):

The true seeker hunteth naught but the object of his quest, and the lover hath no desire save union with his beloved. Nor shall the seeker reach his goal unless he sacrifice all things. That is, whatever

he hath seen, and heard, and understood, all must he set at naught, that he may enter the realm of the spirit, which is the City of God. Labor is needed, if we are to seek Him; ardor is needed, if we are to drink of the honey of reunion with Him; and if we taste of this cup, we shall cast away the world.

According to *Seven Valleys*, the steed of this stage is patience. However, patience alone will not be enough. It should be accompanied by effort and persistence. Looking back to the life of Paul and Táhirih before their conversion, testifies that both of them had a strong passion to reach out to the truth. It is already mentioned that even the Jewish doctrines could not quench Paul's thirst. Paul first learned that the most precious prize that makes life worth living for is the love and favour of God, and the only manner to reach it was through observing the Jewish law (Stalker 2007). It did not matter what measures he had to take to reach it, as long as he was a true seeker who determined to gain God's satisfaction. Fortunately for him, it led him to Damascus and his life-changing experience on the way.

Táhirih's quest to reach the truth took another form. As she grew up, she realised that her family was somehow confused regarding religious motifs. Hence, she started re-reviewing the Shi'i principles, which propelled her to her acquaintance with the Shaykhi School via her maternal cousin. Through her secret correspondence with the deputy of the founder of the Shaykhi School, Siyyid Kazim, Táhirih received answers to her religious queries, and this took her one step closer to her beloved. Then Táhirih was just waiting for an opportunity to see him.

The decisive determination that came out from Paul and Táhirih for knowing the truth, changed their lives forever, which is stunning, and it shows that they were not satisfied with just maintaining their positions. Although both of them could enjoy the comfortable conditions that they had, they rather chose the future pain and suffering.

However, it is notable that, according to the *Seven Valleys*, the traveller should depict such tremendous patience and tolerance that nobody or nothing could divert them from the purpose. Needless to mention that Paul and Táhirih revealed a lot of patience and endurance on this path, the former by paddling in doubt and not knowing the right way for almost four years after Jesus' crucifixion, and the latter by immersing in religious studies and waiting for an opportunity to travel to Karbila.

6.5.2 The Second Valley: The Valley of Love

When a traveller finds the trace of a 'traceless' friend, they will straightaway step into a *Valley of Love*. According to this valley, the traveller who enters this stage, becomes unaware of themselves and of anything besides themselves. They are eager to sacrifice everything, even their existence, for the sake of their beloved:

Love setteth a world aflame at every turn, and he wasteth every land where he carrieth his banner. Being hath no existence in his kingdom; the wise wield no command within his realm. The leviathan of love swalloweth the master of reason and destroyeth the lord of knowledge (Bahá'u'lláh 2005:7).

Bahá'u'lláh (2005:6) adds: 'The steed of this Valley is pain; and if there be no pain this journey will never end. In this station the lover hath no thought save the beloved, and seeketh no refuge save the Friend.' It should be noted that in this valley, pain does not necessarily mean physical pain, although sometimes it also includes physical pain. It rather refers to all thoughts of the lover for their beloved. In fact, the pain of reaching the beloved makes them so unconscious that they have no thoughts except for her/him.

Táhirih's acquaintance with the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kazim fascinated her so much that she began with an extensive correspondence with Siyyid Kazim and had no desire other than to go and meet him. Her family and her husband confronted her, but for a woman like Táhirih, all this opposition was like a spark that

ignited the fire of her love. She had inhaled the scent of the beloved, so it was impossible for her to ignore it.

Paul's conversion and his subsequent actions narrate his unconditional love for his lost beloved. As soon as the divine strength cast him down on the ground, he felt himself encompassed by the divine love (Stalker 2007). Ever since Jesus' love dwelt in Paul's heart, his only desire was to give this love to all creation. This love forever changed his life and became the source of his later actions. Through this love, Paul started his missionary travel and achieved remarkable success. This endless love empowered him to endure the harassment of the Jewish authorities. However, he did not care, since he was determined to obtain the satisfaction of his Lord.

Hence, Táhirih and Paul incepted their journey in the Valley of Love as soon as they smelled the scent of the beloved, burned the harvest of wisdom, and left their homes in search of their divine beloved. This happened while they both suffered and endured considerable pain along this way.

6.5.3 The Third Valley: The Valley of Knowledge

And if, confirmed by the Creator, the lover escapes from the claws of the eagle of love, he will enter the Valley of Knowledge and come out of doubt into certitude, and turn from the darkness of illusion to the guiding light of the fear of God. His inner eyes will open and he will privily converse with his beloved; he will set ajar the gate of truth and piety, and shut the doors of vain imaginings. He in this station is content with the decree of God, and seeth war as peace, and findeth in death the secrets of everlasting life. With inward and outward eyes he witnesseth the mysteries of resurrection in the realms of creation and the souls of men, and with a pure heart apprehendeth the divine wisdom in the endless Manifestations of God. In the ocean he findeth a drop, in a drop he beholdeth the secrets of the sea (Bahá'u'lláh 2005:8).

Paul's revelatory experience on his way to Damascus was like a pivoting moment for him. If Jesus could forgive and love a sinful servant like him who had been persecuting Christians, why could He not forgive and love a Gentile? Definitely, the answer to this question solved all Paul's mental queries. He apprehended that the nature/essence of Jesus Christ is all about love, and this love is endless.

According to Acts 9:10-21, after this revolutionary experience, Paul went to Damascus while he had lost his sight. After three days, his sight was restored by a Christian named Ananias who dreamed about Saul of Tarsus. Through all these incidents (his conversion, being baptised by Ananias, and associating with the Christians of Damascus), Paul knew his beloved. As we will see, over time this knowledge deepened. Needless to mention that he straightaway began to preach that Jesus of Nazareth is the Jewish Messiah and the son of God.

As mentioned above, Táhirih's communication with Siyyid Kazim that motivated her to travel to Karbila, her dream that resulted in her conversion to the Báb, the letter that she sent to the Báb, and the response that she received, and then reading the writing of the Báb which was compatible with the verses that she had heard in her dream – all of those led her to an immovable certainty that nobody and nothing could deter her from the truth. Similar to Paul, she commenced the teaching of her newly found religion immediately. When Táhirih and Paul reached this stage, they achieved such certainty that they found a verse and a sign of their God in everything. In their oppression they saw divine justice, and in their ignorance, the divine knowledge.

6.5.4 The Fourth Valley: The Valley of Unity

After passing through the Valley of knowledge, which is the last plane of limitation, the wayfarer cometh to the Valley of Unity and drinketh from the cup of the Absolute, and gazeth on the Manifestations of Oneness. In this station he pierceth the veils of plurality, fleeth from the worlds of the flesh, and ascendeth into the heaven of singleness.

With the ear of God he heareth, with the eye of God he beholdeth the mysteries of divine creation. He steppeth into the sanctuary of the Friend, and shareth as an intimate the pavilion of the Loved One. He stretcheth out the hand of truth from the sleeve of the Absolute; he revealeth the secrets of power. He seeth in himself neither name nor fame nor rank, but findeth his own praise in praising God (Bahá'u'lláh 2005:11-12).

When the traveller reaches this position, they will realise that all these differences and variations resulted from their limited sight. However, when the servant flies beyond these variations, they see the sign of unity in every creature. The steed of this valley is the chastity of both heart and eyes. The seeker must cleanse their eyes and heart of any other thing, so that they not only observe the reflection of this unity with the naked eye but can reflect this unity in the mirror of the heart.

However, providing a separate explanation from the traverse of Paul and Táhirih in the Valley of Unity is not simple, since as soon as they recognised the truth, they gained such faith and certainty that they became alienated from the world and what was in it. Pondering on Paul's gospel depicts that he achieved his desired unity. In 2 Corinthians 12:1-10, he explained his divine and exceptional experiences of Jesus Christ when he was caught up to the third heaven, where he heard 'words said that cannot and may not be spoken by any human being' (Pitta 2016:1). In another part of this epistle, he provided a remarkable insight. He implied that this (his ascending to the third heaven) can be an experience of each believer,¹²⁵ 'since we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and place us with you in his presence' (Pitta 2016:2).

Hence, as soon as Jesus revealed himself to Paul, the latter reached an important conclusion: There is no difference or superiority between the Jews and Gentiles. Jesus'

¹²⁵ *It is written: 'I believed; therefore I have spoken.'* Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself (2 Cor 4:13-14).

love showers on every servant, regardless of their race or creed. This type of look and attitude became the basis of Paul's theology, and led him to a certainty where he recognised Jesus' face in every person and conferred the love that he has received from Jesus to everyone, without discrimination. With this perspective, he sometimes introduced himself as a true Jew and commanded to observe the Jewish law,¹²⁶ whereas elsewhere he spoke of the new era and put emphasis on justification by faith¹²⁷ as the only means of salvation. There seems to be a contradiction between Paul's words and actions, implying that he did not see any differences between the manifestations of God. These seemingly contradictory views stem from our limited perspective, as Paul could claim to be both a Jew and a Christian at the same time.

Like Paul, Táhirih also recognised her beloved without intermediaries and was informed by mysteries that others could not bear to hear. She took a series of actions – without any direct instruction from the Báb – that signified her pure love and union with the Báb. It was stated before that she has celebrated the first day of Muharram (the birth of the Báb) instead of performing the mourning ceremony for the Imam Hossein. Moreover, her abrogation of dissimulation and her openly teaching the new faith, not only depicted her extraordinary courage and unlimited love, but showed that she burned all the veils of the previous imitations and traditions and united with her Lord (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:178-181).

Hence, just as in the earthly world, the lover and the beloved are informed of each other's secrets after passing the Valley of Knowledge, Paul and Táhirih reached a stage where they became familiar with divine secrets. However, at this stage, love has its own terms and conditions. It is not permissible to tell the secret of the beloved everywhere and to anyone except to those who are from this Valley and are able to keep its secrets.

¹²⁶ *To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law (1 Cor 9:20). The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not covet,' and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself' (Rm 13:9).*

¹²⁷ *For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law (Rm 3:28).*

6.5.5 The Fifth Valley: The Valley of Contentment

In this Valley he feeleth the winds of divine contentment blowing from the plane of the spirit. He burneth away the veils of want, and with inward and outward eye, perceiveth within and without all things the day of: "God will compensate each one out of His abundance."⁵³ From sorrow he turneth to bliss, from anguish to joy. His grief and mourning yield to delight and rapture...the wayfarers in this Valley may dwell upon the dust, yet inwardly they are throned in the heights of mystic meaning; they eat of the endless bounties of inner significances, and drink of the delicate wines of the spirit (Bahá'u'lláh 2005:20).

Studying the events after the conversion of Paul and Táhirih, shows that ever since they drank the cup of love of their beloved, they found themselves so rich and resigned that even in the worst circumstances, this love sufficed them. Paul's missionary journeys narrate Paul's richness in difficulties and sorrow. It was already indicated before that as a Jew, Paul was determined to harass Christians in order to achieve God's favour. This dark record made the apostles of Jesus suspicious of him. On the other hand, *contra* the custom of the apostles, Paul did not ask for money when he preached, and this caused the other apostles (especially the pillars) to blame him. In Thessalonians, where he refuted this accusation, he explained his motto well. In 1 Thessalonians 1:5b, he stated: *You know how we lived among you for your sake*. In 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9, he described this matter in different words: *For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate*. Through these verses, Paul showed his commitment to the will of Christ, his desire to serve without the expectation of material compensation and reward to both the new believers and the chief disciples, and once again emphasised that love is the source of his deeds.

Paul also adopted an amazing approach while he was maligned and humiliated by Jewish Christians or his opponents. Instead of boasting about his pedigree, his imprisonment, and his hardship, he rather displayed joy, humility, and humbleness that forced his addressees to remain silent and eventually retreat. This approach is especially evident in 2 Corinthians.

Táhirih took a similar approach. During her residence in Karbila and her journey in the Arab territories, she confronted people who scorned her, stoned her, and even tried to kill her. A group of Babis even accused her of immorality and heresy, and complained to the Báb about her, but none of this made her sad because she was enflamed by the fire of divine love.

Perhaps the highest form of contentment with Paul and Táhirih manifested itself while they were in prison or persecuted. I have indicated before that while Paul was under house arrest in Rome, and Táhirih in the house of the Mayor of Tehran, they showed such courage and selflessness that, if a stranger observed the situation, they would think that both Paul and Táhirih were on the royal throne and not prisoners in some sort of a jail.

6.5.6 The Sixth Valley: The Valley of Wonderment

After journeying through the planes of pure contentment, the traveler cometh to the Valley of Wonderment and is tossed in the oceans of grandeur, and at every moment his wonder groweth. Now he seeth the shape of wealth as poverty itself, and the essence of freedom as sheer impotence. Now is he struck dumb with the beauty of the All-Glorious; again is he wearied out with his own life. How many a mystic tree hath this whirlwind of wonderment snatched by the roots, how many a soul hath it exhausted. For in this Valley the traveler is flung into confusion, albeit, in the eye of him who hath attained, such marvels are esteemed and well beloved. At every moment he beholdeth a wondrous world, a new creation, and goeth from

astonishment to astonishment, and is lost in awe at the works of the Lord of Oneness (Bahá'u'lláh 2005:21-22).

When the traveller steps into this valley, the traveller immerses into a sea of grandeur and realises how much they do not know, and their astonishment increases at every turn. They become like a moth that absorbs the warmth of a candle flame. The moth approaches the candle and burns, but it approaches the candle again to feel its heat.

Once again, a look at Paul's process of conversion is the key to answering many questions. Just when Paul saw himself as a true Jew and was seeking divine approval through the persecution of Christians, Jesus' sudden appearance on the road to Damascus led him to the conclusion that he knew nothing. He was astonished that Jesus appeared to a sinful person like him and chose him to be an apostle to the Gentiles.

In this valley, the intellect is incapable of understanding the divine wisdom. The lover does not fathom the surroundings and loses composure. Maybe that is why Paul, after his mystical experience, was stunned for three days and went to Saudi Arabia for three years where he lived in isolation. His bewilderment manifested itself in other ways as well: That was when he sometimes introduced himself as a true Jew and sometimes as a non-Jewish apostle. He was a lover who was filled more and more with love and became more alien to his old self. After his conversion, during his missionary journeys, when despair overwhelmed him, nobody knew that, as he was in need of only his beloved.

When he entered Corinth, there were two obstacles in his way: The first was the immorality that existed among the people of the city, and the second was the hostility of the Jews of the city. At the very moment when fear and doubt came to Paul, he had the same dream that he had during times of fear and weakness: Jesus promised him victory and his promise was fulfilled. Suddenly the tide was turned, the hostility of the Jews disappeared, the head of the synagogue became a Christian, and the number of

believers multiplied. Perhaps it was in those moments that Paul realised the greatness of what he was preaching and the wisdom of his actions.

Similar to Paul, Táhirih immersed in this valley in her own way. The sincere dream of Táhirih, which led her to believe in the Báb and the conviction that she achieved by studying the writings of the Báb, led her to take actions that brought her audiences to the conclusion that she has instantly/simultaneously passed the Valley of Unity, the Valley of Contentment, and the Valley of Wonderment. The stages of Táhirih's bewilderment are especially illustrated in her poems.

*Love pounded its banner at my dilapidated abode
Called aloud at the gate, my beloved
Poured the divine wine into my chalice
To make me alien to myself and to the world*

God demands my high aspirations

*The cupbearer of the tavern of the 'Am I not your Lord'
Poured with her hand to every cup, the wine
Shattering into pieces every insignificant piece
The wine itself became drunk by our presence, then, coming into being*

By the stupor of my wine

*Love calls on in every moment
Loud and clear to every created thing
Whoever desires to be joining with us
It is hesitant of the wave of tribulation*

Cannot step to the shore of my sea (Vaseghi 2006:88-93; original emphasis).

Therefore, Paul and Táhirih voluntarily step onto a path that had no other result than their union with God, and that stage was nothing but true poverty and an annihilation in the sight of God.

6.5.7 The Seventh Valley: The Valley of True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness

This station is the dying from self and the living in God, the being poor in self and rich in the Desired One. Poverty as here referred to signifieth being poor in the things of the created world, rich in the things of God's world. For when the true lover and devoted friend reacheth to the presence of the Beloved, the sparkling beauty of the Loved One and the fire of the lover's heart will kindle a blaze and burn away all veils and wrappings. Yea, all he hath, from heart to skin, will be set aflame, so that nothing will remain save the Friend (Bahá'u'lláh 2005:24).

As implied before, the highest point of Paul's theology was a union with Christ and this was the essence of Christianity that Paul achieved. Reviewing the life of Paul after his conversion, reveals that his main ambition was to achieve this stage – a unity with Christ – and his entire gospel and theology revolved around this concept. The Damascus experience was a source of inspiration for Paul. He literally became a new creation. He knew he had to be poor to be united with Jesus. He had to put aside all his previous knowledge in order to be able to accept Jesus' words. He did not even cling to the abilities that were given to him by Jesus. He never bragged about the power of his miracles as he knew that it came from his Father (Johnson 2013:4). In fact, his whole effort was to gain satisfaction and union with Jesus, for which he gave up his whole life.

Táhirih's writings and poems together form a live evidence that, after she started to believe in the Báb, she was eager to unite with him. Despite her high position among the Babis and the Muslims, she did not care for these titles since none of these did matter to her and did not quench her thirsty soul as she yearned for the company of her beloved. In one of her documents, which was revealed to the honourable Mullah

Hussein, she expressed her humility and humbleness to him since he was the first one who believed in the Báb (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:396). Elsewhere, she introduces herself as a small particle that does not claim any position: 'Rather, I do not consider myself among the believers, and I will be grateful if they consider me to the Muslim sect. This status will suffice me' (Mohammad Hosseini 2000:416). She burned all the obstacles between her and her master. She relinquished her status, her children, and everything that could prevent her from connecting to her master. The end of Táhirih's work, just like Paul, was the sacrifice of her life to God, and this was the eternal aspiration that she achieved.

6.6 Summary

The respective love stories of Paul and Táhirih, as well as the paths they took, are wonderful narratives of two lovers of their beloved that were unique in the history of religions. Paul and Táhirih, the first with a Jewish background, and the second with a Muslim background, both went the hard and uncertain way to reach their goal. An examination of the stages that led to the faith of both of them, and eventually to their martyrdom, conforms to the *Seven Valleys* – one of the mystical Scriptures of Bahá'u'lláh. Their mystical journey that, according to this work, involved seven stages to reach their destination, culminating in their martyrdom. Both of them were resolutely searching for the truth. Then they stepped up onto the stage where reason had no place anymore. In that valley there was only love and pain: The pain of being away from their beloved, which was also the source of motivation, energy, and moving forward for them. How beautiful and comforting this stage was for Paul and Táhirih when they saw their Lord in a dream and heard from him!

The third Valley – the valley of knowledge – is the most precarious one,¹²⁸ but both Paul and Táhirih crossed it safely. At this stage, suspicion becomes certainty, and this is followed by the valley of unity which is the starting point of the union between the lover and the beloved. At this point, Táhirih and Paul were informed of mysteries that not

¹²⁸ The wayfarer of this Valley recognises their beloved and their doubt disappears. However, this knowledge can destroy love.

everyone deserved to hear, and when their love to their beloved got deeper and deeper, they stepped into the valley of contentment where they did not care for anything – neither suffrage nor happiness. They also did not feel in any need of the world and everything in it.

No one can exactly judge and describe what happens between the wayfarer and their beloved in the fifth valley, the valley of wonderment. I think that both Paul and Táhirih probably crossed this valley much earlier – perhaps at the time of their conversion where they immersed in the sea of greatness or while they were in trouble or in the hands of their enemies. It could also be in Jerusalem or at the Badasht Conference, where they bravely defended their ideas and theology. The last two valleys that they entered, were stages that they both were looking for and waiting to reach for a long time, i.e. true poverty and absolute nothingness. This was the last stage of their respective spiritual journeys that both of them achieved by spending their lives in propagating their beloved's commands and eventually lying down their lives.

The next chapter provides a brief overview of the issues raised in the previous chapters.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

Turning the pages of the history of religions and exploring it, leads us to people who not only made a tremendous impact during their time, but may even have changed the course of history in some way. Paul and Táhirih are good examples of this. What this research wanted to achieve, was to examine the similarities between these two influential figures in Christianity and the Babi religion respectively, and to explain why and how these two individuals became apostles and heroes who surpassed their contemporaries and became the sources and influencers of such significant changes that their religious beliefs actually managed to influence the path of history.

7.2 Summary of the Literature Review

Many books and articles have been written about Paul, discussing the story of his life, his controversial theology (focused on justification by faith), his influence on Christianity, etc. Gould (1899), Barclay (1976), Stendahl (1963), Best (1982), Carus (1901), Grant (1914), Koptak (1990), Byrne (1998), Roetzel (1999), Duling (2003), Waldron (2006), Deffinbaugh (2004), Bugg (2010), Henning (2010), Leonard (2012), Taylor (2012), Third Millennium Ministries (2012), Fredriksen (2014), Sibley (2016), and Byler (2016) are just a few examples of authors that almost rendered the same and neutral portrait about Paul. Similar to Muslim authors like Beheshti (1979), Farhat (2011), and Fakhrol Eslam (2012), the Jewish author, Langton (2007) proposes a different biography about Paul, and in some cases questions his authority and fruits. However, the New Testament was the main source that this research relied on for final judgement.

Regarding Táhirih, Muhammad Husseini (2000) provides comprehensive and complete information about her life, from her birth to her martyrdom. This collection depicts in detail the important events of this lady, her actions, and her services, based on various sources. Root (1938), Johnson (1982), Maneck (1989), Momen (2003), Fadil Mazanda-

rani (2009), Lee (2016), and Shahrokh (2018) also render beneficial information regarding her family life and achievements, especially her writings that contain her theology.

7.3 Summary of the Data Analysis

Paul was a true Jew, born in a Greek territory, and he spent all his efforts to fulfil the rules and laws of the Torah in order to be saved. Looking at the biography of Paul, one finds that some parts of it are mentioned in the New Testament, revealing that he was a bigoted Greek Jew whose initial enmity towards Christianity was famous among Jews and Christians. With the help of Gamaliel, Paul's moderate teacher, he learned the Jewish teachings to the highest degree. However, the more he studied, the less he felt satisfied. The Damascus incident shook Paul, becoming the turning point in his life. Táhirih also received religious and jurisprudential education, contrary to the common customs of the era in which women were not given any status. However, her mind did not calm down and, just like Paul's, it learnt to fly.

The martyrdom of Stephen, one of the earliest followers of Christ, at first made Paul more determined to persecute and kill Christians, but later raised many questions in his mind and led him to Damascus and his mystical experience. Paul arranged to go to Damascus to persecute the Christians there, but was destined to convert and have faith in Jesus. He saw his master in a dream, and this was the beginning of a journey that lasted 30 years.

After the Damascus experience, his initial hostility changed into an eternal love towards Jesus Christ and the new cult through his inspiration. This event transformed him into a zealous Christian whose story of devotion, his missionary journeys, and most of his sufferings are written down in the New Testament. However, this persistent apostle, whose main aspiration was to serve Christianity, had been criticised by the ones who also presumed themselves as the preservers and observers of the new faith i.e. some Jewish Christians who could not tolerate Paul's liberty in his evangelism of the Gentiles.

Táhirih was born and raised in a fundamentalist Shiite family and was educated under Islamic law since childhood. She attended religious classes and became professional in a way that was eligible for a degree in Ijtihad. However, she was barred due to gender discrimination. Under the teaching of Usulis, it was expected that Táhirih, like her relatives (e.g. her uncle Mulla Taqi) would become a staunch Shiite, but this did not happen. She resolutely challenged these teachings from the beginning and she herself did not stop searching for the truth. In this way, she took a series of actions that were not common for a woman at that time. Not only did she attend the classes of her uncle and father together with the men, but she also gave classes and educate both males and females.

Being acquainted with the Shaykhi school, became the turning point in Táhirih's life. She studied the writings of Shaykh Ahmad and Siyyid Kazim in secret and became so fascinated and excited that she decided to leave her house and children and to make a journey. Táhirih, who at first had decided to visit Karbala with the intention of visiting Siyyid Kazim Rashti, after hearing the news of his ascension, held her classes in his house. The depth of her knowledge and insight on the divine verses, attracted the disciples of Siyyid Kazim to her, and the purity of her heart and intention led her faith in the Báb through a spiritual dream. From then on, despite the opposition of Shiite scholars and even a group of Babis, Táhirih began to preach the divine command openly.

This fire arose opposition to Táhirih with her bold actions, such as celebrating the birthday of the Báb, which coincided with the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, removing the veil from her face, and eliminating Islamic traditions and rituals, her successive deportations to Arab territories, and eventually to her birthplace, and Qazvin that did not disrupt her actions. In Qazvin, her uncle and husband who, before her trip to Karbila opposed her religious beliefs, became her fiercest enemies. The murder of Táhirih's uncle by a fan of the Shaykhi school and the events that led to her house arrest and eventually her departure from Qazvin and her migration to Tehran, marked the beginning of a new chapter in her life and prepared her for future missions. In Badasht, under the

leadership and guidance of Bahá'u'lláh and with the cooperation of one of the sincere Babis called Quddús, she became the forerunner of a new era and announced the Babis' secession from Islam. Even during her imprisonment in Kalantar's house, she communicated with various people, including the Shah, princesses and Shi'i clerics, and interpreted the facts of the new faith to them until her martyrdom.

Scrutinising Paul's theology depicts that he has entered new concepts in Christian literature that, until his day were not acceptable in public. Removing the tradition of physical circumcision¹²⁹ (for gentiles and pagans) and replacing it with baptism, put more emphasis on faith in Jesus Christ and not on performing rituals anymore, claiming that God's grace involves all people, regardless of race or previous background. This was very difficult for the Jews to accept, as they stuck to their previous beliefs and assumed themselves the only 'chosen people' (Fredriksen 2014).

To be fair, it should be admitted that, ignoring the custom of circumcision as a precondition for the conversion of the Gentiles, was synonymous to one of the biggest sins that a Jew could commit (Gibbon 2002), but apparently not for Paul. He removed this tradition and so many other rituals for Gentiles, since he consistently believed that performing these religious customs, would not bring any fruits when the owner of this rituals, i.e. Jesus Christ returned. Obtaining the approval of the chief apostles in Jerusalem, including Peter, James, and John regarding this issue (removing circumcision from the Gentiles), gave Paul more courage to follow his special method of evangelism, and that is why he was titled the apostle of the Gentiles (Burton 1895). This previous prejudiced diaspora Jew also succeeded in founding many Churches in various cities like Corinth and Lidia (Horrell 1997). His letters, which form a noticeable part of the New Testament, are a rich and valuable treasure that contains some of the most important principles and ethics of Christianity.

¹²⁹ *In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins (Col 2:11-13).*

The account of Paul's missionary journeys, which covers much of the New Testament, is a valuable legacy of this diligent apostle. In these writings, he presented a different example and model of leadership, which was very decisive and very confident in spite of humility and patience. Most importantly, he provided an example of leadership that was not only worthy of imitation, but he also trained people who were themselves trustworthy and worthy of leadership. Perhaps on top of all these qualities we should point to his unrequited and boundless love for all the people he met, which stemmed from his belief in the equality of mankind.

The works left by Táhirih are in the form of poetry and prose. In the missives left by her, which are in two forms – private and public – the extent of her love for the Báb has been described in detail. Like Paul, she was a courageous leader who did not give up preaching the word of God for a moment, despite many problems. In public statements, she invited the public to preach and support the divine command, and in private letters and communications, she removed the obstacles and doubts that existed for the audience on the path of faith.

Reviewing the positions of Paul and Táhirih shows that, regardless of the fact that they were attacked and criticised in the same way, their achievements and legacy have also been praised. Spiritual and cultural changes in the structure of societies during their eras, are examples of the legacy of these two apostles. At the forefront of their achievements was the unparalleled courage that they displayed in overthrowing the existing order in society with completely unique actions.

All the abovementioned information indicates the similarities between Paul and Táhirih, which acted as the main objective of this dissertation. Recognition of the truth, in the form of mystical experiences, dominance over religious sciences, decisive and strong personalities, bold propagation of the divine command, introducing a new model of leadership, and more importantly, similar theological perspectives regarding religious concepts, are only but a summary of their similarities.

Both Paul and Táhirih challenged Judaism and Islam respectively in a bold manner. Táhirih rejected customs such as *Taqiyyah*, and gave a new form and meaning to the concepts of hijab, chastity, and infallibility. In a courageous action, she removed her veil at the Badasht Conference and announced the separation of the Babi religion from Islam.

Paul also ended the Jewish racial supremacy by declaring equality between Jews and Gentiles. He gave a more universal understanding of the promised Messiah to the Jewish people. Furthermore, with the help of the Holy Spirit that he received from Christ and his teachings, Paul entered Jerusalem and was able to persuade the main pillars of Christianity that circumcision should be removed as a precondition for non-Jews. He was accepted as an apostle of the Gentiles and baptised many Gentiles as a Christian believer.

However, the successes and legacies of Paul and Táhirih are not limited to the above. The changes initiated by both of them were fundamental changes that challenged the Jewish and Muslim communities of the time. These were not only opposed by foreign enemies but also provoked opposition from a number of Christians and Babis respectively. Paul's desired salvation, which led to his faith in Jesus Christ was not linked to any particular people or group, as it was primarily through faith, not observing the Jewish law. Paul also presented a novel meaning of the resurrection of Jesus. In his epistles, particularly in 1 Corinthians 15:35-49¹³⁰ he referred to a new spiritual body of the resurrected followers of Christ, which would be fit for heaven. He stated that it would be futile to think that Christ was only martyred for our sins, implying that everybody was forever freed from sin. Christ's death would be meaningless without a resurrection. He went on to describe the resurrection as not specifically Jesus Christ's resurrection, but

¹³⁰ In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul explained that Jesus' resurrection was in a spiritual body. He explained that Jesus was not the cause of our physical life, but of our spiritual life. Christ gives life to those who are dead – spiritually dead (Friedman 1999).

also as a daily experience for all believers, saying that they must die on a daily basis from their sins and live in the Spirit of Jesus.¹³¹

Táhirih also revolutionised the Shi'i culture. In a culture where even seeing the shadow of a woman was considered a great sin, she surpassed the men and scholars of the time, established classes, and trained many students. Relying on the power of her femininity, Táhirih showed that a woman's ability is beyond having children, and in the new age, women can be the source of important things. Removing the hijab at the Badasht Conference, highlighted the important fact that a woman could attack and subdue men without sacrificing her gender or relying on physical beauty.

Another valuable legacy of Paul and Táhirih is their mystic orientation which can be extracted through the process of their faith. Paul and Táhirih went through seven steps to connect with Christ and the Báb respectively. While unique in its kind, according to the holy Scriptures (of Christians and the Baha'i), it could be the mystical experience of any sincere seeker. However, it is not an easy task and not everyone would be committed to do it. Reaching this position requires a burning desire, a fiery love, deep knowledge, and eventually an absolute disconnection from the material world. Perhaps this is the point at which the ranks of the believers differ. Abd'ul-Bahá explained these ranks clearly when he states:

Some people stand at the gate of the kingdom and look inside the garden of the kingdom, but they do not enter. Some walk and enter to see its beauty, but do not go too deep into the garden. Some walk around the garden and get intoxicated by the smell of flowers. But there are some who enter and become so unconscious from the splendor they see, that they get drunk and stay in the Garden of Eden forever (Payam Baha'i 2011).

¹³¹ *I face death every day – yes, just as surely as I boast about you in Christ Jesus our Lord (1 Cor 15: 31).*

Certainly, Paul and Táhirih acted as examples of believers who were intoxicated by the wine of divine love and lived in that garden for the rest of their lives.

7.4 Synthesis of the Research Findings

Based on the abovementioned points, it can be concluded that with the emergence of each prophet, people appear who, regardless of time, place, gender, and religious background, can have profound effects on the society and people of their time, and even future generations. Paul and Táhirih were examples of such people whose comparison of actions and influences reveals unique similarities between them and leads the audience to the fact that with courage, discontinuation from God, and connection to the divine source, one can take extraordinary steps and perform profound changes.

The importance of studying these two personalities became especially clear when taking into consideration that the value of their actions and services has not diminished, as it can also be a source of inspiration for the actions of the current and future generations. The union with God that both Paul and Táhirih engaged in, and the path that they took towards transcendence and this union – Paul’s efforts to establish equality and peace between Jews and Gentiles, and his worldview perspective on Christianity, and Táhirih’s cultural activities for equal rights for women and men – are just a few examples of the inspiring actions of these two apostles, while the current generation continues to strive for these values and rights as a result of the actions of people like Paul and Táhirih.

The main goal of this research was to investigate similarities between Paul and Táhirih through both their extant manuscripts and other documents, and to collect evidence that ascertain them to be considered as revolutionary heroes of their era. In order to accomplish this, the research objectives were set as:

- a. *Find similarities between the personalities and theologies of Paul and Táhirih and draw lessons from it.* The following is a simplified summary of the findings:

Similarity	Paul	Táhirih
Character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great communicator and writer (baptised many people and wrote 14 epistles). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brilliant and courageous lecturer (met many Shi'i clerics, the Shah, and princesses). Wrote many poems and prose.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manifested figure and characteristics of a leader (Jerusalem Conference for instance). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Her great leadership became vivid, especially in the Badasht Conference.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decisive and radical, especially in difficulties (defending Gentiles' rights). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bold and firm (in declaring her belief).
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise the truth through inspiration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinguish the Báb through a spiritual dream in Karbila.
Theology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His own interpretation regarding the Jewish law, manifestation, resurrection, redemption, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believed in a spiritual resurrection by the appearance of the prophet, where the law would become void.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mystic terms and approaches, like 'live in Christ.' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mystic tendency (union with God).

b. *Investigate the personalities and culture of both Paul and Táhirih, as well as their lifestyles before their conversion, to see how their thoughts and attitudes were formed towards their new religions, and how much they had in common. The following is a simplified summary of the findings:*

Similarity	Paul	Táhirih
Culture	Diaspora Jew (raised in a place with a multiple culture).	Islamic culture (grew up in a city (Ghazvin) with a multiple culture).
Personality	Explorer, brave, bold, wise and deep, and confident.	Open-mind, courageous, fearless, and adventurous.
Lifestyle before conversion	A devoted Jew who really wanted to serve his religion and at the same time being eager to know the truth.	Believed in Islamic and later the Shaykhi school and then eager to discover the truth at any cost, being busy with teaching religious lessons.
Thoughts and attitudes that influenced the new faith	Intrusion into etiquette and custom with the appearance of the new manifestation. Broad view, believe in equality between nations. Believe in the comprehensiveness of Christianity.	Believe in the uniqueness of the new faith, a comprehensive view towards religion, the invalidity of the previous teachings with the advent of the new prophet.

- c. *Also investigate their respective roles, contributions, and influences on the faith that they propagated.* The following is a simplified summary of the findings:

Similarity	Paul	Táhirih
Role which they played	He was the forerunner of changes (separation between Christianity and Judaism).	She was the forerunner of drastic changes in the Babi faith (removing dissimulation and developed women's status).

Similarity	Paul	Táhirih
Main contributions that they made	He defended the Gentiles' right on different occasions, especially in Antioch and the Jerusalem Conference.	She announced the end of Islam in Badasht by removing her veil. Revealed a woman's strength by her actions.
Things that they influenced, transformed, and changed	He declared equality between the Jews and Gentiles. He has defended their rights and put emphasis on ethical principles instead of superficial rituals such as circumcision.	In Karbila, she revealed her power in front of males by holding classes. By removing her veil in Badasht, she announced the separation of the Babi faith from Islam.

- d. *Reach a better understanding of their faith, by examining their extant documents/manuscripts.* The following is a simplified summary of the findings:

Similarity	Paul	Táhirih
The core ideas of their faith	Christianity is all about love, and this love is not specific to a particular group or race. Get rid of different types of prejudices.	Unity and love among different religions is the main reason for the appearance of the manifestation of God.

- e. *State why they are hailed as heroes of their particular eras.*

The research has proved that both Paul and Táhirih were hailed as heroes of their respective eras because they revealed such a tremendous courage in critical moments. In the Antioch and Jerusalem Conferences, regardless of the views of the other apostles and the aftermath, Paul defended the rights of non-Jewish Christians by removing an obstacle such as circumcision. Táhirih portrayed a new face of a woman with her courageous actions (such as leaving her family and holding classes for men and women) and she also

announced the abrogation of Islamic rules and traditions, after she started to believe in the Báb, and on various occasions such as the Badasht Conference.

- f. *Search for the source of their inspiration and motivation. Did they benefit from the same source of revelation?*

Focusing on the books and writings left by Paul and Táhirih shows that the source of their actions was the reliance on the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Báb respectively. Since their source of inspiration for the divine teachings was the same, we can conclude that they received the same grace.

- g. *Render a fair image of both Paul and Táhirih to inform followers of both religions (Christianity and Baha'i) to have a better understanding of the character of these religions.*

The main reason why I did the research was to provide a fair and neutral perspective on both Paul and Táhirih in order for Christians and Baha'is, as well as Muslims and Jews, to better understand the influence that these two people had on the development of the two religions into separate belief systems.

The sub-questions that supported the main question, were:

- a. Are there similarities between their personalities and theologies? If so, what do we learn from them?

Yes, the above table and Chapter 5 discussed their similarities in detail. The lesson that one can acquire from them is that it does not matter how big the problems are as long as one believes in the correctness of one's actions. With God's help, a person will overcome all obstacles and will be the source of great changes.

- b. To what extent were they committed to their previous religion and then to Christianity and the Babi faith?

Both were influenced by their previous faiths to which they were fully committed, and after their conversions, both were fully committed to their new faiths.

- c. What were their respective missions and did they succeed? How?

Their success in performing new principles and their challenges to separate themselves from their previous faiths (Jews and Islam) are very clear. Their missions were to fully commit to their new faiths and to ensure that the message that they believed in, was spread into the world.

- d. Why do some sources propose a negative image of Paul the apostle and Táhirih?

The approach of believers towards the new religion manifests itself in various forms. Some continue to cling to the teachings of their previous religion and fear new changes, while others realise the independence of the new religion and boldly become the source of change. Paul and Táhirih were in the second group, and this caused opposition from the first group. On the other hand, the complete separation of Paul and Táhirih from the Jewish and Shiite communities created opposition among their former co-religionists because they considered Paul and Táhirih as apostates. Hence, they had been portrayed negatively from both insider and outsiders.

- e. How much were Paul and Táhirih influenced by the societies in which they lived?
The societies and eras in which they lived, influenced and shaped their lives and the extent to which they could act.

- f. Why did they differ from other believers? Did they realise something that their fellow-believers missed?

Whereas many of the early believers of Christianity and Babism took a very traditional and cautious approach, Paul and Táhirih very bravely challenged not only the religious customs of Judaism and Islam, but also without any particular instruction from Christ and the Báb, became the sources of change in their respective societies. This shows that they understood the truth of Christianity and Islam wholeheartedly.

- g. What are their positions in history?

There are two views about Paul and Táhirih: Those who consider them as being misguided and infidels, and those who praise their actions and consider them to be influential believers in the spread of Christianity and Babism. Both of them

have an important place in history in terms of changing the paths of their traditional faiths as well as changing society.

The main question of this research was: *Why are Paul and Táhirih labelled as revolutionary characters of their respective eras?* Both Paul and Táhirih took bold steps. They managed to separate their faiths from the traditional faiths – Judaism and Islam – and ignored many of the religious and cultural customs of their time. Currently they are still influential and controversial, despite the fact that they are portrayed negatively by scholars from outside and inside their faith communities.

7.5 Limitation of the Study

A big limitation is that this research mainly focused on how Paul and Táhirih were portrayed from their respective religious and cultural perspectives and did not deal with other sides of their lives. Another limitation is the author's lack of complete access to all of Táhirih's writings including the English translation of her poems. This problem was largely resolved with the help of a supervisor and other friends abroad. Moreover, the different languages in which the original documentation was written (like the Greek of the New Testament), also posed some challenges to me and I therefore had to resort to English translations that were available to me.

7.6 Recommendations and Suggestions for Future Research

The reason that motivated me to do this research was to provide a fair and neutral perspective on both Paul and Táhirih in order for Christians and Baha'is, as well as Muslims and Jews, to have a better understanding of the influence that these two people had on the development of the two religions into their separate belief systems. I hope that this research will encourage others to broaden such inter-religious research interests.

In this study, I took a certain (subjective) angle to depict the revolutionary role and character of Paul the apostle and Táhirih, as well as their similarities. Unfortunately, I could not find much documentation regarding Paul in the Baha'i Scriptures, which can

be further researched by Baha'i scholars in the future. Peter as well as Paul are specifically praised by Abd'ul-Bahá.

Furthermore, although many angles about these two personalities, especially Paul's theology and its similarities with the mysticism of the Baha'i are not discussed in this study, I do hope that future research will address these motifs. I hope this study will be able to play a minor role in this regard.

7.7 Conclusion

This research reviewed the events of the 1st and 19th centuries CE respectively and examined the role and impression of two influential figures of Christianity and the Babi faith, namely Paul and Táhirih. Scrutinising the life of these two apostles, showed that, regardless of their cultural, social, and religious differences, there are undeniable similarities between these two and that both of them can be regarded as revolutionary characters who did not only influence their own eras, but are still influential in the religions that they helped to form. I do hope that this research will be able to play a role in providing a fair and neutral description of their lives and influences on religion and society.

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