CHAPTER 14

Baha'i Meets Globalisation: A New Synergy?

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When Weber identified the synergy (*wahlverwandtschaft*) between Protestantism and the rationalisation of social control and production in "modern" societies, both processes could be analysed in retrospect. This paper will attempt, more tentatively, to draw attention to the potential "fit" between the dynamics of globalisation and the Baha'i Faith. In the 21st century, the Baha'i community is actually encountering the restructuring of global society, which was something that could only be anticipated in the 20th century. The character of the Baha'i Faith itself is still being shaped, in a three-way dynamic involving the community's scriptural resources, the traditions of practice it has built up over several generations, and the demands of a globalising society. No attempt will be made, therefore, to predict whether the Baha'i Faith will have a fruitful marriage with globalisation, or a short infatuation broken up by underlying incompatibilities. A comparison of the key dynamics of globalisation and corresponding Baha'i scriptures and practice will, however, identify aspects of the relationship that will be most interesting to monitor. We should begin with a definition of terms.

"Globalisation" and "post-modern" in sociology refer to the process by which we move *from* the societies of the centralised nation-states of the "modern" era *to* something which is structurally different. "Globalisation" is the present active tense, and "post-modern" is the future passive participle: "that which will have been globalised," as we imagine it. Globalisation is not just a matter of extending existing social structures to a global level: the extension requires and reinforces deep structural changes, which in turn demand changes in world-views.

The key dynamic of globalisation is the **functional differentiation** of society: that is, the shift from a unitary stratified society to an organic society in which politics, religion, science, and commerce are increasingly distinct spheres of life. Although the process of differentiation

has roots in the earliest division of labour, there has been a sharp acceleration in Western Europe from the 14th to the 20th centuries. Distinct institutions of politics, economics, religion and science already existed, but their autonomy increased and, for the first time, we see theoretical claims that they *ought* to be autonomous. Some universities were freed from church control. Theories of national churches were advanced, to free the political sphere from papal control, and economic theories argued that trade prospers best where the state interferes least. Within the sphere of politics, the theory of the separation of the judicial, legislative and executive powers was worked out. The toleration of dissent developed into arguments for disestablishment, and churches were either constitutionally disestablished or withdrew from politics. These different institutions have also become distinct life-worlds: not only is the church distinct from the state and the academy, but the way we reason and relate to one another is different when we are sharing a Christian mass, arguing politics, doing science and setting up a trading company. It is accepted that we behave according to different logics in different spheres.

That brings us to the second dynamic of globalisation: **individualisation**. When society shifted from a unitary to a differentiated model, individual identity changed absolutely. In a unitary society, the individual has one identity: he might be a "gentleman" in commerce, religion and politics for example. In a differentiated society each person learns to act in distinct ways in the different spheres, and maintains a distinct status in each. The poor cobbler may be a respected leader in the Methodist circle, the magistrate may be excluded from communion. That also means that individuals have more freedom in constructing their own identities, and are dealt with in each sphere as individuals and not as members of a family, group or class. Individualisation brings with it the possibility and concept of individual freedoms, and the claim of classes, ethnic minorities and women to share in them as individuals. I treat **feminism** as an aspect of individualisation, because society recognises the individual and not the family as its basic unit.

Spreading the individual identity across multiple life worlds causes a good deal of stress. How much stress depends on how rapidly world-views change to accommodate the new situation. Any substantial lag is experienced as moral chaos or a "wrongness" in the world, and in the self. Individual responses to this stress can have dangerous social and political effects. The Baha'i Faith tells its followers that a radically different way of ordering the world (a New World Order) is not to be feared, and the Baha'i teachings anticipate the key dynamics of globalisation. These teachings could well alleviate some of the tension by

supporting a world-view in which the differentiated and individualised society is not a threat, it is *the way things are meant to be.*

Another effect of functional differentiation has been that boundaries belonging to one sphere are not transferred to another. Trade is not confined by the boundaries of the state or the religious community, and religious communities cross political boundaries. **Global integration** is the process in which commerce, having become an autonomous sphere functioning according to its own logic, discovers that national and religious boundaries are irrelevant, and becomes a world economic system. Where trade leads, technologies of transport and communication follow, and this makes it possible for science and politics to be integrated globally. It is not yet clear whether religion too will become a global system.

The last dynamic of globalisation I will consider is **pluralism and relativism**, due to intercultural and inter-religious contacts and migration. When we speak of postmodernism in philosophy and the fine arts, we are referring mainly to this aspect of globalisation. Intercultural and inter-religious contacts and migration relativise truth claims and social norms. The family, we now know, is not a given: it is made by people in many different ways. The class system is not part of the divine order. Ideologies too are seen to be manufactured, their doctrines designed to support interests. Ideological states have given way to non-ideological states, and political theories which supposed that shared ideologies and values are the basis of social unity have given way to a model of society that is united, despite our differences, by our needs for one another.

The dynamics of **technological progress** and the convergence of material cultures are major contributors to globalisation, although I will not deal with these.

With one eye on Weber's work on the synergy between Protestantism and capitalist societies, I would now like to relate Baha'i doctrines and community structures to these dynamics of globalisation, looking for potential synergy between the Baha'i faith and postmodern society. In principle I am interested in whether Baha'i *scripture* and Baha'i *practice*, (the latter based mainly on Baha'i secondary literature), support functional differentiation, individualisation and feminism, global integration, pluralism and relativism in the Baha'i *religious community* and in the *world*. However lack of space will not allow sources to be presented for theory and for practice, for the world and the community, in relation to each of the six dynamics of globalisation.

Global integration

As regards global integration, there seems to be no issue. The Baha'i terminology for this is "world unity." According to both its scriptures and its secondary literature, Baha'i teachings favour the extension of communications and of economic and political institutions to a global scale, based on the value that humanity is one people and the globe is one place. Evidence from the Baha'i literature in European languages and observations in the North American and Persian communities have shown that "world-mindedness" or "cosmopolitanism" is a strong characteristic of Baha'is.[1] Specific Baha'i teachings favour free trade and a universal currency, weights and measures, and Baha'i secondary literature has also endorsed these positions. Other Baha'i teachings oppose barriers to global integration, such as nationalism, prejudice and exclusivism. The Baha'is have contributed to the "thematisation of humanity," for instance through the translation and global distribution of the Universal House of Justice's 1985 letter *The Promise of World Peace,* and through their participation in various international forums.

   As for the internal dimension, it is evident that the Baha'i community itself is globally integrated, having spread and established its institutions in most parts of the world and most cultural areas, and having kept its communities in communication and communion with one another.

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[1] See Keene (1967). Keene's "characteristic statements" for world-mindedness are obviously drawn from the Baha'i teachings themselves, which invalidates his inter-religious comparisons (Keene: 145). Nevertheless his study does provide evidence of what has perhaps been too obvious to other observers to require empirical substantiation: the world-mindedness in the Baha'i scriptures is also an accepted and salient part of Baha'i self-awareness. Mehri Jensen (1986) has also used world-mindedness as a measure of Baha'i religiosity in Iran, but she does not report the specific rates she found. McMullen (2000) contains considerable anecdotal evidence for world-mindedness (see e.g., 170-72) but does not seem to have used any specific test for it. One of the most popular scriptural sources for the Baha'i vision of global integration is a letter written by Shoghi Effendi in 1936, and significantly entitled "The Unfoldment of World Civilization". (Shoghi Effendi, 1991: 161-206, especially 203-4).

Pluralism

With regard to pluralism, the Baha'i teachings contain the relevant theory, under the headings of "the oneness of mankind" (or sometimes, "of humanity") and "unity in diversity." Baha'i practice has also been supportive of multi-cultural initiatives such as racial equality education. John Huddlestone. for example, says that "one of the most effective ways of abolishing prejudice is to learn to appreciate the diversity of culture in the world and to see it as an enrichment of our total experience" (1989: 419). He then goes on to quote 'Abdu'l-Baha beginning "Consider the flowers of the garden, though differing in kind ...". This is typical of the presentations found in Baha'i literature, and is such a dominant theme in the Baha'i scriptures that further examples would be redundant.

When we look at pluralism in internal Baha'i practice, we have to distinguish between cultural pluralism, including racial pluralism, and other aspects of pluralism. As for *cultural pluralism*, Baha'i communities contain relatively high proportions of people who were born in another country or have lived long-term in another country, and almost all national Baha'i communities have a spread across the locally relevant variables, whether that be language, ethnic identity, class or religious background. Baha'i authors consistently advocate cultural pluralism. In our visual age, Baha'is have made an icon out of photographs and videos of groups of culturally diverse people. Such images are an important part of Baha'i socialisation and missionary work. Michael McMullen's description of the World Congress as "global Baha'i dramaturgy" is a good example (2000: 3). Pilgrimage to the Baha'i holy places in Israel also reinforces the sense of global identity.

Some Baha'i authors have accepted cultural pluralism, while rejecting *religious pluralism*. Horace Holley, an extreme example, is against any form of social diversity. He says:

> Baha'u'llah stood at that major turning-point of social evolution where the long historic trend toward diversity – in language, custom, civil and religious codes and economic practices – came to an end, and the movement was reversed in the direction of unity. The human motive in the former era was necessarily competitive. The human motive in the new era is necessarily co-operative (1976: 135-36).

This is a good illustration of the conservative instinct, since Holley wants to turn history back in its course, from society to a simple community, using religion to do so. As for religious diversity in particular, he says that

> ... the worldly conception of tolerance between conflicting creeds and sects is not unity – it is merely agreement to disagree. ... Without unity of faith and agreement on ... the laws and principles which come from God ... there can be no political nor economic unity.

David Hofman says that "The strength of an organic society depends upon the unity of its millions of diversified individuals in a common ideology" (1960: 56). More recently, McMullen has said that "Baha'is feel that this global solidarity will come about through adherence to a common ideology and recognition of a common global authority ... i.e., the Baha'i Administrative Order (2000: 4, see also 112). Huschmand Sabet writes "It is a fatal fallacy to believe that a civilisation for mankind might be built up on a plurality of fundamental values" (1986: 76). Moojen Momen also considers a common ideology to be necessary to social unity.[2] His concept of the role of religion in society is explicitly drawn from the past when "It was religion that was the cohesive force within the society." Apart from its nostalgic ring and present impossibility, this would leave religion with a shrinking role at best. A global society that is held together by our need for one another and by the global nature of economics, politics and science has less and less need for religion or ideology as cohesive forces. Durkheim was able to perceive the cohesive function that religion had in *past* societies precisely because, in his own society, it no longer had that function. So a Durkheimian approach will hardly help us in thinking about the role of religion in the new world order.

Pluralism in terms of *sexual orientation* is not clearly addressed in the Baha'i writings, although the *Kitab-i Aqdas* refers to some behaviour – which might be male homosexuality or pederasty – as shameful. Baha'i authors reveal a variety of stances. John Huddlestone confidently describes homosexuality as abhorrent and also (inconsistently) as a medical problem, but there have also been networks and support groups for Baha'i homosexuals (1989: 424). There are some national Baha'i communities today in which diversity of sexual orientation is quietly tolerated.

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[2] Moojan Momen (Unpublished article, 199X): "Baha'i Faith – Towards the Millennium" from http://www.gopbi.com/community/groups/pbcbahai. Another author with a Durkheimian concept of the function of religion (this time explicitly referring to Durkheim) is McMullen (2000: 12).

Relativism

The relativity of religious truth-claims is endorsed in the Baha'i scriptures (Shoghi Effendi 1991: 58, 115) but not always in practice. Some Baha'i authors make absolute claims for the truth of the Baha'i revelation[3] but there is also a tendency in the apologetic literature to relativise, rather than reject, the truth claims of other religions. The acceptance of diversity of ideas within the Baha'i community is more difficult, especially as regards the public expression of ideas. My observation is that this varies between national Baha'i communities as a function both of the culture and of the policies of the National Spiritual Assembly. There is no adequate institutional protection for the right of individual expression which is recognised in theory. There appears to be a certain ambivalence about pluralism and freedom. Both are seen as good, but also as threats which must be kept in moderation, rather than strengths that should be maximised.

Individualism

Individualism, as a modern social philosophy, has its roots in the Enlightenment's rediscovery of epistemological individualism, which is endorsed in both the Baha'i scriptures and the secondary literature, where it is called "the individual search after truth" or the rejection of "blind imitation".

In terms of *religious theory*, the Baha'i Faith continues a long trend in religious history by which the focus has shifted from the collective to the individual. As in Islam and Christianity (and late Judaism), salvation is not the well-being of the tribe but individual salvation. However the concept of an either-or judgement leading to one of two fates has given way to the belief that each individual grows towards an individual potential, the degrees of perfection being endless. It follows that salvation for me may not be salvation for you.

Baha'i religious duties are all individual obligations that cannot be fulfilled by proxy. The role of the prayer-leader has been abolished, except in the case of the obligatory prayer for the dead. Shaykh Ahmad's individualism in the Sufi path has been radicalised to something analogous to the "shaykhood of all believers" (Cole 1997). All this points to a

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[3] The Universal House of Justice does seem to have adopted that position: "the Revelation of Baha'u'llah is the standard of truth against which all other views and conclusions are to be measured." (Letter of 21 July 1968).

remarkably individualistic religious theory. At the same time, the Baha'i writings provide prescriptions not only for individual life but also for political life and the relations between states. Some Baha'i authors (McMullen 2000: 8) have regarded this as a shift from individual salvation to collective salvation, although it does not appear to me to involve any lesser emphasis on individual salvation.

In terms of *social theory*, this basis is reflected in a marked concern for individual rights over and against the state, and also over and against the religious collective. The latter aspect is reflected in an administrative system that is rational, democratic and participatory, and to some extent in a "rule of law," in that there is a formal appeal system. However since there are no formal legal procedures in practice, for instance to ensure that an individual who has suffered religious sanctions knows what he or she has been accused of, by whom, or on what evidence, the present appeal procedure is effectively an empty letter. The Baha'i scriptures do not provide details of the required procedures, but neither do they bar them: this is a matter to be worked out by and in practice.

The position of the internal dissenter – the heretic – is always an acid test for a religious theory of society. In the Baha'i case, those who have been declared to be "covenant-breakers" are expelled and so excluded from every right within the religious community, but the Baha'is are also required to ensure they have full enjoyment of their civil rights.[4]

The Baha'i communities of the west began with a strongly Protestant – and to some extent millenarian – background, which involves an individualistic approach at least to religion (Stockman 1985: xix, 103; Will van den Hoonaard 1997: 26). However individualism in this sense is not the same thing as embracing individualism as a social philosophy.

Holley is one of the most collectivist of Baha'i authors (1976: 85). He says that the individual should accept "guidance ... for his doctrinal beliefs, for not otherwise can he contribute his share to the general unity." ... "In comparison to this divine creation, the traditional claims of individual conscience, of personal judgement, of private freedom, seem nothing more than empty assertions advanced in opposition to the divine will." Since he rejects the epistemological source of individualism, he naturally rejects individualism as a social philosophy as well. The Baha'i International Community refers in one statement to

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[4] *Letter from Shoghi Effendi to the Baha'is of Iran, cited in Schaefer et al. (2000): 257.*

"dogmas of consumerism and aggressive individualism"[5] which they feel dominate society. In another statement they say that "No aspect of contemporary civilization is more directly challenged by Baha'u'llah's conception of the future than is the prevailing cult of individualism ..."[6] Moojen Momen echoes this: "Free-market capitalism," he says, "is principally a combination of laissez-faire economics and a strident individualism and consumerism. Having this as the ideology of a society is a paradox in that this ideology is itself destructive of society."[7] If that were true, it would be remarkable that the societies afflicted with individualism have proved so successful. None of these authors support their views on individualism from the Baha'i scriptures.

Feminism

I am treating feminism here as an especially important variety of individualism, as a social philosophy that claims that people should participate in society and be treated by society as individuals, and not according to shared characteristics such as biological sex or gender identity. This principle is extensively treated in the Baha'i writings, and especially in reports of 'Abdu'l-Baha's talks in Western countries, under the heading of "the equality of men and women."

In practice the Baha'is have advocated equal rights for women in society, and have acted to raise the status of women, for instance through women's literacy programmes. Huddlestone (1989: 419-20) supports equal rights and the full public participation of women without reservation. Hofman stands out as somewhat of an exception: he says that women's place of honour is in the home, since the female represents Eros (1960: 68).

Although 'Abdu'l-Baha referred to "the equality of men and women and their equal sharing in all rights," Baha'i laws regarding inheritance and ritual duties distinguish between men and women as such (1978: 249). The theory on these points is complex, and some general references will have to suffice. As for the inheritance law, I have argued that the law

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[5] Statement "Conservation and Sustainable Development in the Bahá'í Faith" (1995): http:/ /www.bic-un.bahai.org/ 95-0406.htm

[6] Bahá'í International Community, statement "Who is Writing the Future" (2000): http:// www.bahai.org/ article-1-7-3-1.html.

[7] *The Bahá'í World Today* [199X] http:// www.northill.demon.co.uk/ bahai/ intro9.htm.

provides a limited primacy for sons in inheriting from the father, and for the daughters in inheriting from their mother (McGlinn, 1995). This does not seem to be justifying unequal treatment for men and women as such. The ritual laws also exempt women from the duty of pilgrimage, although they may participate, and in practice do so equally with men. Menstruating women are exempt from fasting and obligatory prayer, but again they may participate, and menstruation and childbirth are not associated with ritual pollution. The same exemptions apply also to the sick, the elderly and those engaging in hard physical labour. Compliance with these religious laws is voluntary, and non-compliance does not affect a person's status within the community. There is therefore no direct contradiction with the principle that the *community* should treat members as individuals and not on the basis of their sex.

There has been a vigorous debate among Baha'is in recent decades as to whether the Baha'i scriptures exclude women from election to the Universal House of Justice. The textual issue is the same as that concerning the eligibility of women for the presidency in Iran. The Iranian constitution refers to the candidates for presidency as *rijal*, the same word that is used in the *Kitab-i Aqdas* to refer to the members of the House of Justice, and the issue is whether this means men only, or is an honorific address to persons of either sex. One might have expected that Baha'u'llah's own statements that women are counted as *rijal*[8] would be decisive, but the situation is not so straight-forward, for reasons that have been described in the unpublished paper "The Service of Women on the Institutions of the Baha'i Faith" and more succinctly by Cole in "Women and Baha'i Houses of Justice."[9] I will omit the arguments here, and simply say that the "theory" is not unambiguous: there are real textual grounds that have led some Baha'is, including the present Universal House of Justice, to think that women are scripturally excluded from that body. The practice however is clear, since it is decided by the Universal House of Justice. Women cannot serve on the Universal House of Justice, and votes for women are counted as invalid votes.

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[8] There are at least three such statements. One is translated in Research Department (1986), #7, 3.

[9] Available at: http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~bahai/docs/vol3/wmnuhj.htm and http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jrcole/bhwmhous.htm

Differentiation

Differentiation in the social model and internal differentiation need to be addressed separately. As for *differentiation in society*, the Baha'i scriptures speak most clearly on the issues of church and state, and to a lesser extent on science and religion. In both cases the theory endorses an organic model in which different social organs co-exist and cooperate, each retaining its independent existence. The scriptural position on church and state is a major theme in the Baha'i writings, and has been described by Cole, Saiedi and myself: it need not be rehearsed here.[10] It is important to note that the Baha'i theory endorses the differentiation of religion and politics on the basis of a high, not a low, valuation of politics. Politics is not rejected as dirty, it is the manifestation of the sovereignty of God, and therefore cannot be treated as subordinate to religion.

The theological arguments for this differentiation, based on the unknowable oneness of God and the differentiation of God's attributes, are in principle translatable to Jewish, Christian and Muslim theologies. Here the Baha'i Faith could contribute to the integration of religions in the post-modern order by showing why the functionally differentiated society is also the way the Kingdom of God is meant to be. For the individual believer, the implication of the organic model is that *religion is not everything*, which confirms what our life experience tells us, that we live in multiple worlds with their own ethics and logics. The metaphor of organic unity used in the Baha'i writings offers a way of making this abstract truth conceivable, by providing a representation of the differentiated global society as a body whose diverse organs have a common reference to a "soul" which is not contained in any one organ. This should be sharply distinguished from monist uses of the organic metaphor in authoritarian religious and political theories (such as those of Hofman and McMullen, cited above), in which the coordinating agency is one of the organs.

Many Baha'i authors assume or argue a unitary concept of society and reveal a strong aversion to functional differentiation. Vafa Moayed describes the separation of church and state in Christianity and says "The Baha'i concept is however radically different: the Baha'i Faith has a *monist* concept of human society" (1987: 57). Holley expresses a desire to establish a society centering on religion, in which religion dominates all aspects of life (1976: 63-64). David Hofman says that "our dreadful Western civilisation has succeeded in dividing

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[10] See Cole (1992) and (1998); Saiedi (2000:360-70); S. McGlinn (1999). The last of these lists the major scriptural sources.

life (and therefore people) into separate compartments. Business, recreation, politics, religion, and social life are regarded as separate and distinct activities, to be assumed according to the time or day" (1960: 109). The point illustrated by Hofman would, I think, hold for the many other Baha'i authors who are critical of "Western" civilisation: their actual target is functional differentiation, which they mistakenly believe to be a purely Western phenomenon. The same could be said of the anti-globalisation movement in general: the goal is not an end to international integration, but a return to a unitary social model.

Authors who claim that Baha'i teachings advocate theocracy, and that the Baha'i Administrative Order is an alternative system of government, are a particular case of the general aversion to functional differentiation. In the passage just mentioned, in which Hofman rejects the division of life in "Western" society, he goes on to reject the New Testament verse "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" – a verse which Baha'u'llah cites as a proof text in *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*.[11] This endorsement in turn was cited by 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi in works that Hofman would certainly have known. Yet he, and Holley (1938: vii), reject this. The gap between scriptural theory and community practice could hardly be more glaring.

The rejection of the differentiation of society in these authors is combined with a strong advocacy of international political institutions and internationalisation. Huddleston, for instance, strongly advocates world free trade but presents an ideal of society without politics, and with much reduced structures, since morality is to take the place of institutions (1989: Chapter 29). In my view this should be interpreted as an anti-globalisation position, based on the rejection of functional differentiation. Some of the Baha'i authors who advocate theocratic government also advocate global political institutions or praise the United Nations, without any apparent awareness that global political systems must necessarily be secular.

Baha'is with a unitary world-view and a unitary self-image can resolve the religion and politics issue by refusing to participate in politics. David Hofman, for example, boasts that he has never participated in any election outside of the Baha'i community (1995: tape 7 side 2). But while politics can be avoided, science cannot. Baha'i authors' treatment of the relationship between science and religion reveals a unitary concept of truth, and a strong resistance to the plural roles that the individual is called on to play in different spheres. John

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[11] Pages 89-92. The Tablet to the Shah (Lawh-i Sultan) was available to Hofman and Holley in E.G. Browne's translation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *A Traveller's Narrative*: 113. The *New Testament* text is Mark 12: 17.

Huddlestone says "a scientist can become a Baha'i without having to split his mind into two separate and conflicting parts" (Huddlestone 1989: 415). Anjam Khursheed (1987) argues for a teleological theory of evolution, and seeks to show that the latest discoveries of physics are already prefigured in the Baha'i scriptures. His argument is directed against the intellectual differentiation of science and religion, without addressing the relationship between their institutions. Similarly, the Universal House of Justice has expressed its disapproval of Baha'i academics who write "as if they were non-Baha'is" and say that "Scholarly endeavors are not an activity apart ... answering to standards and operating on authority outside it" ("it" being an "organic process" of growth acting through the Baha'i institutions).[12]

The *internal differentiation* of the Baha'i community is one of its most remarkable features. The Baha'i term here is again "organic unity," a unity based on balance and harmony between elements and organs, rather than domination by one. In the *Kitab-i Aqdas* Baha'u'llah distinguished between the Houses of Worship and the Houses of Justice, separating liturgy and worship from administrative authority over the affairs of the religious community. I think this is an idea without antecedents, a stroke of genius or of inspiration. 'Abdu'l-Baha in turn distinguished between interpretative and doctrinal authority, vested in the Guardians, and legislative and administrative authority, vested in the Houses of Justice. This theoretical differentiation also exists in practice, although it is not always understood.

Conclusions

The Baha'i theory has a high degree of congruence with the dynamics of globalisation, in both its picture of the religious community and its picture of society. However, when we look at the practice we see a community that has a global identity and the means to consolidate it in individuals, but is unaware of how the various dynamics of globalisation fit together. The more conservative authors I have cited reveal a resistance to some aspects of globalisation. Their commitment to a unitary social model, as seen in the rejection of church-state differentiation, a negative evaluation of individualism, the belief that a society must be structured around a common ideology, the perpetuation of male dominance of religion, and in some cases outright rejection of religious and other kinds of pluralism, represents a serious problem for the Baha'i community.

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[12] Letters of 4 October 1994 and 10 December 1992.

If the Baha'is present their message in terms of an imagined future in which a unitary society is defined by a common ideology and ruled by a theocracy, they will be marginalising their message. Individual believers will also be in a situation in which they have a religious investment in one view of how the world ought to be, while their daily experience tells them that this would be impossible and undesirable. As globalisation proceeds, the global economic, political and legal orders become steadily stronger, and it becomes ever more implausible to expect it to collapse, and ever more evident that what the Baha'is have been calling the "old world order" is in fact the New World Order. The tension increases, and at a certain point an individual finds the implausibility of the world-rejecting position unbearable, and either leaves the community or embraces the social changes brought by globalisation as the fulfilment of Baha'i hopes.

The community faces a considerable intellectual challenge. The viability of a post-modern construction of the Baha'i Faith depends on having a coherent *religious* explanation of society, of religion and of their relationship. It is not sufficient simply to embrace post-modernity's own secular explanation of itself: Baha'u'llah must be re-envisioned as the prophet of post-modernity, as Cole (1998) has done. Exegetical traditions that have stood for generations have to be replaced with new readings. The "imaginary" of an organic society has to be developed in rites, music and other arts, and in teaching the Faith, both internally and externally.

Some infrastructural changes are required if the Baha'i community is to flourish in a globalising society: censorship and other barriers to a civil society will have to be removed, the networks and interest groups that would constitute an internal civil society will have to be established, and the state of mind that sees diversity as "internal opposition" to the true faith will have to be overcome. A community without a firm concept of the rights of individuals, and the criteria and infrastructure to guarantee these rights, is ill fitted for a post-modern society. While the Baha'i Faith is potentially a post-modern religion today, the unavoidable social inertia will probably ensure that the Baha'i community as a whole does not enter post-modern society for another two to three generations.

On the positive side, the Baha'i community has a strong sense of global identity. It represents a broad spectrum of the cultures of the world and has found effective means of teaching the message that "humanity is one." It has succeeded in building multi-racial communities even in hostile environments. If globalisation consisted simply of this, without involving any structural changes in society, the Baha'is would be in a good position.

Moreover the Baha'is have a strong missionary drive and a strong work ethic, they value thrift and sobriety, literacy and higher education, altruism and community solidarity: these will continue to be success factors in the globalising world.

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