The Passion of Jesus Christ

Jesus is often portrayed in art, theatre, film and sculpture. His image adorns most churches and is often an object of adoration.

Bahá’ís are discouraged from displaying images of Bahá'u'lláh in their homes, or attempting to portray any Manifestation of God. The wisdom of this becomes evident when we see how inadequate the results of any such attempt are.

For example the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* was in some ways an admirable attempt to capture Jesus’ humanity while acknowledging that He was, and is, believed to be Divine. While generally faithful to the story of Jesus’ last days as recorded in the Gospels, it failed to capture the reality of Christ. It was written from the imaginary perspective of Judas, the Apostle who betrayed Jesus, and it portrayed Jesus as weak and questioning of God when He prays “Let this cup pass from me”.

We know, however, from first hand accounts of the actions and words of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh that the Manifestations of God never feared death but lived Their lives in close embrace with God. Bahá'u'lláh wrote of Jesus’ prayer in the garden:

He Who was Thy Spirit (Jesus), O my God, withdrew all alone in the darkness of the night preceding His last day on earth, and falling on His face to the ground besought Thee saying: “If it be Thy will, O my Lord, my Well-Beloved, let this cup, through Thy grace and bounty, pass from me.”

By Thy beauty, O Thou Who art the Lord of all names and the Creator of the heavens! I can smell the fragrance of the words which, in His love for Thee, His lips have uttered, and can feel the glow of the fire that had inflamed His soul in its longing to behold Thy face and in its yearning after the Day-Spring of the light of Thy oneness, and the Dawning-Place of Thy transcendent unity

Jesus Christ

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

*(*Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleaning 86)*

Mary Magdalene (Close follower of Jesus)

When Jesus Christ died upon the cross, the disciples who witnessed His crucifixion were disturbed and shaken. Even Peter, one of the greatest of His followers, denied Him thrice. Mary Magdalene brought them together and confirmed their faith, saying, “Why are ye doubting? Why have ye feared? O thou Peter! Why didst thou deny Him? For Christ was not crucified. The reality of Christ is ever-living, everlasting, eternal. For that divine reality there is no beginning, no ending, and, therefore, there can be no death. At most, only the body of Jesus has suffered death.” In brief, this woman, singly and alone, was instrumental in transforming the disciples and making them steadfast. This is an evidence of extraordinary power and supreme attributes, a proof that woman is the equivalent and complement of man. The one who is better trained and educated, whose aptitude is greater and whose ideals are higher is most distinguished and worthy—whether man or woman.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.395)

Peter (Chief Apostle, “The Rock”)

“Peter,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has testified, “according to the history of the Church, was also incapable of keeping count of the days of the week. Whenever he decided to go fishing, he would tie up his weekly food into seven parcels, and every day he would eat one of them, and when he had reached the seventh, he would know that the Sabbath had arrived, and thereupon would observe it.” If the Son of Man was capable of infusing into apparently so crude and helpless an instrument such potency as to cause, in the words of Bahá’u’lláh, “the mysteries of wisdom and of utterance to flow out of his mouth,” and to exalt him above the rest of His disciples, and render him fit to become His successor and the founder of His Church, how much more can the Father, Who is Bahá’u’lláh, empower the most puny and insignificant among His followers to achieve, for the execution of His purpose, such wonders as would dwarf the mightiest achievements of even the first apostle of Jesus Christ!

(Shoghi Effendi: *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p.46)

Judas Iscariot (Disciple who betrayed Jesus)

Judas Iscariot was the greatest of the disciples, and he summoned the people to Christ. Then it seemed to him that Jesus was showing increasing regard to the Apostle Peter, and when Jesus said, ‘Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church,’ these words addressed to Peter, and this singling out of Peter for special honour, had a marked effect on the Apostle, and kindled envy within the heart of Judas. For this reason he who had once drawn nigh did turn aside, and he who had believed in the Faith denied it, and his love changed to hate, until he became a cause of the crucifixion of that glorious Lord, that manifest Splendour.

(*Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p.163)

Annas and Caiaphas (Jewish High Priests)

Consider the Dispensation of Jesus Christ. Behold, how all the learned men of that generation, though eagerly anticipating the coming of the Promised One, have nevertheless denied Him. Both Annas, the most learned among the divines of His day, and Caiaphas, the high priest, denounced Him and pronounced the sentence of His death.

*(*Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleaning* 83*)*

Herod (Jewish ruler of Galilee and Peraea, son of King Herod the Great)

Consider and call thou to mind the days whereon the Spirit of God (Jesus Christ) appeared, and Herod gave judgment against Him. God, however, aided Him with the hosts of the unseen, and protected Him with truth.

*(*Bahá’u’lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the* Wolf p.58*)*

Pontius Pilate (roman Governor of Judaea) & the Trial of Jesus

Similarly, call thou to mind the day when the Jews, who had surrounded Jesus, Son of Mary\*, were pressing Him to confess His claim of being the Messiah and Prophet of God, so that they might declare Him an infidel and sentence Him to death. Then, they led Him away, He Who was the Day-star of the heaven of divine Revelation, unto Pilate and Caiaphas, who was the leading divine of that age. The chief priests were all assembled in the palace, also a multitude of people who had gathered to witness His sufferings, to deride and injure Him. Though they repeatedly questioned 133 Him, hoping that He would confess His claim, yet Jesus held His peace and spake not. Finally, an accursed of God arose and, approaching Jesus, adjured Him saying: “Didst thou not claim to be the Divine Messiah? Didst thou not say, ‘I am the King of Kings, My word is the Word of God, and I am the breaker of the Sabbath day?’” Thereupon Jesus lifted up His head and said: “Beholdest thou not the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and might?” These were His words, and yet consider how to outward seeming He was devoid of all power except that inner power which was of God and which had encompassed all that is in heaven and on earth. How can I relate all that befell Him after He spoke these words? How shall I describe their heinous behaviour towards Him? They at last heaped on His blessed Person such woes that He took His flight unto the fourth Heaven\*\*.

*(*Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitab-i-Iqan, pp. 132-133)*

Notes

\* Mary the wife of Joseph, not Mary Magdalene

\*\* In Islamic lore, Jesus was supposed to inhabit the fourth (sometimes the third) of the seven heavens until his return at the end of time.

Mary (Mother of Jesus)

Likewise, reflect upon the state and condition of Mary. So deep was the perplexity of that most beauteous countenance, so grievous her case, that she bitterly regretted she had ever been born. To this beareth witness the text of the sacred verse wherein it is mentioned that after Mary had given birth to Jesus, she bemoaned her plight and cried out: “O would that I had died ere this, and been a thing forgotten, forgotten quite!” I swear by God! Such lamenting consumeth the heart and shaketh the being. Such consternation of soul, such despondency, could have been caused by no other than the censure of the enemy and the cavilings of the infidel and perverse. Reflect, what answer could Mary have given to the people around her? How could she claim that a Babe Whose father was unknown had been conceived of the Holy Ghost? Therefore did Mary, that veiled and immortal Countenance, take up her Child and return unto her home. No sooner had the eyes of the people fallen upon her than they raised their voice saying: “O sister of Aaron! Thy father was not a man of wickedness, nor unchaste thy mother.”

And now, meditate upon this most great convulsion, this grievous test. Notwithstanding all these things, God conferred upon that essence of the Spirit, Who was known amongst the people as fatherless, the glory of Prophethood, and made Him His testimony unto all that are in heaven and on earth.

(Bahá’u’lláh *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*)

A Parallel with the Mission and Death of The Báb

The passion of Jesus Christ, and indeed His whole public ministry, alone offer a parallel to the Mission and death of the Báb, a parallel which no student of comparative religion can fail to perceive or ignore. In the youthfulness and meekness of the Inaugurator of the Bábí Dispensation; in the extreme brevity and turbulence of His public ministry; in the dramatic swiftness with which that ministry moved towards its climax; in the apostolic order which He instituted, and the primacy which He conferred on one of its members; in the boldness of His challenge to the time-honored conventions, rites and laws which had been woven into the fabric of the religion He Himself had been born into; in the role which an officially recognized and firmly entrenched religious hierarchy played as chief instigator of the outrages which He was made to suffer; in the indignities heaped upon Him; in the suddenness of His arrest; in the interrogation to which He was subjected; in the derision poured, and the scourging inflicted, upon Him; in the public affront He sustained; and, finally, in His ignominious suspension before the gaze of a hostile multitude--in all these we cannot fail to discern a remarkable similarity to the distinguishing features of the career of Jesus Christ.

(Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By***.** p56-57)

Compiled by Colin Dibdin 28 April 2021