The Tablet of Baha'u'llah to Pope Pius IX (1846-1878). Stephen Lambden.

It was perhaps a year after his being exiled to the then Ottoman prison city of Akka' (Acre, Palestine) in August 1868 CE., that Baha'u'llah (d.1892) dispatched his almost twenty-page Arabic Tablet to Pope Pius IX (Pontificate, 1846-1878). The son of a count this pope, named Giovanni Maria Mastai-Ferretti, was born in Senigallia (Ancona, Italy) on May 13th 1792. It may not have been long after Baha'u'llah's dispatching the Tablet to the Pope that papal temporal power was virtually ended. Following the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War and the seizure and occupation of Rome by Victor Emmanuel (Sept. 1870) Pius IX came to see himself as a dethroned sovereign and a (self-imposed) prisoner within the Vatican where he died in 1878.

it was in December 1854 after consulting the cardinals and bishops that Pius IX solemnly defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Bull Ineffabilis Deus -- he has come to be known as `The Pope of the Immaculate Conception'. Increasing the level of Catholic Marian devotion this non-Biblical dogma basically indicates that the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus, was herself born free of the alleged "stain of original sin". Among the most important events of the reign of Pius IXth was the convocation of the first Vatican Council (1869-70) at which a definition of papal primacy and infallibility was set forth. It may well have been during the course of this 20th ecumenical council that

the Tablet to the Pope was communicated and received -- precise details are not known.

While as Christ returned in "his most great majesty" (bi-majdihi al-a`zam) Baha'u'llah extended the hand of salvation to all on earth, Pius IX maintained an intransigent attitude towards all deistic, humanistic and non-Catholic religious avenues to Truth and God. The Pope gloried in the traditional axiom *extra ecclesium nulla salus* ("No salvation outside the [Catholic] church"). We do not know the reaction of Pius IX to Baha'u'llah's bold claim to be the return of Christ "come down from heaven" but it cannot have been favourable in the light of his exclusivist soteriological stance and claim of infallibility.

The Tablet to Pope Pius IX is the first of the `Tablets to the Kings' appended by Baha'u'llah to the (revised) Surat al-Haykal ("Sura of the Temple" late 1869[73]?) expressive of the `New Jerusalem' of the Baha'i Faith. It may thus also be the Tablet accorded by Baha'u'llah the apocalyptic, qur'anic epithet `The [Destructive] Cry [of Punishment]' (al-sayhah) (Iqtidarat, 298; cf. GPB:212). Shoghi Effendi referred to the Tablet to Pope Pius IX as a "most weighty Epistle" and contrasted the outwardly polarized earthly conditions of its imprisoned author and the powerful ecclesiastical recipient (GPB:209).

In this paper key themes and aspects of the Biblical interpretation implicit within the `Tablet to Pope Pius IX' will be commented upon including the identification of the Bab as the "return" of John the Baptist and of its author as the returned Christ who is the "Father" (see Isaiah 9:6).