

This 2022 PDF reprint of my 2005 Master's thesis lacks the transliteration table (Appendix 4), graphics and other minor elements which, in the thesis, were printed separately and pasted into the hard copy. Some typing, spelling and grammar errors have been corrected. The PDF generator has put a diagonal line across the oval diagram on page 17 (= page 25 of the pdf).

CHURCH AND STATE

*Book 1 of a postmodern political theology
for the Bahai community*

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STUDIES IN THE BÁBÍ AND BAHÁ'Í RELIGIONS

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Remove the veils from mine eyes, O my Lord,
that I may recognize what Thou hast desired for Thy creatures.
(Prayers and Meditations of Baha'u'llah 215)

This book is dedicated
to the community of the Remembrance of God,
wherever they may be.

A note on transliterations

The guiding principle throughout is that the spelling of words from Middle Eastern languages should give the reader an approximate indication of the usual pronunciation, rather than representing the letters used in the Arabic script. Persian pronunciations have been favoured above Arabic pronunciations, and accepted anglicized pronunciations or spellings take priority over either. Arabic and Persian words that are used more than once are presented without diacritics, except that at the first use, the long vowels and combined letters (kh, th) are indicated in parentheses, without attempting to distinguish the various forms of s, t, z, and d which have distinct pronunciations in Arabic, but not in Persian. Such ‘transliterations’ therefore provide only a more refined guide to the pronunciation. To spare the reader looking back through the text to find the first usage of each word, these words are also listed in Appendix 4, along with the full spelling in Arabic script for those cases in which a reader wants to distinguish between *sin* and *sad*, and such like. This system means that there is no need for transliterations, in the precise sense of the term.

I have represented the Persian *ezafe* linkage with -e rather than -i, because English speakers tend to pronounce -i long. One result is that my own references to the *Kitab-e Aqdas* are spelt with -e, but in references to the published English translation, the title is *Kitab-i Aqdas*, as published. Double hyphenation of the *ezafe* link has been dropped because it produces bizarre results when the text is justified automatically by the word processor.

The initial hamza in Arabic words has been omitted: an Arabic word cannot begin with a vowel, so those which are represented with an initial vowel must have a hamza (except that the spellings *ulama* and *Ali* are conventional English usage, an initial ‘ayn having been dropped). Words which are in general use in English have a conventional spelling, thus *Quran* rather than *Qur’an*, and *Shiah* and *Shariah* rather than *shi‘a* and *shari‘a*. In some cases I have chosen to translate rather than transliterate, thus “exemplary guide (*Marja’-ye taqlid*).” Wherever the term ‘exemplary guide’ appears later in the text, it is a translation of this technical term.

I have used *Bahai* rather than *Baha’i*, and *Abdu’l-Baha* rather than ‘*Abdu’l-Baha*, in accordance with the accepted pronunciation in English.

Names have been shortened by dealing with them in the same way as transliterated words, when they are first mentioned. Only a few transliterated names are included in Appendix 4: the first use of the remainder can be found by using the index.

Diacritics used in titles and citations have been amended to conform to the same system, except for the *ezafe* as noted above. Capitalisation has been minimised.

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Foreword

This book presents my own understanding of the Bahai¹ teachings on some issues that are now critically important to the Bahai community and its relations with the world. My approach has been enriched by my Christian background and education, my studies of theology and church history at Knox Theological Hall and Holy Cross Seminary in Dunedin, New Zealand, and studies of Persian and Islamic Studies at Leiden University, in the Netherlands.

I should declare at the outset that my stance is not that of an historian or academic scholar of the science of religion, but of a Bahai theologian, writing from and for a religious community, and I speak as if the reader shares the concerns of that community. As a Bahai theologian, I seek to criticize, clarify, purify and strengthen the ideas of the Bahai community, to enable Bahais to understand their relatively new faith and to see what it can offer the world. The approach is not value-free. I would be delighted if the Bahai Faith proved to have a synergy with post-modernity, if it prospered in the coming decades and had an influence on the world. The reader who is used to academic studies of religion that avoid such value judgements will have to make the necessary adjustments here and there. I do not however write as an apologist: the goal is a serious study that can aid the Bahai community and others to discover the potential for contemporary religious life which lies within the Bahai scriptures, rather than simply to repackage the Bahai Faith in a palatable form for present needs.

I should also say that I place myself somewhere towards the progressive end of the contemporary Bahai spectrum, in other words, that I feel quite at home in a differentiated, pluralistic, individualistic and globally integrating world, and I hope and expect to see post-modern society prosper. At the other end of the spectrum, there is a very different Bahai discourse which regards a postmodern society as a non-viable option since – according to traditionalist ideas of a ‘what society is’ – differentiation and individualism are symptoms of the disintegration of society. Rather than looking forward to an unpredictable synergy with postmodernism, a really *new* world order, the conservative Bahai discourse hopes to re-establish a society in the traditional sense, once the progressive disintegration of society, as they perceive it, has run its course. The reader should be aware, then, that this is only one among the competing discourses within the contemporary western Bahai community.

Since this book is a reexamination of the Bahai teachings that are relevant to the art of politics in its broadest sense, I presume some knowledge of previous interpretations of the Bahai writings, of the central figures of the Bahai Faith, and

¹ See the preceding ‘Note on transliterations.’ The anglicised pronunciation is Bahai (rhyming with ‘eye’); the pronunciation guide according to the system applied to other Persian and Arabic words is *Bahá’í*.

the institutions of the Bahai community. A list of introductory and reference works on the Bahai Faith is provided at the end of the book.

As a theologian rather than a political scientist I am interested in principles rather than political mechanisms or history, and particularly in how those principles relate to the nature of the Kingdom and ultimately to the nature of God. Topical applications of these principles are a separate question. The theological principles will undoubtedly need to be supplemented from both practical experience and detailed historical research. It is to be hoped that my intellectual and spiritual debts, and my leaning towards theological rather than historical analysis, have been the source of selective enrichment, rather than bias. The reader is, at any rate, forewarned.

The views offered here are not an authoritative view of the Bahai teachings, nor a definitive statement of my own views on these topics. These are samples from a work in progress, born out of an ongoing argument with myself. It is published now rather than at some other time partly because I have achieved a degree of certainty that at least the broad lines of these ideas do accurately represent the Bahai teachings, but chiefly because the issues dealt with here have become so pressing for the well-being of the Bahai communities in the west, and offer such potential for fruitful dialogue with the Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions, that a start must be made.

The present volume has been self-published as part of the requirements for a Master's degree, and would in several respects be different if it was a more formal and market-oriented publication. The extensive literature review in the fifth chapter is *de rigueur* for a dissertation, but can hardly be made thrilling reading. The general reference system for the Bahai scriptures and the writings of Shoghi Effendi, using paragraph numbers rather than page numbers, was being introduced during the writing, but has not been used, although it is desirable that it should be speedily adopted for all academic work. The editions of Bahai scriptures cited are those I happen to have, not the first or most recent or most widely used. Primary sources in translation have generally been checked against the originals, but not in every case, and not at all in the case of the Bible. Time has not allowed a proper treatment of the church-state relationship in the late Ottoman empire, which is probably as relevant as the relationship in Shiah (*Shi'ā*) Iran, an adequate treatment of Jewish or Christian political theologies, or a proper comparison with the ideas of contemporary Islamic modernists.

The title 'church and state' will appear strange to most Bahai readers, since the Bahai faith is an independent religion born from Shiah Islam, not a church. However 'church and state studies' is the accepted name of a field of study which is not confined to Christianity. There is, for example, a *Journal of Church and*

State, and research schools on the topic. These deal with the general issue of the relationship between organised religion and the institutional part of political life, while placing both of these within the vague field of less organised life (religiosity and civil society) and relating them to other disciplines such as law and sociology. As we will see, much of what Baha'u'llah (*Bahá'u'lláh*) and Abdu'l-Baha (*Abdu'l-Bahá*) teach on the issue is not specific to the Bahai Faith, but refers to the role of religion, religions, or leaders of religion in general. So 'church and state' is the best term available, just because it has become universalised. It is also Effendi's choice, when observing Shiah Iran:

... in the slow and hidden process of secularization ... a discerning eye can easily discover the symptoms that augur well for a future that is sure to witness the formal and complete separation of Church and State.¹

A second reason for using the term 'church' is that there is no ready word available for the Bahai equivalent of 'church,' because Bahais, unlike Christians, have multiple religious institutions that are specialised to different functions. If I use the term 'House of Justice' I have left out the appointed institutions, if I talk of the 'Administrative Order' I have still left out the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkar* (*Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*), and by doing so I might overlook important questions. Does the interface between the religious order and the political order in the Bahai model of society pass primarily through the House of Justice, or the Administrative Order including the appointed institutions? Or through the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkar* and its dependencies? Or all of these? The use of the admittedly inapplicable word 'church' for all of the structures of the Bahai community leaves these questions open.

My thanks are due to the editors of journals and books in which earlier versions of some of the chapters have been published (see the bibliography) and to the members of a number of email discussion groups, especially *Talisman*, who have provided valuable information and feedback on many sections. The translation of Abdu'l-Baha's *Risalih-ye Siyasiyyah* was first published electronically in *Translations of Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Texts*, vol. 7, no. 1 (March, 2003).² I have been assisted by many members of staff in the Faculty of Theology and the Department of Languages and Cultures of the Islamic Middle East at Leiden University, and particularly by my graduation supervisor, Professor J. ter Haar of the Persian department. Thanks are also due to Dr. A.H. de Groot, who commented on drafts of some sections, and to Asghar Seyed-Gohrab for his assistance in collating the two manuscripts of the *Risalih-ye*

¹ *Baha'i Administration* 147.

² <http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~bahai/trans/vol7/govern.htm>

Siyasiyyah (Abdu'l-Baha's *Sermon on the Art of Governance*) and in polishing its translation. Steve Cooney helped in identifying many of the sources in the secondary Bahai literature mentioned in the survey of church and state in the Bahai secondary literature.

Finally, the greatest debt of all is due to my wife Sonja, who through many years has shared and sustained my conviction that the issues warrant the effort required to address them.



*The All-Knowing Physician
hath His finger on the pulse of mankind.
He perceiveth the disease, and prescribeth, in His unerring
wisdom, the remedy. Every age hath its own problem, and
every soul its particular aspiration. The remedy the world
needeth in its present-day afflictions can never be the same
as that which a subsequent age may require. Be anxiously
concerned with the needs of the age ye live in,
and center your deliberations on its exigencies
and requirements.*

Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah CVI



Introduction

Transitions and translations

In the first and most astonishing of the transitions which mark its history, the cool and universal rationality of the Bahai Faith arose out of the messianic fervour of the Babi (*Bábi*) movement, in 19th-century Iran, like Venus on the foam. At a time of tyrannical, arbitrary and authoritarian governments, its founder, Baha'u'llah (1817-1892), and his son Abdu'l-Baha (1844-1921) preached the virtues of constitutional government, the rule of law, democracy and the separation of organised religion from the institutions of the state. In a climate of cultural and religious obscurantism which, in reaction to the impact of the west, sought to turn Iran's back to the world, they combined a readiness to accept the best from any culture or civilization with a consciousness of their own heritage in the ancient and rich culture of Iran. At a time when the battles of the lately rediscovered clash of religious civilizations were already raging around them, they preached the peace of transcendence rather than of conquest.

Although they sought to keep some distance from the immediate political action, the political relevance of their message was not lost on their contemporaries. They were exiled from place to place, as prisoners of the Shah (*Sháh*) and then of the Ottoman Sultan, ultimately reaching the prison city of Akka (*Akká*) in Palestine. When Baha'u'llah died near the city in 1892 he was still technically a prisoner and an exile.

Abdu'l-Baha, who was just 9 years old when he first went into exile with his father, was not free to travel until the Young Turk rebellion of 1908 overthrew the Sultanate. When he was free, he travelled to Europe and North America. With these travels, the Bahai Faith made the second of its major transitions. In the East, where Iran had been going through a period of unrest culminating in its Constitutional Revolution, Abdu'l-Baha had written on the virtues of constitutional government and the need to moderate the power of the monarchy and the clergy. In the West, he spoke against cultural parochialism in France, met the suffragettes and free thinkers of the United Kingdom, opposed the nascent ideology of fascism in Europe, and in the United States spoke extensively on liberty, economic justice, the equality of men and women, and the abolition of racial prejudices. His gift to the Bahai community of his time was a set of clearly enunciated principles relevant to current social and political issues, for North America too was making a painful transition, into the industrialized age. The West was wrestling with the question of how much of the bright vision of the Enlightenment it could bring with it through that historical divide, and how it could be applied in the changed circumstances of a modern society. Abdu'l-Baha

could not be said to present a political programme, but the political understanding he offered was certainly current.

For the next several decades, the shape and destiny of the Bahai Faith lay largely in the hands of the English-speaking, particularly North American, believers. They had the freedom to travel, the means, the international vision and the organizational culture to build up some of the religious institutions that Baha'u'llah had envisioned, and to scatter outposts of the Bahai community around the globe. During this period the Bahai teachings were recast, with the emphasis on those elements which were of vital importance to the unity and health of the rapidly-growing community. The questions which will be particularly addressed in this book were then of lesser importance, and were neglected entirely or were treated in ways which, in the light of the questions facing human society in the new millennium, are now inadequate. For it is my contention that the Bahai Faith and the global society of which it is part are passing through another transition, and one which requires that the Bahai teachings should again be recast to focus on questions about the nature of liberty, of good governance and the civil society, of human rights and social responsibilities, of the place of religion in this society and in our lives. The functional differentiation of society, which is the dynamic underlying the pluralism, global scope and individualisation of society, is producing a society which is different in kind to anything the world has seen before. We cannot simply take an old model of 'what a society is,' whether taken from Greek philosophy, *The City of God*, or Durkheim's sociology, and insert the Bahai Faith into the now empty socket where religion 'belongs,' because that position no longer exists in a society in which religious ritual is the mirror of individual distinctiveness, not of collective identity, in which lasting pluralism means that no religion can attain the position of arbiter of common norms and values, and above all, in a society that has painfully learned, over the course of the 20th century, to see the wholesale transferal of norms from one sphere of life to another as the source of all evil. Economic affairs cannot be governed by political ideologies, science must be free of doctrine and political agendas, and politics should not be allowed to shelter under the umbrella of religion.

It seems undeniable to me that Bahai theology has to be reformulated in the present situation, if the Bahai Faith is to remain meaningful. However the aim of this book is not simply defensive. The purpose of producing a post-modern Bahai political theology is not to show that it can be done, to prove that the Bahai Faith or religion in general might outlive the secularisation thesis, but rather pastoral. A post-modern political theology should actually help people to function in the post-modern world. I believe that the Bahai writings, because they are not

formulated in terms of the pre-modern model of a stratified but theoretically monist society, offer a variety of religious repertoires that can help to make sense of the predicaments people face in a contemporary differentiated society. They allow us to reinterpret the differentiation of our experience into life-worlds, and the diversity that we experience in the cultural and religious spheres, not as signs of something wrong in the universe, but rather as *the way things are meant to be*. Differentiation and diversity in the human microcosm can be felt as a reflection of the differentiation and diversity of the cosmos, for unicity and singleness are to be found only in another realm which we can never enter, in the Godhead itself. All the worlds below – including the world of religion – are the realms of multiplicity, and therefore of ambiguity and doubt, and this is as it should be.

There is a large measure of continuity in the Bahai Faith, in as much as it is a Faith focussed on, and defined by, the persons and writings of Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha. But there is also a continual need for reformulation, refocusing, and translation into the terminology of a changing world. This book is intended to be another step in that process. While I argue against most previous formulations of the Bahai teachings on church and state, I do not deny the debt that we owe to earlier generations of Bahais.

About this book

This book has been limited to the relationship between church and state, because it is written within the framework of a Master's course in Islamic studies which allows only one year for writing the dissertation. It is intended to be the first volume in a larger work, including other aspects of Bahai political theology such as the institutions and principles of the religious community (the equivalent of ecclesiology), the relationship between the individual and the collective, and the nature of religious law in the Bahai system. The common thread for this political theology is the theme of organic unity, a metaphor so often misused that it must immediately be defended.

Society has been presented as something analogous to a body, and as an organic unity, since the Babylonian empire and perhaps earlier. This metaphor has supported the power of the powerful, the subordination of the weak, the extension of the ruler's power to every aspect of life, and the secondary importance of individuals. The body of society has been pictured as having one heart (or in modern times, one brain), with all the parts existing only to serve the will of the centre. The organs and limbs should therefore work in harmony, under direction. This is a fascist model of society, by which I intend not mere name-calling, but a literal reference to that political philosophy that is embodied in the image of the *fascies* bound together, and the motto 'strength in unity.'

I would like to reclaim the metaphor of society as a body for a new purpose, in the first place by inviting the reader to conduct a thought experiment: let your brain instruct your heart to cease operations for a moment. The least reflection shows that the fascist interpretation of the ‘body politic’ is based on pure fiction. Our bodies function without one organ commanding. The brain may not know of, let alone understand and control, the operations of other organs. Our bodies, the very model of organic unity, consist of distinct organs, each functioning autonomously according to its own internal logic, each affecting the others, and each needing the others to be fully itself. The liver, for instance, cannot do its alchemy of purification without the flow of blood from the heart; the heart cannot pump unless the blood is both purified and oxygenated. The harmony of the parts cannot be attributed to the command of any one organ: it derives from a transcendent and indefinable property, ‘being a being,’ a quality that cannot be located, but cannot be denied. Reinterpreted in this way, the metaphor of organic unity becomes a model of the postmodern society. It can also be applied to the institutions which make up the Bahai religious community, and to the metaphysical realities that Bahais refer to as the names and attributes of God, and it has obvious implications for the relationship between the individual and collective. This is too much to address in one volume. What can be presented here, the theology of church and state, is therefore no more than the first chapters of what would be a *postmodern Bahai political theology* on the theme of organic unity. These terms too require some explanation.

First, this is the first part of a *political theology*. Where political philosophy asks ‘What would utopia be like?’ and ‘how should social life be organised,’ a political *theology* asks ‘what should we believe about the Kingdom of God, about the ideal organisation of social life, the life of the faith community, and its relation to the world?’ A political theology does not simply describe or prescribe the institutions of social life (which would be political science), rather it asks, ‘what is the point’ of the institutions and rules of political and religious life, from the point of view of religion?

The difference between a political theology and a systematic theology is not just that a systematic theology is broader, including topics such as proofs of the existence of God, the nature of the prophets, reason and revelation and ethics, which will not be dealt with here, but also that in systematic theology ‘the world’ appears as one topic within the realm of religion, while political theology reverses this. In political theology, our religion is treated as part of our world-view, and ecclesiology as one aspect of the religious meaning of society.

This is also a *Bahai* theology, in the sense that I write primarily for the Bahais, and therefore use Bahai scriptural and historical sources. But a Bahai

theology can hardly be exclusive, since Bahai scriptural resources include the Bible and the Quran (*Qur'án*). Moreover, any political theology is in one sense at least universal, since it begins with the world. People of all faiths and none live within one world: pluralist and fragmented, but paradoxically the same world.

This is a *theology*, which is to say, not just a set of religious teachings, but a systematic discourse centred around God. A political theology examines the inferences of the political language used in religion. All language about how God acts in the world is analogous. We say for instance that God is the “Helper of the needy, the Deliverer of the captives, the Abaser of the oppressors, the Destroyer of the wrong-doers, the God of all men, the Lord of all created things.” The fact that such names are used in scripture entitles us to suppose that there is some sort of analogy between God’s acting as Lord and Deliverer and the human projects of lordship and liberation, and *vice versa*. There is nothing which would act, like a diode in an electrical circuit, to prevent the analogy working both ways, so the freeing of the slaves, for instance, is analogous to God the Deliverer leading his people out of bondage in Egypt. Therefore language about God is inescapably language about human beings, and political language used about God’s acting in the world inescapably speaks about human political relationships. What then does it mean to say that God is ‘the King,’ or that ‘sovereignty belongs to God’?

This is also a *postmodern* theology, which follows in fact from its being political, from the fact that it begins with the world and society. One cannot write political theology today as if society was still the same sort of thing as it was for Plato, al-Farabi (*al-Fárábí*) or Augustine. By postmodern here, I refer to the sociological fact, and not to current literary and philosophical theories about postmodernity. I regard these postmodernisms as various attempts to construct a theory that corresponds to the experience of living in society after the modern age, for a particular field such as literary criticism or philosophy. I will attempt to provide a Bahai theology which starts from the same social fact, and may either parallel or diverge from the postmodernisms proposed in other fields (but will in any case avoid the postcondemnerist style which has marred many postmodernisms). Thus the postmodern here refers to *the world we live in*, or that we feel we are coming to live in, and not to any particular school or author. My understanding of the dynamics and structure of a postmodern society is explained in more detail below.

Since I hold that our religious views are part of our world-view, and that the view of society contained in postmodernism is fundamentally different to the social model of the ‘modern’ age (the age of the centralised and rationalised nation-state), it follows that while much of this Bahai theology should make sense to Islamic, Jewish, Christian or non-religious postmodern readers, it will be at

best strange to Bahais who think not of ‘society’ but of ‘a’ society: an organisational unit having borders roughly congruent with those of a state (or more recently, of ‘Europe’ or ‘the West’) and a value system that is roughly congruent with a cultural tradition informed by one religion. As we will see in the review of church and state in the Bahai secondary literature, some Bahais have nursed a nostalgia for an even older model, in which society is an expansion of the family or a global confederation based on “tribal communities.”¹ Some may still be expecting an end to “our dreadful western civilization” which divides life into separate compartments (to quote one of the more influential Bahai authors)² and a return to the golden past. They are forewarned that they will find little common ground between such nostalgic hopes and the role of the Bahai Faith in a postmodern society as presented here.

The yawning gulf between the conservative and postmodern views is an indicator of the high ambition that motivates this first attempt at a postmodern Bahai theology, and an opportunity to give a preliminary answer to those who ask what a theologian, or a theology, could be good for, anyway. What is needed is not simply to recast Bahai thought in contemporary terms, or to hold the theological thinking of the Bahais up for critical examination in the light of Bahai scripture (both useful functions of theologians), but rather to drag Bahai thinking bodily from one world-view into the next. We can scarcely understand, now, the extent to which the Christians of the second and third centuries saw their religion in terms set by the shape of Roman society and the Roman state. If we do focus on that, we also see the magnitude of the transition initiated by Augustine’s theology, in disentangling the Christian religion from outdated suppositions about society. In the same way, the Bahai secondary literature, including statements issued by the official bodies of the Bahai community, show how deeply the thinking of the Bahai community is – unconsciously – committed to an old world-view. Assumptions about the nature of religion, the shape of society and of religious community, and the relation of the individual to these collectives are taken over from a pre-modern world-view, and are assumed to be self-evident, or are explicitly labelled as ‘the Bahai teachings,’ although they have no possible anchor in the Bahai scriptures. We cannot hope to entirely extricate the Bahai faith from all such assumptions and see it ‘as it really is,’ for our religions are part of our world-views, and none of us can live without organising our thought and perceptions in terms of one or more world-views. We can however try to see the

¹ Hatcher and Hatcher, *The Law of Love* 180.

² David Hofman, *The Renewal of Civilization* (1946) chapter 8 (page 109 of the 1960 edition). The sentiment was expressed earlier by Genevieve Coy, in ‘A Century of Progress in Education’, *Star of the West* Vol. 24, No. 6 September 1933, pages 186-7.

Bahai Faith within another world-view, as one part of the global polysystem of post-modern society, and I believe that we will see that it makes eminent sense when viewed in that way.

While the project is ambitious, no-one would imagine that such a wholesale transition can be achieved completely, and for everyone, by one author. There are no patent rights on the construction of the Bahai postmodern theology. I am also aware that the criticisms of those opposed to such a wholesale rethinking of Bahai teachings will themselves contribute to a healthy dialectic process which will take some generations. At the same time, the need for a Bahai theology closely related to the post-modern world is so pressing that we must put on seven-league boots, and attempt to cover as much of the distance as possible, now.

The dynamics of globalisation

Something must also be said about what I mean by ‘globalisation’ and ‘post-modern’ in the sociological sense. I understand globalisation as the whole process by which we move from the societies of the centralised nation-states of the ‘modern’ period to something which is structurally different. The two words are one semantic unit: ‘globalisation’ is the present process, and ‘post-modern’ is the result. Postmodern means ‘that which will have been globalized,’ 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 changes in social structures, which in turn demand changes in our world-view: the result is a new kind of society as well as a globally extended society.

The key dynamic of globalisation is the progressive **differentiation** of different spheres of social life. Functional differentiation begins at the dawn of history, and is self-accelerating, in a process analogous to the curve of differentiation of the means of production. The division of labour increases productivity which yields surplus, and it also yields more specific expertise and thus more differentiated individual identities. The roles of the smith, the fisherman, the herdsman, the religious specialist and the ruler represent both distinct functions in society and opportunities for individuals to differentiate themselves from others. The greater expertise and surplus produced can be used for further progress, while competition between societies ensures that there are penalties if differentiation does not progress. At first this differentiation could be partially accommodated by social stratification, for instance between the strata of rulers, warriors, scribes, artisans and peasants.

Although the process of differentiation goes back to prehistory, two significant steps can be noted. The first is the emergence of religions of

transcendence in the axial age: in such religions the social order is not simply a part of the cosmic order, rather, the transcendent has a certain relation *to* social order, as something external and higher. Parts of the social order may relate more intimately with the cosmic order than others, so the transcendent creates the not-transcendent, and the possibility of having ‘worldly’ and ‘spiritual’ aspects of life. Kingship may still be divine, and supported by the religious order, but it is not self-evidently so. The divine king is a charioteer, harnessing two horses but not making them the same thing. They are institutionalised in two orders (priests and courtiers), and there is always the risk of them pulling in different directions. The voices of transcendence may demand one thing, and reasons of state something else. At a very early date, political philosophy emerges as distinct from theology, providing a non-religious justification for the existence of the state based on the necessity of punishment (and perhaps reward) to create social order and ensure prosperity.¹

The second great step in the functional differentiation of society dates from about the 14th century, particularly in Europe, with a sharp acceleration in ‘modern’ times. Distinct institutions of politics, economics, religion and science already existed, but their degree of autonomy has increased and, for the first time, we see theoretical claims that they *ought* to be autonomous. The shift from a monist but stratified society to an organic and differentiated society gave the western societies in which it first occurred a tremendous competitive advantage, which is why globalisation is sometimes confused with westernization. In reality, a glance at western history shows that modernity was experienced there as something that ‘happened to’ western societies, and that it required deep and painful rethinking and great changes to Western social institutions. We see the establishment of the ‘free university,’ called so because it was intended to be free from religious control. Theories of national churches are advanced, intended to free the political sphere from religious control (and, if possible, to turn the tables). From the Hanseatic League onwards, we see the realization 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 is worked out. From the toleration of dissent, arguments for disestablishment are developed, and churches are constitutionally disestablished or withdraw from politics in the narrow sense (but in neither case from public life: one should not confuse institutional differentiation with the privatization of religion). These different

¹ Arjomand gives an example in the Hindu political philosophy of Kautilya, dating from 300 BC (Arjomand, ‘Religion and the Diversity of Normative Orders,’ 44-5. For discussions of the differentiation of the religious and political in the axial age see Arjomand, *Political Dimensions*, chapter 1 (S.N. Eisenstadt) and chapter 2.

institutions also became 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 and setting up a trading company. It is accepted that we behave according to different logics in different spheres.

The concept of different ‘logics’ that apply in different life-worlds can be compared to the idea of a core business in business studies. This does not entail that a business, or the institutions in a particular sphere, should concentrate exclusively on one task, but rather that they understand clearly what their nature and primary goals are, and the implications of this for the way they relate to others. It requires that they should align their internal life and structures in accordance with the requirements of their ‘core business.’ The idea of internal logics has also been admirably expressed in the subtitle of a work by S.T. Coleridge: *The Constitution of Church and State, according to the idea of each*, where the word ‘idea’ has its full platonic value. The institutions of politics and of organised religion are justified by their own missions, which each seeks to fulfil in the world.

The core business of government is coercion, and a state’s sovereignty consists of its monopoly on coercion. However, in any society beyond that of a slave plantation, coercion does not operate purely as an imposition. Coercion is a service provided by the business of government, as an integral part of its two prime functions, the provision of security and enabling effective collective action. I, of course, pay my taxes and obey the laws willingly, and would do so even if I were not coerced. However I would not do so willingly if my neighbours were not coerced. They might not pay their taxes, or their businesses might undercut mine by ignoring environmental laws. That is, some people might take a free ride on the backs of more conscientious citizens. My neighbours of course reason in the same way about me. Thus the coercion provided by government is necessary to enable the members of a society to freely support social action: coercion is the essential instrument of government to which Baha’u’llah refers:

The instruments which are essential to the immediate protection, the security and assurance of the human race have been entrusted to the hands, and lie in the grasp, of the governors of human society. This is the wish of God and His decree....¹

¹ Cited as translated by Shoghi Effendi in *Gleanings* CII. More literally: ‘The reins of protection, security and assurance in outward matters are in the mighty grasp of the government. This is the wish of God and His decree....’ Wherever no Persian or Arabic source is given in connection with a quotation translated by Shoghi Effendi, I have used

No-one would suppose that the good society could be one based solely on coercion: the point illustrates the general rule that a clear understanding of the nature of one organ immediately highlights its relationship to other organs. If government's core business is coercion, it follows that government is not everything: it should aspire only to a limited role in relation to other human projects. "Penalties" may be "an effective instrument for the security and protection of men," but "dread of the penalties maketh people desist only outwardly from committing vile and contemptible deeds, while that which guardeth and restraineth man both outwardly and inwardly hath been and still is the fear of God."¹ Baha'u'llah says that "The weakening of the pillars of religion hath strengthened the foolish and emboldened them and made them more arrogant ... The greater the decline of religion, the more grievous the waywardness of the ungodly. This cannot but lead in the end to chaos and confusion."² The issue here has both individual and structural dimensions. First, religion can motivate individuals and teach norms and values (but so can non-religious forms of commitment). Second, the absence or ineffectiveness of institutional religion in society creates a vacuum which, in the time since Baha'u'llah wrote this, has tempted governments to seek to fill what is seen as a necessary social function. But government has no legitimate means of inspiring altruism, because altruism and coercion cannot share the same pillow. In the twentieth century the projects of nationalism, fascism and communism have sought to invest the state with an aura of ultimate authenticity which would inspire altruistic behaviour, and the result in every case has been not only a great deal of suffering but also the exposure of the ideology as a mask for power. More recently, the communitarian philosophy has provided a justification for state support for a hegemony of one culture as a means of fostering the common norms and values that communitarians believe to be necessary. If (God forbid) it were to be as successful as previous forms of collectivism, its results would no doubt be as horrifying.

However high-minded their rhetoric, governments cannot surrender their core business of coercion, which means that government cannot itself be the source of altruism (though government service is a sphere for altruistic action). This in turn means that good government must allow the free operation of other human projects, such as religion and culture, which can supply what government lacks.

¹(...continued)

the text in the Bahai World Centre's CTA translation aid.

¹ Baha'u'llah, Lawh-e Dunya, in *Tablets of Baha'u'llah* 93, *Majmu'ih az Alwah* 53.

² Kalimat-e Firdawsiiyih (Words of Paradise), in *Tablets of Baha'u'llah* 63-64, *Majmu'ih az Alwah* 34-5.

Religion on the other hand can elicit altruism, but it undermines its own credibility when the religious institutions take control of the instruments of coercion, as in contemporary Iranian theocracy. The Law of religion can only operate on the basis of the fear of God, its disciplines voluntarily accepted by people who may freely leave and so exempt themselves from religious law. This would not be a very plausible way of running a state.

The difference between the logics of religion and of government means that they deal with individual members differently, as believers and as citizens respectively. Beliefs are not relevant to citizenship status, and civil status should be irrelevant to membership of the religious community. Citizenship and its duties cannot be adopted and renounced at will, while membership of the religious community can be. The differentiation of the two spheres therefore arises from the fundamental nature of each. Particular thinkers and traditions, and historical accident, have enabled this distinction to be embodied earlier or more clearly in some societies, and most clearly in the last two centuries in western societies, but the principle itself is not Western or Christian but logical and essential. Abdu'l-Baha considered the clear awareness of the autonomy of the religious sphere to be one of the causes of Europe's greater progress:

when [Europeans] removed these differences, persecution, and bigotries out of their midst, and proclaimed the equal rights of all subjects and the liberty of men's consciences, the lights of glory and power arose and shone from the horizons of that kingdom ... These are effectual and sufficient proofs that the conscience of man is sacred and to be respected; and that liberty thereof produces widening of ideas, amendment of morals, improvement of conduct, disclosure of the secrets of creation, and manifestation of the hidden verities of the contingent world. ... Convictions and ideas are within the scope of the comprehension of the King of kings, not of kings; ... 'The ways unto God are as the number of the breaths of [His] creatures' is a mysterious truth, and 'To every [people] We have appointed a [separate] rite' is one of the subtleties of the Quran.¹

Equally, those countries in which the autonomy of the economic sphere has been recognised have prospered, while those that subordinate economic activities to national interest or political ideology trail behind. Likewise, the liberation of the scientific and educational sphere from any religious *a priori* has accelerated scientific and technological progress. We can generalise these processes by

¹ *A Traveller's Narrative* 89-92. The Persian is in the Philo Press edition 204-5. The citation is Quran 22:35.

saying that the functional differentiation of society is the motor behind the creation of successful contemporary societies, and that this differentiation entails not just the separation of institutions, but also the differentiation of the individual's roles as citizen, fellow-believer, scientist and economic agent.

Although the transcendent concept of the cosmos contained in the religions of revelation underlies the differentiation of the religious from the worldly, the religions of revelation have not in general wholeheartedly endorsed the “de facto pluralism of normative orders”¹ which they spawned. The sense that this pluralism is *wrong* seems to have been deep-seated. In the 20th century, communism and fascism have sought to re-establish a monist normative order, with the result, as George Orwell foresaw, that truth was no longer something distinct from political expedience. The distance created by dual normative orders is also the space required for ethical critique. The task for a contemporary political theology is to elevate this normative pluralism into an explicit religious principle, by justifying not only the existence of the order of politics, but the existence of plural orders *per se*.

The differentiation of the political as just one aspect of life entails another sort of differentiation, between the state and society, with the result that elements of the religious order can choose to relate primarily to the state *or* to the people. The question of ‘church and state’ is in fact a *ménage à trois*, in which religion may serve to domesticate the people on behalf of the political order, or mobilise them against it, and in which the state may coerce the people on behalf of the religious order, restrict their appeal to it, or protect them from religious coercion. The religious order and the political may compete for popular legitimation, and the actual shape of church-state relations is determined not only by the institutionalisation of each order and the constitutional rules applying between them, but also by the social dynamics that distribute legitimation to one or both.

The multiple roles of the individual as citizen, fellow-believer, scientist and economic agent in the different life-worlds brings us to the second dynamic of globalisation: **individualisation**. When society shifted from a unitary but stratified structure to a functionally differentiated structure, the principle of individual identity changed absolutely. We can picture this with two diagrams. The first is a triangle representing an individual in a unitary stratified society, where the strata represent primarily status and power, and only secondarily specific social functions. The second shows the profile of one individual in a functionally differentiated society, in which the vertical areas represent economic life, religious life and political life. In the first diagram, the individual has one identity: he might be a ‘gentleman’ in commerce, religion and politics. But in a

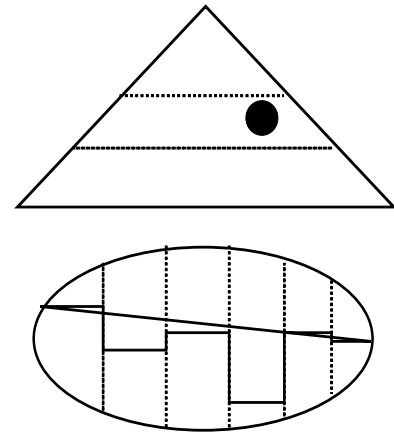
¹ Arjomand, ‘Diversity of Normative Orders’ 52.

differentiated society the person is smeared across the life-worlds: we have profiles rather than individual identities. Each person comes to act in distinct ways in the different spheres, and maintains a distinct status in each sphere. The poor cobbler may be a respected leader in the Methodist circle, the magistrate may be excluded from communion: we are different ‘selves’ in different contexts. 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.

Coupled with this **individualisation** comes the possibility and concept of individual freedoms, and the claims of classes, ethnic minorities and women to share in them as individuals. I regard feminism as an aspect of individualisation, because individualisation entails that society recognises that its basic unit is the individual, and not the family, class, production unit or religious or ethnic community. The effects are so remarkable that feminisation could be considered among the most important dynamics of globalization, but the various issues concerning the status of women according to the Bahai teachings are postponed here, to be dealt with in later volumes.

Individualism as a political philosophy, which is to say, the recognition that the individual is the basis and justification for collective life and not *vice versa*, is certainly the most important value of postmodern societies and, coupled with structural differentiation, the key to their astonishing success. Individualism is the prerequisite of a society governed by law, of democracy as a technique of government, and of the concept of human rights, and also provides a climate for innovation in science and effort in commerce. The high valuation of the individual and the recognition of rights to sufficiency and self-development also underlie the welfare state and modern mass education.

In a functionally differentiated, religiously pluralistic and individualised society, religions cannot play the public role of providing social cohesion for society as a whole, and they must seek new roles. One strategy is to develop individual religious identity as a counterpoint to social identity, so that being Muslim, Methodist, or Mormon becomes an element in identity that differentiates one individual from another and assures each of their individuality. This entails the individualisation of religion, creating a private sphere within which religious values and world-view provide a sense that the old society – the pre-differentiated society and the singular identity it offered to the individual – still exists, although



it plainly does not exist outside the home and the religious community. The second strategy, pursued here, is for a religion to re-invent itself in terms of globalisation, to offer itself as a means of giving meaning to post-modern society.

Rotating the axes of society and smearing individual identity across multiple worlds causes a good deal of stress – the experience is analogous to what happens in *Star Trek* when something goes wrong with “Beam me up, Scotty,” and the individual ceases to be located in any particular place. How much stress is involved depends in part 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. The intra-personal tension may be externalised by identifying ‘enemies’ who are responsible for the chaos, or the individual may retreat into fantasies such as survivalism, or may seek a leader who promises a high power difference, thus providing a definitely located identity for the individual. All of these responses to individual stress have potential social and political effects that should concern us. The Bahai Faith tells its followers that a radically different way of ordering the world (a new ‘World Order’) is not to be feared, and the Bahai 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 but rather the way things are meant to be.

Another effect of functional differentiation has been that geographic 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, then discovers that neither national nor religious boundaries are relevant to it, and so becomes a world economic system. Where trade leads, technologies of transport and communication follow, and this makes it possible for science, politics and religion to be integrated globally.

The development of global subsystems is not inevitable, or at least not predictable, since the dynamics of global integration appear to differ in the different spheres. Politics is driven to global integration, by common problems, by the globalization of the economy, the freeloader problem, tax competition and so on. States find they need a rule of law and institutions of implementation, and they are deliberately constructing them. Science however is a naturally global system, where barriers of external control, language and communication do not intervene. Economic, political and scientific global systems are thus forming, but in different ways. None of this necessarily applies to religion or to religions, especially if we think of religions acting primarily at the local level through face

to face interactions such as religious rituals. Perhaps religion will not become the next global sub-system, but rather one of the local and particular components of a global society. In sociology, this is the question of ‘religion as a global system,’ which is intriguing but seems to have no clear answer yet. In the context of a Bahai systematic theology, it is the question of the relationship between religion as such, “The changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future,”¹ and particular historical revelations of which Baha’u’llah’s is one. Can one religion become a global religious system in itself, or can religions in the plural form such a system? But this would take us from political theology to prophetology, and we must leave the question for now.

The last dynamic of globalization I would like to mention is **pluralism and relativism**, due to intensified intercultural and interreligious contacts and migration, which in turn are due to the global integration of the political and economic systems. When we speak of postmodernism in philosophy and the fine arts, we are referring mainly to this aspect of globalisation. The implications of relativism in philosophy and theology have been far-reaching, and it is tempting to explore them further, since Shoghi Effendi has said that the “fundamental verity underlying the Bahai Faith [is] that religious truth is not absolute but relative,”² but we are concerned here primarily with the effects of cultural and religious pluralism in societies.

As intercultural and interreligious contacts and migration relativize truth claims and social norms, it becomes harder to find ideological support for social structures. 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 have proven untenable, and ideology itself has been asked to turn around for inspection – and we can see at the very least that the emperor’s new clothes have a large hole in the rear. Ideologies too are seen to be manufactured, their doctrines designed to support interests. Political theories that supposed that shared ideologies and values are the basis of social unity have given way to a model of society that is united, despite differences, by our needs for one another. States that still possess a state ideology, such as Iran and Turkey, are now anachronisms.

For completeness’ sake, I should also mention the dynamic of **technological progress** and the convergence of material cultures. This is a major contributor to globalisation, although I do not intend to deal with it further.

¹ Baha’u’llah, *Kitab-e Aqdas*, paragraph 182.

² *Baha’i Administration* 185; see also *World Order of Baha’u’llah* 58, 115.

The limits of theology

In this view, society is a polysystem, that is, a system containing areas or entire subsystems in which the laws governing the behaviour of other parts of the system do not apply, or different laws do apply. Arithmetic, for instance, is a system but mathematics is a polysystem. All the functions of arithmetic can in principle be reduced to possible manipulations of discrete like objects such as coins, counting stones or abacus beads. But there are fields of mathematics that bear no possible relationship to physical objects – the use of square roots of negative numbers for instance. There are other fields with laws that are additional to arithmetic laws, such as set theory. Sets are not like objects, and one set may intersect or subsume another. I call society a polysystem in part because it is highly complex and can be broken down for analytic purposes into functionally differentiated subsystems, but especially to draw attention to the fact that the ‘logics’ of the various parts differ. The idea of different logics implies that no explanation of the whole system – whether that be a theological explanation of society (a political theology) or a sociological or economic model – can claim to provide an overall theoretical framework that is also valid in models of society derived from other disciplines.

The economy, to take one example, functions in accordance with the rational maximization of utility, and its behaviour can be predicted from this behavioural ‘law’ and others. Nobody would imagine that behaviour in the arts or religion could be usefully explained or predicted by the same law. Yet economics, art, government and religion are not hermetically sealed spheres. An economic model of society should include submodels for the arts, education, religion, science and government, because these aspects of society have economic effects and are affected by economic life. The economic model of society may translate the behaviour of these other ‘projects’ using para-economic concepts such as social capital, social goods, symbol production and symbolic consumption, psychological utility and so forth. Although such an economic model might incorporate economic descriptions of the whole of society, it would still be an *economic* model, and not a comprehensive social model (whatever its practitioners might imagine!). It would be a model of the whole in terms defined by one subsystem, the project of economic life. No-one should imagine that such a model describes the inherent dynamics of artistic appreciation or creation, the attraction and awe that the holy exercises on the mystic, the solidarity of the family or the curiosity of science – at least, not in ways that correspond to the experience and motivations of the participants. Similarly, science has models of religion, within disciplines such as the ‘history of religions,’ the psychology of

religion, and the sociology of religion, but these are not religion as religion understands itself.

Religion too has something to say about science and technology: that all knowledge is a path to God since truth is one, that humans are in this world as stewards of creation, and that human knowing is a manifestation of the name of God ‘The All-Knowing.’ Clearly these are not the concerns that drive the scientist *as a scientist*: it would be difficult to derive the norms of falsifiability and replicability from them. A scientist as a believer might understand what a theology says about the project of science, but would be perfectly capable of doing science without any knowledge of religion, and will do science best if he, or she, does it according to the logic of science without regard for theology.

The same limitation applies to religious models of society, or ‘political theologies.’ Religion is just one of the human projects that make up society, so political theology cannot assume that religion should provide normative explanations for all of the projects in society. A political theology should describe the other projects in religious terms, but this does not imply that religion exercises a hegemony of value over other projects. A political theology can at most say what other projects can mean *for religion*, it cannot claim to describe how they ought to appear in their own lights. The theorists of Islamic integrism¹ have often said that Islam embraces the whole of society (and there is the danger that the

¹ See Jansen, *Dual Nature*, chapter 2, and the sources cited there. The term integrist is preferred to ‘fundamentalist’ or ‘Islamist’ throughout, because it seems more precisely to pinpoint the approach to religion *and to society* which is common to those who have been called Christian, Islamic and Bahai fundamentalists, and because the term Islamist is specific to Islam and concedes too much: Islamic traditionalists and modernists are not less Islamic than those who call themselves Islamists. The term integrist is borrowed from the French, where it referred originally to those who held fast to Catholic tradition, rejecting all changes: this is what we would now call a traditionalist stance, seeking to maintain the *integrity* of the tradition. As a result of the word’s use in connection with Islamists, it has come to refer to those whose stance is conservative in relation to changes in their own religion, and who seek to *integrate* all aspects of society under the banner of their own religion, or more modestly to create for themselves an integral religious and social community as separate as possible from the society around them. Integrists of all religions construct their own identities by opposition to theological modernism, secularisation, individualisation, the relativising effects of globalisation, and the structural differentiation of society. The premise in every case is that society should be an integrated whole, in which religion provides coherence (see e.g., Riesebrodt, *Pious Passion*, 65, 182). All fundamentalists are integrists, but I do not think that Bahai integrists can usefully be called fundamentalists, since two characteristics of fundamentalism, xenophobia and religious nativism, are absent (see, e.g., *op. cit.* 61).

same could be said of the Bahai Faith, in that virtually every aspect of life is at least mentioned somewhere in the Bahai scriptures). In practice, however, the factor 'Islam' does not adequately explain all that is going on in an Islamic society. Nor should it, according to the organic social model employed here. Religion is not everything, although it may speak *of* everything. The integrists' claim that religion has a hegemony is untrue in practice, and wrong in principle.

If we have economic, religious and political models of society, each seeing the whole in its own terms, the question arises, are there no universal categories, no possibility of a model of society as a whole? I can only venture an answer, acknowledging that it comes primarily from the project of religion and the point of view of a believer. I suggest that the only model adequate to the polysystem of society as a whole is the category of the person, by which I mean both the human person and the person of God. But this does not help us much, since the person is a mystery – a holy mystery. How is it that we each do science according to the rules of science, believe as believers, are citizens of the state and explore the arts and – by and large – pass from one life-world to the other without dropping a stitch? We know that an excess of faith in art makes for bad art, that the ethics of the state are not the same as those of an individual, that the truths of revelation and of science are drinks better taken unmixed. How do we know this, and how do we maintain this equilibrium?

Every logical system contains axioms that cannot be proved within that system. In this system, which is my political theology for the Bahai Faith, this must simply be stated as an axiom – that the person, human and divine, is a mystery; that the person harmonises incommensurate qualities and is the highest possible category. This means that the individual – any individual – is prior to any collective. Society as a polysystem, with its diverse organs functioning according to different laws, can at its harmonious best be somewhat like a single person, but the individual already is that. Society also derives its value from the individual, and not vice versa. This theology, as a postmodern theology, is axiomatically individualistic.

Of church and state

One motive for writing this book now rather than in some indefinite future when my knowledge may be more adequate, is that the issue of church and state has moved to the top of the agenda. This is a burning question in several respects: *universally* in human societies, and in contemporary world politics as an emblem of wider disagreements concerning the application of enlightenment values in a post-enlightenment world; in Bahai *apologetics* because of the publication of works about the Bahai Faith, some critical and some meant to be objective, which

claim that the Bahai Faith has as its goal the institution of a global theocratic state; and finally because the increasing *social engagement* of Bahai communities means that we now need to understand this issue ourselves, because it affects not only what will happen in the far future but also what we are becoming now, but the way it is treated in the secondary Bahai literature is particularly inadequate.

To begin with the first of these: the relationship between the religious and political institutions of society is one of the oldest questions in human society, going back perhaps to prehistoric rivalries between medicine men or women and tribal chiefs. The issue has taken particular and pressing forms in recent years, with divisive and even violent church-state conflicts in a variety of countries from Tibet to Algeria, Poland to Afghanistan. The issue is not simply constitutional and political, but also cultural, because religions have been central to the symbolisation of social order in most cultures, but in most contemporary cultures that is no longer tenable. In recent years the rise of political Islam in many countries has brought with it a questioning of whether the state, as a thing in itself, has any right to exist apart from the religious community and its laws. The assertion that the separation of church and state has no justification in Islam might be likened to a flag planted by Islamic integrists to mark out the field on which the clash of civilizations will be fought – and also as an assertion by Orientalists that the object of their study is utterly foreign. Few other doctrines can awaken such unanimous rejection among the heirs of the western liberal tradition, in east and west. In the west there is a common horror of rule by clerics, a horror in which more or less uninformed western images of Islam, and particularly of Iran, are mixed with images drawn from our own western history, from Protestant portrayals of the Inquisition, through the anti-clerical tradition of the French revolution, to the anti-religious rhetoric of the ‘battle between science and religion’ of the early 20th century.¹ Rule by religion has had a singularly bad press. The Islamic revival has given the West the opportunity to focus this abhorrence on an external other: Islam stands identified with clerical rule (if we conveniently forget that the great majority of Islamic countries, throughout history, have been monarchies rather than theocracies, and that some are now, more or less, democracies), and on this issue at least we in the West know where we stand and why. Moreover, the extremes of the Islamic Brotherhood in Egypt,

¹ Theocratic beliefs are still alive in the West, in the contemporary Christian reconstructionist and dominion theology movements (which appear to be two different names for the same thing), but without any church order adequate to fulfill grand political ambitions that are both worldly and global in scope. As such, these radical but friable movements appear less threatening than the images presented by Islamic integrists or the Roman Catholic past.

the Iranian revolution and al-Qaida have provided the West with new negative images which can conveniently be applied to Islam as a whole. It would be difficult indeed to rouse any enthusiasm in the secularized and desacralised west for a religious defence of the West European version of the Christian faith and heritage against the rising tide of Islam. But no effort is required to achieve a consensus that any force seeking to turn back the clock, in the direction of theocracy, must be resisted.

The separation of church and state thus becomes a slogan, an emblem for deeper anxieties and wider hopes. It is not a technical question for the constitutional lawyers, but a touchstone for how we see ourselves and the world. Having separated church and state, how do societies live with religion and politics, and how do individuals combine their religious practice with social, and therefore political, participation? The solution which I have found in the Bahai writings may be of interest to societies and individuals, of whatever faith. For I think it shows that adherence to fundamental values which are derived from religion and faith does not necessarily entail a denial, or even relativization, of the just rights and prerogatives of the state, or of the dignity of statecraft. It is indeed possible to be a citizen of the city of God and of an earthly country, providing one can establish that God so wills it.

The issue of church and state is not only a marker for the front line in the battle of civilizations, but also the occasion of domestic unease of various kinds in the West. The Protestant countries of the West are watching the growth of a politically active and influential expression of Christian integristism with argus eyes, unable to dispense with religion, whose power to motivate altruism has been recognized, but equally unwilling to allow that the integristists' claims to possess the revealed truth can have any place in the political process. An article in *Time* magazine cites one of the 'Promise Keeper' pledges, which includes the verse "... go, and make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."¹ *Time* comments, "On the small scale of Lawton's First Assembly of God church, the inspiration is palpable, touching, poignant. But in the grander scheme, the Bible verse raises other questions: Who on earth will command? And who must obey?"² Recent elections in the United States have shown the continuing political power of organized religion – although it is 'organized' in the case of these Protestant movements outside of the established and orthodox churches, and by self-appointed evangelists rather than by the clergy.

¹ Matthew 18:19-20.

² *Time*, Vol. 150 No. 15, Atlantic edition, October 13 1997, 40.

Similarly, the post-communist Roman Catholic countries of Eastern Europe are feeling the renewal of direct political influence from the clergy, and are suffering a degree of dissonance in the process. Clearly most of the churches, particularly the Catholic church in Poland, have contributed a great deal to keeping more humane values alive through the decades of official materialism, under a ruling culture dependent on omnipresent informants and large-scale official lies. A considerable debt of thanks and respect is due to them. In many cases the same churches served as rallying-points in the anti-communist revolutions that enabled these countries to move out of the isolation and stagnation in which they had sunk. However it is equally clear that the forward movement that they have aided cannot continue without an acceptance of the separation of church and state, as a universally recognized prerequisite for the foundation of a modern state. The churches that have stood as parents in the birth of the post-communist states must now let their offspring go out into the world on their own – accepting the irony that the exclusion of the church from direct participation in political life was one of the doctrines of the communist movement which they have helped to overthrow.

In England, church establishment appears more untenable every year, as religious pluralism, unchurched religion, and irreligion steadily reduce the proportion of the population who support Anglican institutions. In Italy, Spain and Ireland, where the Roman Catholic church is established, the question of what this means in terms of legislation on abortion and divorce has been given in referenda into the hands of the citizen-believers. In these countries, where the faithful and the citizenry are almost co-extensive, the debates have shown that this is not primarily a struggle between parties with differing visions of the nation and its future, but rather a struggle within individuals for an understanding wide enough to embrace these two aspects of the human person.

My second reason why church and state is an urgent issue referred to the attacks the Bahai Faith has suffered on this point in recent years. Some of these will be referred to in the survey of secondary literature, and *en passant* where relevant points are touched on in the text. The polemic focus on this point is understandable. The characteristic theological doctrine of the Bahai Faith is ‘progressive revelation,’¹ and its characteristic social teaching is the unity of the human race, a unity which should find expression in a reign of universal peace

¹ In fact this doctrine is shared by both Islamic and Christian theologies, both of which recognize a chain of historical revelations leading up to the revelation which is definitive for the religion. The difference is that the Babi and Bahai version of this doctrine is open-ended, since revelation never ceases, and in principle revelations outside of the Semitic heritage are recognized.

upheld by a world government. The Bahai Writings mandate a world super-state, with an elected world legislature, a world executive and judiciary. The same scriptures mandate, and give quite detailed prescriptions for, the Bahai administrative order, containing elected, appointed and hereditary elements, which culminates in the twin institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice who are empowered respectively to interpret the Bahai Writings and to legislate for matters not contained in those Writings. This administrative system is presented as a pattern and model for the organization of the world. Since the Bahai Faith has no clergy, its well-organized administrative machinery, consisting of elected ‘Assemblies’ at local and national levels and the ‘Universal House of Justice’ at the international level, has been critically important in coordinating its activities and maintaining its unity. A large part of Bahai energies over the last several generations, in those countries where they are free to do so, has been devoted to building up these administrative institutions.

The question which naturally arises is what the relationship may be between the elected administrative machinery which the Bahais have devoted so much of their collective energies to erecting and the institutions of the world government which they proclaim as necessary and inevitable. The suspicion that they might be one and the same thing is natural, and not all the writers who have taken this view have done so perversely, to attack the Bahai programme. But some have used the issue deliberately to present the Bahais in a way calculated to arouse fear or contempt in modern audiences.

The most sustained and perverse of these is Ficicchia’s *Der Baha’ismus – Religion der Zukunft?*¹ (1981), according to which the Bahai Faith is not only totalitarian intolerant and anti-pluralist² in its internal structure, it seeks to make that structure the government of a *theokratischen Weltherrschaft*,³ a theocratic world dominion, which would be centralized⁴ rather than federal, and would include a centrally-planned economy. Indications to the contrary are dismissed as opportunistic tactics and *taqiyya* (*taqíyya*, the dissimulation of beliefs),⁵ that is, as a mask that will be abandoned when the true goal of world dominion becomes attainable. It is a monstrous vision that Ficicchia conjures up, and it has had an effect on the public perception of the Faith in German-speaking countries. In 1988 the Bahai community was refused permission to place an information

¹ For a Bahai response see Schaefer, Towfigh, and Gollmer, *Desinformation als Methode, die Baha’ismus-Monographie des F. Ficicchia*, 1995.

² Pages 400, 398, 393.

³ Page 271.

⁴ Pages 389-390, 393, 400.

⁵ Page 399.

stand in a public place in Berlin on the grounds that the Bahai material “contains things that are contrary to the free democratic constitution of Germany.”¹

In Ficicchia’s case I cannot believe that such criticisms are anything but deliberate distortions, but in other cases there are genuine concerns arising, on the one hand, from the very confused articulation in the Bahai secondary literature on this point, and on the other hand as a byproduct of anxieties about other threats to post-enlightenment society from other directions: Islamic and Christian integrism on the one hand, and the historic reluctance of Catholic and Orthodox churches to embrace a modernity which, to be fair, was less than willing to embrace them in return. A western intellectual culture that is drawing itself up to defend the achievements of the Enlightenment cannot afford to admit within its ranks anyone whose commitment to enlightenment values is questionable. I hope not only to show that the Bahai teachings are in accordance with enlightenment values, in the sense that these values can be regarded as a previous manifestation of the same transformation which was later to be embodied in the Bahai teachings, but also to show a way in which the fortress may be unnecessary. For if I have understood them correctly, the Bahai teachings not only provide a theological justification for the separate existence of the state but also some indications of how church and state, once securely separated, are to be reconciled.

Thus Church and state is a critical issue for human societies in general, for the antagonists in the clash between eastern and western cultures (or religious and modernist visions of society) at the present juncture, and for the Bahai Faith now that it is receiving more attention as a community and model of governance warranting serious consideration. It is self-evident that it is worthwhile for Bahais and Bahai scholars to try to articulate the Bahai teachings on education, the abolition of racism, the equality of men and women, the harmony of religions and fellowship between religions, and so on. If the issue of church and state is as fundamental to human societies and present anxieties as I have said, and if the Bahai teachings on this question have the potential for healing these anxieties which I think I have uncovered, then it should be equally self-evident that the Bahais need now to focus on this topic in study and public information programmes. This is not an issue to be postponed to the far future.

The third reason why church and state is an important question for the Bahai Faith at this time is that our attitudes to the state will shape our own development as a religious community. What is at stake is our stance towards our social environment. The attitude we find in the Bahai Writings to the physical environment – to the good things of the world and the enjoyment of the senses –

¹ The letter, from the *Bezirksamts* of Berlin-Steglitz, dd. 5.1.1988, is reprinted in Schaefer, Towfigh and Gollmer, *Desinformation als Methode*, page 6 note 23.

is very positive. This will, in the long term, shape the Bahai community into forms very different to those taken by religious communities that have a deep distrust of material creation and physical enjoyments. Our relation to our social environment, of which the state is an important part, can be expected to have analogous effects. If we begin with the idea that the state and the whole project of human governance is illegitimate, as in the more extreme forms of Islamic integrism, or at best a necessary evil, as in much of Christian political theology, then one would expect the Bahai community to develop a conception of itself as apart from and in some sense more pure than the world around it. On the other hand, the belief that statecraft and government are projects that have been endorsed and commanded by God (as have science and the arts) would appear to be a positive foundation for a working relationship between Bahai communities and the structures of governance in the broadest sense. Whatever attitude we take to the world and its governments, we are inevitably required by our involvement in the world and concern for the well-being of its peoples to work with governments and politicians where possible. There are now a number of countries in which the Bahai community represents a small but significant portion of the population, and the question of what the Bahais intend eventually to create in those countries and in the world will be asked. And in other countries, where the Bahai communities are a very small minority, our understanding of this issue will have an immediate effect as we seek to “attract people of capacity,” and as the community is “drawn more deeply into dealing with world issues.”¹ If we harbour the idea that statecraft is illegitimate, politics dirty, and that the whole structure would, in an ideal world, be swept away, then our relationships to the politicians and institutions we deal with can hardly be whole-hearted and sincere. Political actors in turn could hardly be expected to sincerely respect the Bahai institutions and what they stand for. A negative assessment of the value of the state and statecraft in the divine scheme of things would make a charade of our efforts to contribute to the United Nations and other organs of global governance by presenting Baha’u’llah’s teachings on world federalism. Why would we be devoting such efforts, for instance to UN charter revisions, if the perfection of that body with its recognition of the Order of Baha’u’llah would mean that it recognize its own illegitimacy? Shall we baptise the state, or the global state, only to abolish it? Since we are engaged in efforts to aid the progressive perfection of human government at all levels, we have an immediate need for solid foundations for a sincere and wholehearted relationship to government *per se*.

Baha’u’llah’s solution to this ancient and topical question lies between the two poles of theocracy on the one hand and a wall of separation between church

¹ Universal House of Justice, Ridvan message, BE 150.

and state on the other, but it cannot be adequately described as a compromise within this polarity because two new elements have been injected in the equation: Baha'u'llah provides a theological justification and divine charter for the institution of the state and a new interpretation of the metaphor of 'organic unity' as a model of society. But Baha'u'llah's solution is certainly not difficult to understand: it might be characterized as the harmony of permanently differentiated organs of equal dignity, within an organic body politic which is understood in terms of the interdependence of the parts rather than their subordination to a single rationale.

This solution could also bridge a gap that exists in the theological systems of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, between systematic theologies and theologies of the state. The religious communities of the Western traditions all have models of ideal 'social' structures, on various levels. They have, for example, ultimate eschatological models of the Kingdom of God and the reign of justice. This is an ideal society to be created by divine intervention at the end of time. There are also metaphysical models in which entities such as angels, prophets, the Hidden Imam and the souls of the departed relate to the world and to one another. This is the realm of saints and angels, but also of unverifiable dynamics such as 'love conquers all' and reward and retribution. These models show a spiritual reality under and beyond material reality, and present pictures of the life after death. Then there are 'ecclesiological' models, that is, models of the religious community's own ideal existence as a commonwealth, whether it is expressed in terms of the church as the body of Christ, the community of the Islamic faithful reflecting the primitive community of Medina, or the house of Israel as a people chosen in service to God. Clearly there are connections between the models of the ideal Kingdom at the end of time, the life with God in the next world, the spiritual realities and dynamics which are already active, and the community of the faithful. One could speak of a single model projected into three dimensions: the millennial future, the metaphysical, and the community itself.

These religious communities also have immediate goals and activities, in societies that are governed by state institutions. They therefore have at least implicit theologies of the state. These serve as models by which they picture what 'the state' should be doing, how it comes to exist at all, and what they as religious communities are doing as they are relating to the state. While there is broad congruence between pictures of the Kingdom of God throughout the Western religious traditions, there is a radical divergence in the theologies of the state. The difference exists not primarily between Jewish, Christian and Islamic theologies, but within each tradition. Even among groups that are theologically closely related, one finds some world-rejecting groups that are hostile to the state as

irretrievably worldly, while others try to seize the state from secular control and return it to the hands of faith. Some churches have moved from one stance to another within a matter of generations. These differences in theologies of the state are possible because the state is absent from the relatively stable theological models of the Kingdom of God and (excluding some short-lived theocratic states) is by definition external to the religious community's ecclesiological model. The state may be seen as evil, as an evil wisely ordained for a wicked time, or as the secular arm performing the will of the church by other means; it may be baptised, reformed or overturned, but it cannot be truly good, because in the eschatological, metaphysical and ecclesiological models of the truly good society, there is no state. The Kingdom to come is pictured as a non-political society. Christian, Islamic and Jewish theologies of the state are at best loosely related to these communities' systematic theologies and are therefore highly variable. And because states also know that there is no room for a state in the Kingdom, the relationships between churches and states cannot be more than tactical. Where true acceptance is withheld on one side, trust cannot be given on the other.

For these reasons, and given the importance that church-state theories have assumed in Islamic integrists' rhetoric vis-a-vis the West, the model of church-state relationships in the Bahai scriptures is exceptionally interesting. Coming from the Islamic world itself, the Bahai Faith presents a justification of the separation of church and state going far beyond those produced in the West. Millennialist in origin¹ and still occupying a peripheral position in most countries, its scriptures nevertheless present stronger arguments for the rights of the state than can be found even in the theologies of established churches. From the position that the Messiah has come and the eschaton has been initiated in the life of Baha'u'llah, the Bahai Faith presents an eschatological model in which the state is not rendered redundant by the coming of the Messiah, but rather has been blessed and guided by that Coming.

In this version of the Kingdom of God there is a state within the Kingdom of God, and principles governing its relationship with the religious order. Social institutions manifest metaphysical realities, and the principles governing church-state relationships are believed to reflect "the necessary relations inherent in the realities of things,"² which in turn reflect the nature of God. The platonic reality that the state exists to manifest is part of the Kingdom in Heaven. Moreover the

¹ For a sociological study of the transition from millenarianism, see Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*.

² Abdu'l-Baha, *Tablet to August Forel* 13, 20, 24; *Tablet to the Hague* 3; *Selections* 198; *Tablets* vol. 3 page 525; *Tablet to Laura Barney in Gail, Summon up Remembrance* pages 174-176; *Sermon on the Art of Governance* see page 395 below.

relationship of organic unity between differentiated institutions of church and state corresponds to the differentiated organic structure of the ideal Bahai community, so the theology of the state is matched by a parallel ecclesiology. Finally, the same pattern is found in the integration of diverse attributes and multiple citizenships in the human person. Thus the differentiation of church and state in Bahai political theology is related to metaphysics, eschatology, ecclesiology and anthropology, as variations on one theme, and this theme in itself has a clear relationship to the *kerygma* of the Bahai teachings, which is unity. An additional reason for interest is that this teaching is argued, and not simply revealed as the divine fiat, and it is argued in neoplatonic terms which are a common language for Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Perhaps the argument will prove transferable.

*Glory be unto Him who hath produced growth in the
adjoining fields of various natures!*

*Glory be unto Him who irrigated them with the same waters gushing forth from
that Fountain!*

(Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha 398)

Glory be to Him Who has created all the pairs,
of such things as earth produces,
and out of men themselves,
and of things beyond their ken.

Quran 36:36.



Religion and Politics in Islamic history

A great deal of nonsense has been written about the issue of ‘church’ and state in the history and theology of Islam, partly because of ignorance about the variety of Islamic history, and partly because the ‘Islamic’ view has been defined by contrast with an ‘other,’ and it has not always been clear whether this other is western, Christian or modern. The nonsense has come from two sides: from an orientalist discourse which presents Islamic societies as essentially different to other societies, and from an integrist Islamic discourse which makes the same claim. While there are differences between the Islamic and Christian scriptural resources, the histories of the two religions show that the variation within each is greater than any ‘essential’ difference between the two. It would appear that the issue of relations between the religious and political orders is a universal one, and that the most remarkable difference is not between East and West, but between traditional and modern, and moreover, that what distinguishes the modern society from the traditional is not the discovery of a fundamentally new approach to the problematic relationship, but the fact that a very old approach, the differentiation or separation of the two orders, has been made explicit in modern societies in a socio-political discourse, and has been grounded in theory and embodied in texts, institutions and laws. And, as we will see in later chapters, this explication and embodiment is extended, in the Bahai scriptures, into the religious discourse.

The following sections will attempt to provide some telling examples of church-state relationships in Islamic history, intending not to provide an overview throughout Islamic history or theology, but simply to be sufficiently convincing to clear away the undergrowth of misconceptions, so as to provide clearer ground for our main topic. More detail will be given in relation to Safavid and Qajar (*Qájár*) Iran, because these, together with the late Ottoman empire, constitute the most important historical and doctrinal backgrounds to Baha’u’llah’s thought. Nevertheless Baha’u’llah and his contemporaries would also have been aware of vigorous European debates on the topic (it will be remembered that the separation of church and state was not yet universally accepted in European political thinking in the 19th century).

In Islamic historiography

Bernard Lewis begins his discussion of *The Political Language of Islam* (pages 2-3) by saying:

In classical Islam there was no distinction between Church and state. In Christendom the existence of two authorities goes back to the founder, who enjoined his followers to render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s and to God the things which are God’s. Throughout the history

of Christendom there have been two powers: God and Caesar ... or, in modern terms, church and state. They may be associated, they may [be] separated; they may be in harmony, they may be in conflict; ... But always there are two, the spiritual and the temporal powers, each with its own laws and jurisdictions, its own structure and hierarchy. In pre-westernized Islam, there were not two powers but one, and the question of separation, therefore, could not arise. The distinction between church and state, so deeply rooted in Christendom, did not exist in Islam ... there is no equivalent to the term 'laity,' a meaningless expression in the context of Islam. At the present time, the very notion of a secular jurisdiction and authority ... is seen as an impiety, indeed as the ultimate betrayal of Islam. The righting of this wrong is the principal aim of Islamic revolutionaries and, in general, of those described as Islamic fundamentalists.

Many other authors have taken the same line, I have chosen the hapless Mr. Lewis as my text in clearing away some misunderstandings simply because his book is so useful in other respects that it lies at hand on my desk. Lewis represents a tradition of interpretation that has reigned for centuries in orientalist approaches to Islam and has, in more recent years, been adopted in Islamic integrism.

If it were true that "In pre-westernized Islam, there were not two powers but one," this would present some difficulties for Bahais, since Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha regarded the differentiation of the worldly and religious enterprises as a universal truth, one which has always been taught by the divine religions, and Islam according to Bahai teachings is one of the divine religions. However a little later in his book (47-8), Lewis is discussing the shift in the meaning of 'Caliph' (properly speaking, *Khalifa*) as effective power was transferred to other rulers, and he cites the military rulers of Baghdad in 1194¹ addressing the populace as follows:

If the caliph is the Imam (*Imám*, leader), then his constant occupation must be prayer, since prayer is the foundation of the faith and the best of deeds. His preeminence [in] this respect and the fact that he serves as an example for the people is sufficient for him. This is the true sovereignty; the interference of the caliph in the affairs of government is senseless; they should be entrusted to the sultans.

¹ Dates in the Islamic and Bahai calendars have been translated into the Gregorian calendar, except where dual dating is used in relation to early Islamic history.

Another source that Lewis cites, the Persian (but Sunni) historian Bayhaqi (*Bayhaqí*) writing about a century earlier, says:

Know that the Lord Most High has given one power to the prophets and another power to kings; and He has made it incumbent upon the people of the earth that they should submit themselves to the two powers and should acknowledge the true way laid down by God.”¹

In the first of these citations, there is clear concept of two categories of leader, the Imam and the Sultan, the religious and the worldly. The second citation shows that this is based on an earlier model of the relationship between them in terms of ‘two powers,’ an expression that prefigures the terms that would be used in European theories of church-state relationships, and also looks uncannily like the words used by Abdu’l-Baha in his *Sermon on the Art of Governance* (Appendix 1, sections 5 and 18), so that one wonders whether there may have been a direct influence from Bayhaqi to Abdu’l-Baha.

Lewis goes on to show that the attempt of the Ottoman sultans to claim the caliphate (in the sense of religious leadership of Muslims everywhere) is of relatively recent origin, first appearing in print in 1788, and being formally asserted for the first time in the Ottoman constitution of 1876.² The attempt to combine authentic religious leadership and absolute political power in one person, the Sultan-Caliph, was part of the pan-Islamist movement, which sought to recover the initiative for the Sunni (*Sunní*) Islamic world in the face of Western dominance. During the same period, one Shiah cleric, Mirza Muhammad Hasan Shirazi (*Shírází*), had come to be recognised as the sole Exemplary Guide (*Marja’-ye taqlíd*) in matters of religious practice, for all followers of twelver Shi’ism. This itself was something new for Shi’ism, since it would have been impossible without modern communication and the printing press. Modernisers in the Shiah world were urging Shirazi to take up “the reins to control the people.” Had this movement succeeded, it too would have combined worldly and religious power in one person. Curiously enough, one of those who advocated pan-Islamism and thus universal *religious* leadership for the Ottoman Sultan was a prominent Islamic reformer, known as Afghani (*Jamál ad-Dín Afghání*), who was also the leading figure urging Shirazi, as the leader of Shiah Islam, to take up

¹ Lewis, *Political Language* 134 note 8, citing Ta’ríkh-e Mas’úd, translated in C.E. Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids: Their Empire in Afghanistan and Eastern Iran*, Edinburgh, 1963.

² Lewis, *Political Language* 50.

worldly power, even urging him to depose the Shah.¹ The great pan-islamist advocate of Islamic unity was thus propagating two contradictory projects, one for Iran and the Shiah world, in which the religious leadership would claim worldly power, and the other for the Sunni world, where a worldly power was to assume universal religious leadership.

It is important to see that such projects to unite the two powers were responses to modernity and not, *pace* Lewis, any part of “pre-westernized Islam.” None of the classical formulations of fundamental Islamic doctrines mentions government or the state, and Lewis’ own examples from medieval Sunni Islam show that there was a healthy understanding that religion is not politics, and *vice versa*. Those examples could be multiplied endlessly, but it appears preferable to refer the reader to Ira Lapidus’ massive and renowned *A History of Islamic Societies*. This history has two particular virtues, from our point of view: it is organised around the theme of religion, politics, and the relation between them, which Lapidus correctly perceives to be one of the principle dynamics shaping all history, and it begins with the temple-cities of Sumeria, the caeseropapist empires of Mesopotamia,² the church hierarchies of Christendom and the looser networks of Rabbinical Judaism, and does not treat Islamic societies as if they were a case apart.

¹ This story is told in more detail in Appendix 1, since it relates to the audience to which Abdu’l-Baha addressed his *Sermon on the Art of Governance*.

² Caeseropapism: in Christian theology, the doctrine that the state is supreme over the church in religious matters, thus, that Caesar (the ruler) is in effect the Pope. In sociology, a caeseropapist society is one in which the highest political organ is able to enforce its will on an effectively operating religious hierarchy. Caeseropapism can only arise where the political ruler possesses an autonomous legitimation (charisma).

The use of the religious hierarchy as an arm of government distinguishes caeseropapism from the mere endorsement of one religion by the rulers. To function in practice, caeseropapism requires an effective religious hierarchy with a high degree of compliance from the population. Regimes which have and control their own court religion which does not extend to the population are not caeseropapist. Caeseropapism is distinct from theocracy in that religion is made to serve the needs and logic of the state, whereas in theocracy politics is subordinated to a religious logic, and the political order to religious authorities. Ancient Egypt was therefore a caeseropapist, and not a theocratic, state, for while the Pharaoh as God-king might present himself as a divine ruler, the logic of the pharaohs’ rule was governed by political needs. Caeseropapist societies are therefore highly stable, whereas theocratic societies are always short-lived.

In Classical Islam

I would like to pass over the periods of Muhammad in Mecca and Medina, for the present, except to note that by the time Muslims came to look back at the Medina period as an ideal society that was not characterised by the various ills they perceived in their own times, their idealisation included the unification of political and religious virtue and leadership, in the person of Muhammad and the rightly guided Caliphs. By the time Islam really enters the full light of history, however, we can see that this monist ideal only partly corresponds to practice. We can begin with the **Umayyad dynasty**, which held the Caliphate and ruled the Islamic lands from 661 to 750 AD. In Umayyad theory, and also according to the dissident Kharijites (*Khárijites*) (and possibly in the Shiah theory of the Imamate, whose forms in the Umayyad period remain obscure), the Caliph was the sole ruler of a single community and custodian of both its religious principles and its political interests. The Umayyads, Kharijites and Shiah disagreed about how the rightful caliph was to be selected, and a great deal of blood and tears flowed, but we need not consider that here. What we should note is that even at this early period there were pious believers who were disenchanted with the worldliness of the early Caliphal regimes, and that there were already religious sects and forms of religious organisation that distinguished the state and state-sanctioned religion on the one hand from what was conceived as ‘true’ religion.¹ To some extent this distinction was inherent in Islam itself, since it was understood primarily as a religion of otherworldly salvation, in which divine justice is meted out, and the individual is rewarded for virtue, faith and piety, at the time of the resurrection, whereas in this world the unjust very often prevail. This in itself implies that the religious project does not have a necessary connection to the worldly or temporal. It contrasts with the pattern of some tribal religions and messianic moments, in which ‘salvation’ is expressed in terms of protection or dominance in this world, achieved through the intervention of the deity who ensures justice. Other-worldly salvation correlates with some degree of autonomy for religion from other concerns. Early Islam can also be contrasted to the pattern of sacred kingship in pre-Islamic Persia, Syria and, to some extent, Byzantium, in that the polity is not sacralised as a reflection of the sacred cosmos. The ruler (despite Umayyad pretensions) is not God’s representative, and political obedience is not directly related to the individual’s salvation.

At the same time, the Islamic religious duties of obedience to “those endowed with authority” (Quran 4:59), of jihad (*jihád*), and of “calling to righteousness, enjoining what is right, and forbidding the reprehensible” (Quran 3:104), all

¹ Lapidus, *History of Islamic Societies* 147.

imply action in the *polis*, or politics in the broad sense. This is a pattern we will see again and more clearly in the Bahai teachings, where the strict autonomy of the religious and state institutions is combined with a command for the believers, as good citizens, to engage in society, including legal political activism. However the fact that there are religious duties that the believer can only carry out in the political sphere does not in itself imply that the political sphere exists only by grace of religion.

In the crucial area of law, Ibn Muqaffa° (*°Abdu'llah Ibn al-Muqaffa°*) suggested in 757 that Islamic jurisprudence and legal procedures, which varied from one city to another, should be systematised, and enforced by the Umayyad Caliph.¹ This would have incorporated Islamic law into the state, but his suggestion was not followed. The result was not just that the great diversity of legal practice continued, but also that the state in its secular jurisdiction developed a positive law, implemented and shaped by governors and judges, while religious law was developed by legal theorists who were at the same time pious religious scholars, as much concerned with ethics as with rules.² Separated from the centre of temporal authority and practical demands, the legal theorists developed a corpus of Islamic law characterised by unreality and artificiality.

As the Umayyad caliphate ran its declining course, many leading Sunni figures became alienated by the military and administrative policies of the regime, its assumption of royal trappings, and its politically motivated intervention in religious affairs.³ Many of the Islamic traditions (*hadīth*) that discourage truly religious scholars from entering state service, for example as judges, must be dated to this period.⁴

The perception that the Caliph represented worldly power without religious virtue was one fact that enabled the Abbasid (*°Abbásid*) propagandists to mobilise support, leading to the defeat of the Umayyads in 750 and the foundation of the Abbasid caliphate with its capital in Baghdad. At this stage, it must be remembered, the Muslims constituted a small and highly militarised ruling elite, governing subject peoples who were Christian, Zoroastrian, Jewish and pagan. The presence of substantial non-Muslim populations in itself meant that the logic of politics could not coincide with the demands of religion. In Iran, Abbasid rule depended on collaboration with the Zoroastrian elite who had governed in Sasanid times, and the interests of the Zoroastrian clerical and priestly classes

¹ Balyuzi, *Muhammad and the Course of Islam* 239.

² Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 46 and 49-50.

³ Lapidus, *History of Islamic Societies* 53.

⁴ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 50. For the traditions see, e.g., Chittick, 'Two Seventeenth-century Persian tracts' 297 n52.

were respected to such an extent that the regime has been described as a “dual [Muslim-Zoroastrian] orthodoxy.”¹ Opposition to the regime took the forms of syncretic religious innovation in rural areas and of Shi‘ism, both embodying the claim that the officially sanctioned forms of religion were not the true religion.

In the Umayyad and early Abbasid periods we can observe the emergence of a split between the Islam of the institutions and officers of the state, so far as central power extended, and another Islam embodying the personal piety and social values of the Muslim urban populations. The first sponsored the development of Islamic architecture, translation, philosophy and science, and the adoption of Iranian and Hellenistic forms in literature, but the second provided the matrix within which the Quranic sciences, the shariah (*Shari‘a*, or religious law) and mysticism developed.² Whereas in Christian history, church organisations developed an identity over many generations in contradistinction to the state, in Islamic history political powers sought to establish caeseropapist regimes from an early stage, by co-opting the mosque and its pulpit. The result was that the religious counter-force coalesced not around one religious institution (the church) but around the Quran itself and the informal authority of those who were reputed to be most learned in the Quran, law and traditions, as well as around mystics.

The **Abbasids** attempted to impose what they took to be Islamic orthodoxy. Had they been successful they would have established a state ‘church’ of the Byzantine or Sasanid type.³ The Abbasid Caliph al-Ma‘mun (r. 813-33) sought for the first time to extend the power of the Caliph to doctrinal and ritual matters, by proclaiming the superiority of Ali (‘*Alī Ibn Abī -Tālib*, the fourth Caliph and first Shiah Imam) to all other companions of Muhammad and the first three Caliphs. This went against the accepted doctrine that all ‘companions’ were of equal rank. Caliph al-Ma‘mun also changed the sequence of movements and verses in the daily obligatory prayers. In 833 he instituted an inquisition, requiring all officials to swear their adherence to the mu‘tazalite doctrine that the Quran was created by God, and not pre-eternal. The details need not concern us,⁴ but the outcome is important: the claims of the Caliph (and his two successors)

¹ Lapidus, *History of Islamic Societies* 65. This remark will become interesting when we consider whether the ‘establishment’ of religion in a modern constitution entails the selection of just one religion.

² *Op. cit.* 65-6, 71-73, 81-82.

³ *Op. cit.* 73, 99.

⁴ Lapidus discusses the political background of the inquisition, and gives details of the numbers and responses of those summoned to appear before it, in ‘The Separation of State and Religion,’ 370-82.

were eventually defeated, thanks particularly to the opposition of Ahmad ibn Hanbal. It was a very close thing, but the informal institutions of urban religion centring around the Quran were able to preserve their existence independent of the political powers, and to win a recognition that they, and not the Caliph, would have the last word in defining Islamic orthodoxy, and the first claim to popular support in matters of religion.¹

As the Abbasid empire broke up into more or less independent princedoms, the leadership of the ulama (*‘ulamá*, or religious scholars) and of the Sufi (*Súfi*) masters took on institutionalised forms, through schools of legal interpretation (*madhhabs*) and the institutions in which law was taught and administered,² and through Sufi brotherhoods. The *madrasa*, or college of legal studies, was often physically combined with a mosque and a residence for teachers and students, who would often travel from one city to another to teach or study a particular text. It has been said that Islam does not have any institution corresponding to the Christian church, but this group of related institutions, which in late Ottoman times was to take on the architectural form of the *külliye*, the mosque surrounded by institutions of learning, health care and charity, bears some resemblance to the medieval church in the services it provides to the community. The difference is crucial for the church-state question, however: because the religious order of Islam is embodied in a group of institutions, there are multiple interfaces between the political and religious orders, and it is at once harder for the religious order to adopt an effective prophetic role vis-a-vis the state, and harder for the state to control religious life. It will be interesting, in a later volume, to compare the Bahai Mashriqu’l-Adhkar, the ‘rising-place of the remembrance of God,’ which is a house of worship surrounded by institutions of learning, social and medical care, and a hospice for travellers, with both the Ottoman *külliye* and the lodges of the Sufi brotherhoods.

The late Abbasid and post-Abbasid centuries were the classical age of Islam (c. 9th to 12th centuries), in which its religious teachings, laws and social ethics and the patterns of institutional life assumed reasonably standard forms that are still recognisable today. The development of the *madrasa* and of the endowments (*waqf*, plural *awqaf*) that funded them meant that professional full-time study of the law became possible. The princedoms that succeeded to the Abbasid empire were ruled by foreign military elites, many of nomad origin and employing slave armies. This was also the time of mass conversions of the subject populations to Islam.

¹ Lapidus, *History of Islamic Societies* 88-103.

² *Op. cit.* 134-137.

As conquerors and regimes came and went, the schools of legal interpretation, along with Sufi brotherhoods and Shiah sects, provided the frameworks within which the ulama emerged as a class of native notables, related by marriage and common interest with the landowning and merchant classes. In many places they took charge of taxation, irrigation, judicial and police affairs, as well as serving as scribes for the rulers. Their acceptance of these responsibilities, reversing the earlier ulama's resistance to involvement in state services, was due in part to the weakening of the Caliphate.¹

It is important to note that the classical development of Islam grows out of urban Islam, and not the court of the Caliph. This classical form of Sunni Islam presumes the existence of the ruler as a separate and geographically limited worldly power, in contrast to religious institutions that are not geographically defined and do not seek worldly power.

As the Caliph lost effective political power, it became possible to redefine the caliphate as the titular religious leadership of Sunni Islam. The quotes from the 11th and 12th centuries that were cited above (page 34) show that this shift had been completed. Although the caliphate was moved from the political to the religious side of the equation, caliphs did not establish a corresponding reputation for religious learning or mystical insight, so that they were unable to assume control of the networks of ulama and mystics. Their influence was confined largely to providing religious justification for the court in Baghdad and for autonomous princes, by recognizing their accession to the throne, although some caliphs also attempted to adjudicate the sometimes bitter disputes between schools of legal interpretation. It was the kings, and not the caliph, who were the primary builders of mosques, *madrasas* and other religious buildings, and their power to do so became one of the justifications of kingship. At the same time, private initiatives through endowments meant that religious institutions retained a measure of independence, varying in extent from time to time and between the Sunni and Shiah communities.

Over the same classical period, **Shi'ism** was developing the theory of its imamate, codifying its collections of traditions and its law, and consolidating its identity as a permanent opposition to the established political regimes. As it became increasingly quietest, Shi'ism begins to appear as a religion of other-worldly salvation. The institutional development of **Sufism** is a little later, from the 11th to the 14th centuries. It centres on the Sufi master (*pír* or *shaykh*) who teaches a disciple and eventually licences him to teach, and on devotional rituals that differ from one order to the other, and also from the devotions of the mosques. By the end of the 12th century, Sufi orders (*tariqát*) would typically

¹ Lapidus, *History of Islamic Societies* 144-5.

have a genealogy of leading disciples, their masters and their masters in turn, stretching back to the first Islamic century, a central chapter located at the tomb of a saint and containing residential and teaching spaces for initiates as well as a hall for public preaching, and branches and sub-branches which might extend across the whole Islamic world. Most orders would have lay members who would attend devotional rituals, as well as the disciples and masters. Thus the Sufi centre (*khánagá*) in some ways resembles the church of medieval Western Christianity, particularly on the periphery of Islamic expansion where Sufi orders, and not the Islam of the ulama and the mosque, were the main vehicle for transmitting Islamic culture. The relations of the orders to the state varied: the Shadhili order has always taught that one should avoid close relations with government authorities, whereas the Safavid order actually assumed power in Iran in 1501.

From 1055, following their conquest of Baghdad, the **Saljuq** (*Saljúq*) Sultans introduced a new mode of church-state relationships, by favouring the Hanafi (*Hanafi*) school of legal interpretation against its rivals within Sunni Islam, and promoting themselves as the protectors of orthodoxy by vigorously suppressing Shiah movements. They did so in part because of Saljuq rivalry with the Fatimid (*Fátimid*) dynasty in Egypt, who were Shiah, and because of the political threat posed by the Ismaili form of Shi'ism. Later Saljuq rulers alternated in supporting the Hanafi school, the Shafi'i (*Shafi'i*) school, and adopting a pan-sunni policy.¹ The details need not detain us here. This option of state control of urban Islam through a policy of divide and rule was only possible after the schools had established their institutions and sectarian support in the population, and so long as the schools had comparable strengths. Once adherence to the main Sunni schools had come to be regionally distributed, with one school dominant in a particular civil jurisdiction, the possibility of making political gains by playing one against the other was foreclosed.

The **theories of politics** developed during the classical period corresponded to the de facto situation, in which rulers held power by force of arms. Three principal branches of Islamic political theorising can be identified: the work of the ulama in Sunni legal theory, a Persian-inspired genre of mirrors for princes written by the scribal classes, and neo-platonic theorising by Hellenised philosophers. The **legal theory** of the ulama explained the necessity of the caliphate and the task of rulers, who were required to implement the shariah. This assumed that the religious institutions did not have the coercive power required to rule. While authors did discuss the personal requirements and formalities by which the ruler might assume power, the fear of disorder was so great that in effect the theory justified obedience to any ruler who seized power by force, and

¹ Lapidus, *History of Islamic Societies* 141-2.

supported hereditary succession in subsequent generations. With the final end of the Baghdad caliphate in 1258, this element of Sunni thinking could be assigned to the past, and legal thinking about government came to correspond more closely to the realities of the time. In place of the top-down leadership of the caliph, the ulama were portrayed as the local models of Islamic behaviour, and as advisors and counsellors to their princes.¹ Their task was to cultivate a class of rulers who would uphold justice, understood in terms of equal treatment for equals, and who would preserve the Islamic institutions and values.

In the genre of **mirrors for princes**, it is the wise minister who is the counsellor to the prince, and his texts are drawn not from the Quran but from the good and bad examples provided by kings of the past. In this literature, society is composed of functional classes such as soldiers, peasants and merchants, and the justice of the ruler consists in giving each class its due so that the whole may prosper.

Classical Islamic **political philosophy** focuses on the person of the philosopher, who so understands the truth that he is able to order human society rightly, so that society becomes a garden whose fruits are virtuous citizens. In the absence of such a supreme philosopher, a state can be well ordered by implementing laws that embody the wisdom of a philosopher. As Lapidus remarks, this form of state “is akin to the ideal Caliphate of Sunni legal theory,”² that is, it resembles the earlier Sunni theory in which the Caliph, not the prince, is the ruler. Unlike the other two kinds of theory, neoplatonic political philosophy did not generally produce a theory that corresponded to the reality of a differentiated society (exceptions will be mentioned below). Platonic political philosophy imagined a society in which philosophy, which some authors thinly disguised as Islam, would provide an over-arching framework within which rulership, law and commerce were mere departments.

From these cultural resources, a series of great political thinkers produced variations on an Islamic political theology. **Al-Farabi** (*al-Fárábí*, 870-950) developed a theory of the state that bears some resemblance to Plato’s caste-based theory, but with an important difference: Al-Farabi’s ruling caste itself consists of several primary organs, analogous to the heart and vital organs. The lower levels serve these vital organs, and the whole is ideally ruled by one virtuous man.³ Al-Farabi’s theory recognises the fact of social differentiation, as well as stratification. **Al-Mawardi** (*Al-Máwardí al-Basrí*, 975-1059) adds the important observation that it is individual variation, and not just institutional differentiation,

¹ Lapidus, *History of Islamic Societies* 149.

² *Op. cit.* 153.

³ Sjadzali, *Islam and Governmental System* 38-9; Fakhry *Al-Farabi* 102-5.

that makes it both necessary and possible for individuals to help one another. Far before his time, he discovered the foundation of individualism as a political theory: far from being contrary to social unity, individuation is the motor that makes society possible. He also differs from Al-Farabi in emphasising the importance of religion, not as a state ideology or source of common values, but as a source of virtues, thus uniting the legal theory of the ulama and the political theory of the philosophers. His thinking also has elements of a social contract theory, rather than subscribing to the necessary fiction that God appoints the ruler. The corollary is that an unjust or inept ruler can be deposed.¹

Al-Ghazali (*Al-Ghazali*, 1058-1111) unites political philosophy with the mirror for princes tradition, in that he emphasises the functional classes that make up society. Since order and security are prerequisites of a society in which people can prepare themselves for the next life, the appointment of a head of state is a religious duty. Therefore, he says, religion and the king are like twins: religion is the foundation, and the ruler is the guardian, and each needs the other. God has chosen two groups of people to guide humanity: prophets and kings.²

Ibn Taymiyyah, (*Ibn Taymiyyah*, b. 1263) writing after the end of the Abbasid caliphate, takes it for granted that worldly power is in the hands of local rulers with no need for religious legitimation, and religious authority is contested among the ulama. He founds his political theory on the ‘authority verse,’ Surah 4:59:

O you who believe! Obey God, and obey the messenger and those entrusted with command among you, and if have a dispute concerning any matter, refer it to God and the messenger ...

His contribution to the theory is to relate this to the previous verse, “God has commanded that you return your trusts to those to whom they are due...” God has entrusted command to the ruler, and the ruler is therefore subject to the ethical standards that are incumbent on the testamentary guardian of an orphan or a merchant holding a trust. The argument looks stronger in English than it is in the Arabic, since ‘trust’ and ‘entrusted’ in the two verses are unrelated words, and the two verses appear in fact to be speaking of two different things.

The three streams of classical political theory all share an emphasis on the virtue of the ruler, though the one emphasises piety as the source of virtue, the second royal nobility, and the third philosophical understanding. More recent integrist authors, such as Sayyid Qutb (1906-66), share this preoccupation with the virtue of the ruler, and the virtue of those to whom authority is delegated. In

¹ Sjadzali, *Islam and Governmental System* 43-44, 75.

² *Op. cit.* 53-55.

this they are recognisably medieval in character, in contrast to the political theories of Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha, in which the guarantee of good governance comes not only from virtue reinforced by the fear of God, but also from communicative rationality in the form of popular consultation, and the institutional check of periodic elections.

It is evident from these examples that the differentiation of the religious and political orders of society did not enter Islamic societies through their contacts with the west. As Olivier Roy, has said,

... since the time of the original community there has always been a *de facto* autonomous political space in the Muslim world: what has been lacking is a political thought regarding the autonomy of this space, ... as early as the end of the first century ... a *de facto* separation between political power (sultans, amirs) and religious power (the caliph) was created and institutionalized.¹

Islamic law, which is a structure built by successive generations in the most productive periods of Islamic history, upon the foundations provided by the Quran, has everywhere been the personal law of various schools of legal interpretation or sects, and not the law of the land. The fact that it has come down to us as an overwhelmingly private law is eloquent evidence of the universality of Islam's distance from affairs of state in Islamic societies. The law of the land has in most cases been an extension of the ruler's will, in some cases somewhat codified, but generally not distinct from the administrative apparatus.

In short, pre-modern Islamic history reveals a wide variety of church-state relationships, but none that would justify Lewis's assertion that "In pre-westernized Islam, there were not two powers but one, and the question of separation, therefore, could not arise." A few examples of theocratic Islamic societies can be found, for instance in the Mahdist state of Sudan (though this itself was a response to colonial pressures, and exceptional in terms of classical

¹ *The Failure of Political Islam* 14. It would be unfortunate to give the impression that only western authors such as Lapidus and Roy have recognized the *de facto* separation of religion and politics in Islamic societies: in addition to the medieval theorists just mentioned, who take it as self-evident, Taha Husayn (*Táhá Husayn*, 1889-1973) and Ali Abd-ar-Raziq (*°Alí °Abd ar-Ráziq*, 1888-1966), Muhammad Husayn Haykal (*Muhammad Husayn Haykal*, 1888-1956) and some more recent writers such as Munawir Sjadzali (*Islam and Governmental System* 161) have highlighted the theme. Haykal says explicitly that no provisions for a governmental system were made during Muhammad's life in Medina: rather Muhammad accepted the sometimes differing systems of local and tribal government that he found (see Sjadzali, *op. cit.* 125).

Islamic models) and in contemporary Iran. What we cannot find is any example of a stable caeseropapist state comparable to the ancient Egyptian, Russian Orthodox or Byzantine models. The nearest approaches are the Fatimid and late Ottoman dynasties.¹

One must ask then what Lewis and others mean to convey, when they make statements that, given their own knowledge of Islamic history, they should recognise as factually untrue. If we look at Lewis's statement again (quoted above, page 33) it appears that he is seeking to emphasise the difference between Islamic and Christian societies, an approach which has been labelled orientalism (that is, oriental-occidental essentialism), but might also be regarded as a pedagogic device to warn students from contemporary western backgrounds that they cannot transpose their assumptions about society and religion to other times, religions and societies. It is certainly useful for the student to remember that the 'state' in classical Islamic history is not the nation-state of today, that the religious order had various forms that did not generally correspond to that of a church, and that the relationship between these two did not automatically suppose that two distinct orders ought to exist. However the same points must be remembered in studying Christian history of periods and areas outside of modern Western Europe. Lewis islamizes, where he ought to relativize.

His analysis also contains other errors. He supposes that the distinction between the two orders arose in Christian history because of Christ's recorded statement concerning Caesar, but it is evident that history offered no other choice to the early church, as a cult identified in contrast and opposition to the officially established cult of the Roman empire, and at times as a persecuted church. Second he supposes that the Quran, traditions and early history of Islam did not offer comparable foundations for a theory of separation, so that the "distinction between church and state, so deeply rooted in Christendom, did not exist in Islam." As we will see when we consider Muhammad at Mecca and Medina, and the text of the Quran, this is not entirely true. The textual foundations for the distinction that are available in Islamic theological resources are more numerous than those in the New Testament, and only less explicit in the sense that 'Caesar' is not named. This is what one would expect, given that Christianity developed in a Roman empire that had a strong central state, whereas Islam developed in a barbarian periphery with nothing like a central political power to be named.² It is

¹ On the powers of the Fatimid state-appointed Qadis (judges), which sometimes included leading prayers and delivering the Friday sermon, see Amin Haji, 'Institutions of Justice in Fatimid Egypt.'

² It might be said that by concentrating only on the Pauline letters and the 'render unto
(continued...)

also true that early Islamic theology did not produce a theology of the state as clear as that of Augustine, but this is due not to the relative weakness of Islamic theological resources but to the fact that Islam did not suffer a setback comparable to the sacking of Rome until the Mongols sacked Baghdad in 1258, and it did not suffer a defeat that produced a new political theology comparable to that of Augustine, until Bonaparte's conquest of Egypt. The fact that the Jewish theology of the state was more advanced still may well have something to do with developments first in the Babylonian exile and then in the diaspora: communities living as minorities are more likely to feel a need for an explicit religious explanation of the state as such. Thus the supposition that the differences between Christian and Muslim political theologies can be traced back to differences in their scriptures and traditions can be rejected. As we will see, Shiah theology did produce a 'two orders' theology very similar to Jewish and Western Christian political theologies.

Lewis further supposes that the clarity of the distinction between church and state in 'Christianity' (he means, in western European Christianity) is due to the distinction between clergy and laity, which he says is absent in Islam. If by a 'clergy' one means a class of religious specialists recognised for their expertise in religious matters, then Islam does have clergy (the ulama). If he is referring to religious specialists with official functions in public worship, then again Islam has this, in the form of the imam or *pīsh-namáz* (both meaning prayer leader). If he is referring to the functions of intercession and absolution from sins, one must say that this can hardly be relevant, since Protestant Christian churches whose clergy do not have these functions have supported the strict separation of church and state, while Eastern Orthodox, Byzantine and, at times, Roman Catholic Christianity have combined strong sacerdotal roles for the clergy with weak church-state distinctions, in stable caeseropapist regimes. In these regimes, the individual is dependent on a state-appointed and funded religious specialist for intercession on the path of salvation. The Islamic ulama did not generally have an intercessory function, with the exception of the Usuli (*usúli*) form of Shi'ism,

²(...continued)

Caesar' pericope, I am underestimating the New Testament resources for a Christian theology of the state. Luke-Acts certainly provides an apology for the state to the Christian community (see Walaskay, *Rome*), but this fact only became evident with the advent of source criticism, followed by redaction criticism. It is mainly through the way the author selects and changes his sources, and shapes the narrative, that we can see he was aiming at a two-power theology very like that of Abdu'l-Baha in the *Sermon on the Art of Governance*. Lucan studies may well be the starting-point for a new Christian political theology for postmodern society, but so far as I know this has not yet been attempted.

where there was a belief that the ulama could intercede for the believers on the day of judgement. The lack of a ‘clergy’ in the intercessory sense may perhaps explain the relative *strength* of one aspect of the church-state distinction in Islamic societies: it explains why Islamic societies seldom generate the strongest form of caeseropapism (the late Ottoman empire being an exception in this respect).

In Shiah Islam

Shi‘ism in all its forms is defined by the centrality of the Imams. The Shiah believed that their community embodied true Islam, handed down from Ali, who was Muhammad’s designated successor and the first Imam. The community was guided in the true religion by a charismatic lineage of Imams descending from Ali and Muhammad’s daughter Fatima. By accepting the imams as legitimate successors to Muhammad, the Shiah implicitly or explicitly denied the religious legitimacy of the Caliphs, but we should be careful not to assume that this implies a rejection of the state *per se*.¹

In the first centuries (Umayyad and early Abbasid times) the Shiah lived as a sect dispersed throughout the largely Arabic Muslim world. As a minority sect, the Shiah developed their systematic theology and the jurisprudence of family law and of contracts, rather than a practicable political theory. Their religious law became very elaborate, but without provisions for systematic implementation it was even more remote from judicial practice than Sunni law.² Shiah jurists (*faqih*) served as judges in disputes within the community, the Shiah being discouraged from taking their disputes to the courts of the caliph.³ But these jurists were self-appointed, by virtue of claiming the necessary knowledge, and where more than one jurist was available in a locality, a litigant could choose among them. Since each jurist was king in his own court and could counter the decision taken by another, litigation could pass from one judge to another for years. Even if a judgement was made with some finality, the jurists had omitted to provide any

¹ There has been a tradition in Western Iranian studies and Shiah Studies to claim that Shi‘ism is unable to recognise the legitimacy of any worldly authority (see e.g., Sachedina, *Just Ruler*, 38). In the past two decades it has been realised that this is not so, primarily because Shiah texts in political philosophy and political theology have been explored. In this respect, Shiah studies is a step ahead of Sunni studies in the West.

² Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 52.

³ See for example the Islamic traditions cited by Hairi in *Shi‘ism and Constitutionalism* 59. However some of the Shiah ulama refused to engage in jurisprudence at all, as an expression of their disinterest in worldly affairs. See Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 207.

means of enforcing it.¹ The impracticality of this system highlights two features: first, it could only exist in a society in which the need for positive law was satisfied by the state through its courts and laws, and second, its elaboration did not answer any societal need for positive law. Its vast detail and discussion grew out of the study of the *shariah* as a devotional practice, much as the rabbis studied and refined the Jewish sacred law, the *halakha*, when the opportunity to actually apply it was very limited.² The study of the minutiae of the law becomes an intellectual but not necessarily an empty exercise, for in diving into the sea of the Law, its complexity so engages the rational mind that the soul may perhaps feel that it brushes the Word that underlies the words. Moreover, the ability to read and refer to the law becomes a marker of male adulthood, and real mastery of it confers status in the religious community.

The Shiah's minority status necessarily led to a clear *de facto* separation of the religious domain from politics.³ Under the **Umayyads**, Shi'ism could best be described as a political movement within the religion of Islam, defined by its aims regarding the leadership of the whole Islamic community.⁴ The Imam, the designated successor to Ali, was seen as an anti-caliph who should ideally displace the Umayyad usurper, but this rhetorical high ground was seized more effectively by the early **Abbasids**, who used the titles of Mahdi (*Mahdí*) and imam. The sixth Imam, Ja'far as-Sadiq (*Ja'far as-Sádiq* c. 700-765), reshaped Shi'ism as a quietist religious movement, with no immediate claim to political rule and much less tension with society. He is said to have approved Shiahs accepting state appointments, as a means of doing good, in contrast to an earlier refusal (attributed to Ali) to accept offices.⁵ According to Shiah sources, during the mobilisation for the Abbasid revolt (749-50), Abu Salama (*Abú-Salama Hafsa Ibn Sulaymán*), a Shiah who was later to become the Abbasid vizier, approached Ja'far as-Sadiq asking him to become the figurehead of the revolt and take the office of Caliph. Ja'far as-Sadiq not only refused, he prevailed on his uncle to also refuse the offer, when Abu Salama came to him.⁶ Whether this was based on a

¹ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 52.

² Weiler, *Jewish Theocracy*, especially parts 2 and 4. The novels of Isaac Bashevis Singer (Yizhaq Zinger) provide a vivid insight into the mysticism of sacralised study in contemporary Jewish communities.

³ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 34.

⁴ Sachedina, *The Just Ruler* 62.

⁵ Traditions collected by Mulla Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, in *‘Ayn al-hayat*, translated in Chittick, 'Two Seventeenth-century Persian tracts' 288.

⁶ It is remarkable that Sachedina, whose thesis is that Shiah Islam teaches that the Imam is the only legitimate worldly authority, reports that the Imam was offered leadership on
(continued...)

principled refusal of political power, an aversion to violent revolt, or simply doubts about the ability of the forces in Khurasan to prevail, is not clear, but the second appears to be the strongest explanation.¹ When none of the direct descendants of Ali could be persuaded to cooperate, Abu Salama turned to the house of Abbas, and the rest is history.

The eighth Imam, Ali ar-Rida (*‘Alī ar-Ridá*) was designated as heir to the throne by the Abbasid Caliph Ma’mun (*Ma’mún*) in 816, and accepted the appointment, apparently with some reluctance.² However he died soon after, and there seem to be no sources that would explain his thinking in accepting the designation, or what this may say about the evolution of Shiah political theology in the sixty years since the Abbasid revolution. The idea that the worldly authority might voluntarily decide to transfer power to the religious authority is one that emerges again in the Bahai secondary literature,³ and one wonders whether it might be based in part on an awareness of this moment in Shiah history, when the Imam nearly became the Caliph.

For Ja’far as-Sadiq, the government, whether Umayyad or Abbasid, was illegal, but the Shiah were not to rebel against it without the permission of the Imam, which he did not give – a precedent that throws an interesting light on the question of “The Babi concept of Holy War,” which has been intensely debated in the field of Babi history.⁴ Although there was no explicit recognition of the legitimacy of a separate worldly authority, the doctrine of the Imam was being *de facto* depoliticised. This was in parallel to the usage of the term ‘Imam’ in Sunni Islam, to refer to the founders of the schools of legal interpretation: it connotes a divine authority given for guidance, and an authority in relation to doctrine and ethics, but no claim to political rule.⁵ The Shiah were encouraged to serve rulers, rather than fight them, where this offered a means of improving the lot of their fellow-believers.⁶ The theologian Kulayni (*Muhammad al-Kulayní ibn Ya’qúb*, d. 939-940) made this suspension of what was after all a religious obligation more palatable by explaining that jihad has two forms: the Greater Warfare is a spiritual struggle against one’s own lower nature, and the Lesser Warfare is the worldly

⁶(...continued)

this occasion but forgets to mention that he declined it! (*Just Ruler* 39).

¹ Balyuzi, *Muhammad and the Course of Islam* 217.

² Momen, *Introduction to Shi’i Islam* 41.

³ Hatcher, *The Arc of Ascent*, 281-2; Universal House of Justice, letter to the author of 27 April 1995.

⁴ See MacEoin, D., “The Babi concept of Holy War” *Religion* 12 (1982) 93-129 and the subsequent debate.

⁵ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 34.

⁶ *Op. cit.* 59.

struggle, which could be suspended at least as far as warfare against Islamic pretenders went. His terms are reflected, with an ironic twist, in the Bahai terminology of the Lesser Peace, which is political and implies the cessation of warfare through a global system of collective security, and the Greater Peace, the peace of a spiritual civilization.

Arjomand characterises the political ethic of what he calls ‘the sectarian phase’ as toleration of the existing political order while inwardly undermining it. He likens it to Troeltsch’s description of Pauline quietism as “not founded on love and esteem for the existing institutions but upon a mixture of contempt, submission and relative recognition.”¹ Both descriptions could be applied to the political ethic we will see in the western Bahai secondary literature of the 20th century. Such a stance is almost inevitable where a movement with the pretension to become a ‘church’ in the Weberian sense finds itself a tolerated minority. As such it does not tell us anything ‘essential’ about Christian, Shiah or Bahai teachings. It represents a compromise between the need to retain and assert identity, and the fact that both individuals and the movement stand to make greater gains by minimising tensions with the wider society.

The Imam is said to be the spiritual leader of the Shiah community, but he also has a cosmic function since there must always be a divinely guided, sinless (i.e., ‘infallible’) person who is the gate to salvation and the teacher in religious matters for all the people of earth.² Although the imamate succession came to be seen, in retrospect, as a legitimate authority inherited from father to son, the succession was in fact disputed at several points.³ It was seen not as a right to be claimed by primogeniture, but an authority that derived from having divinely inspired knowledge – the capacity to attain to this knowledge being inherited within the families of the Imams.⁴

This doctrine of the historical imamate faced a crisis in 874 when the eleventh Imam died, apparently leaving no son. The crisis was eventually resolved by claiming that he had had an infant son, who had withdrawn into concealment and, as the **Hidden Imam**, continued to exercise the Imam’s cosmic function. As Arjomand acutely observes, this solution not only addressed the succession crisis, it was “at least in part, an attempt to explain the fact that political power was not in the hands of the Shi’ites. ... it was premised on the divorce of imamate from actual political rulership [and] by postulating the necessary absence of the Imam,

¹ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 59.

² Ja’far as-Sadiq, summarised in Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 35.

³ See the works by Montgomery Watt, cited in the bibliography.

⁴ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 36.

accentuated the divorce between imamate and political rule.”¹ The occultation of the Imam, at first expected to be temporary, was later defined as lasting until his return to rule at the end of time, thus assimilating the Hidden Imam to the Mahdi. This belief also meant an indefinite suspension of the justification for rebellion, and made political quietism a theoretical as well as a practical norm in Shiah history – although it has been the quiet of a people enduring, waiting to be awoken.² Shi’ism’s political theology thus became part of its eschatology, “a utopian substitute for political theory.”³ A political expectation, that the wrong order of Islam and of the world would be corrected in history, has been displaced by an apocalyptic drama that is the end of history: the Mahdi (or *Qa’im*, or *Imám-e Zamán*) would appear in a time of tyranny, along with Imam Husayn and Jesus. The anti-christ Dajjál would also appear, and the whole Shiah community would arise to fight under the Mahdi’s banner. What follows is not a just society on earth, but the resurrection and judgement. This apocalyptic drama, elaborated in the 10th century in the works of at-Tusi (*at-Túsi*), was reiterated in later Shiah works, and in popular Shiah piety.⁴ At-Tusi also initiated the generally accepted prohibition on predicting the date for the reappearance of the Mahdi. The force of Shiah apocalyptic is reflected in a paradox of Babi history: the Bab (*Báb*, 1819-1850) acted as if he was laying the legal and devotional foundations of a religious community and a society that would continue in this world, but many of his followers acted as if there was no future after the last battle.

As compared to the orthodox Sunni schools of the time, Shi’ism placed more emphasis on the “separation and reciprocal independence of the theological and the political spheres.”⁵ Political rule was not only separate, it was devalued. The insertion of the name of the Caliph into the form of Friday prayers (which both Sunni and Shiah faithful would attend) was condemned by the Shiah as an abuse of religion for political ends.⁶

The definition of the doctrine of the Hidden Imam was at first accompanied by the claim that he was represented by a real person who served as his deputy.

¹ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 36.

² Keddie, ‘Is Shi’ism Revolutionary?’ and Sachedina, *The Just Ruler* 36, 55.

³ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 38.

⁴ *Op. cit.* 160, 161.

⁵ *Op. cit.* 39, citing a study by Scarcia, ‘A proposito del problema della sovranita presso gli Imamiti,’ in *Annali dell’ Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli*, 7 (1957) 118-19.

⁶ *Op. cit.* 38, citing the authoritative Shiah theologian Ibn al-Mutahhar al-Hillí. Baha’u’llah and Abdu’l-Baha make prayer for the ruler or government a religious obligation, but without including it in the recital of the daily obligatory prayer (*Tablets of Baha’u’llah* 220; *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 90; *Tablets of Abdu’l-Baha Abbas* 46, 375, 402, 493-4).

This function was claimed by several generations of a wealthy and influential Baghdad family, the Nawbakhtís. The shift from a largely plebeian outlook to an aristocratic ethos continued even after the line of deputies was ended in 940. The leaders of the Shiah community commanded considerable revenues and had a respected position among the political elite of Baghdad, and acted to suppress the elements of popular religious ‘extremism,’ including the mystic Mansúr al-Halláj, who was tried for heresy and executed.

The Shiah were not always suppressed, and Sunni Islam was itself riven by factionalism, for instance under the Saljuqs. This meant that the Shiah were at some times free to proselytise and to engage in the inter-factional debate on a footing similar to those of the Sunni schools.¹ For approximately three centuries, from the consolidation of the doctrine of the Hidden Imam until the Mongol invasion in 1220, Shi‘ism developed as an urban, intellectualist and (within its own norms) orthodox religion, with many of its elite serving as prominent government officials under the Saljuqs, and many of its middle classes in the military.² They joined with the Sunni orthodoxies in opposing Sufism, which was seen as antinomian and contrary to a rationally construed monotheism. The earlier negative evaluation of the political project, and subdued antipathy to it, gave way to a positive evaluation as the Shiah elite took leading roles in politics. Arjomand has pointed out that the Caliph for the Sunnis was heir to the Prophet, whereas for the Shiah he was, at best, the Just Ruler, without religious authority. It was therefore easier for the Shiah than for Sunnis to accept the authority of de facto kings and sultans who, by the 11th century, exercised the real political authority in place of the Caliph.³

At the same time, there was an effort to provide a Shiah normative framework for social, economic and political actions and interactions with the non-Shiah population, using a growing body of dubious traditions and also, in the work of ‘Allama al-Hilli (‘*Alláma al-Hillí*, d. 1325), by borrowing from the Sunni law on transactions. This meant that the commercial law prevailing in society was substantially accepted as an expression of Shiah commercial ethics. Al-Murtada (*Al-Murtadá*) (d. 1044), a leading theologian who accepted an appointment as judge in the Buyid court, ruled that it was permissible “and may even be obligatory” to hold office under an illegitimate, unjust ruler, if one considers it likely that “he will through the tenure of the office be enabled to support a right

¹ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 60.

² *Op. cit.* 56-58, and 286-7 note 124.

³ Arjomand, ‘Introduction: Shi‘ism, Authority and Political Culture’ 3-4.

and to reject a false claim ...”¹ His treatise on the imamate shows the difficulties that he faced in reconciling this with his simultaneous claim that the office of imamate “is a universal leadership by a single individual in religious and secular matters,” a leadership that God, being merciful, is obliged to provide for humanity. The ideal imam he described did not exist, but he claims that the “possibility of his advent at any time” is sufficient mercy for the believers.² Although political participation could be provided with a religious justification, the doctrine of the imamate, both historical and hidden, meant that Shi‘ism could not so easily be used to legitimate a particular ruler or dynasty – but that too was achieved, as we will see, by the Safavids.

It was also during this period that Sharif ar-Radí edited his famous compilation of the wisdom of Imam Ali, the **Nahj al-Balagha** (*Nahj al-Balágha*), which includes a letter purporting to have been written by Imam Ali to Malik al-Ashtar (*Málik al-Ashtar*), the governor of Egypt.³ If this letter is genuine, it is a puzzle where it was, and why it was not quoted, in the three and a half centuries between its supposed composition (c. 660) and the appearance of the *Nahj al-Balagha* in 1009 A.D, so I will take it here as reflecting political thinking among the Shiah of the 10th century.⁴ The letter tells the governor to rule with justice, using a standing army funded by taxation, and through an apparatus of ministers, judges and a secretariat. The justice of the governor involves ensuring that the various social classes have their proper rights according to their station,⁵ and preserving good customs. It is clearly addressed to a class-based society, and one in which commerce and industry constitutes an important pillar. In some respects the letter resembles the ‘mirror for princes’ genre. Arjomand likens it to the pre-Islamic conception of politics in Persia,⁶ although class-based political frameworks could also be found in Byzantine, Syrian Indian and Egyptian pre-Islamic politics: there is no reason to link it particularly to the Sasanian Persian tradition. However its ‘option for the poor’ and warning of the dangers of wealth and luxury⁷ differentiate it from the political ethics of the court or an urban elite, as found in the mirrors for princes genre.

¹ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 63.

² Translated by John Cooper in Hilli, “‘Alláma al-Hillí’ 240-242.

³ Ali Ibn Abu Talib, *Nahjul Balagha* 534-549.

⁴ For a brief discussion and references regarding its textual history, see Danishpazhouh, ‘Annotated Bibliography’ 215-6.

⁵ Ali Ibn Abu Talib, *Nahjul Balagha* 536.

⁶ Arjomand, *Shadow of God*, page 61 and chapter 3.

⁷ Ali Ibn Abu Talib, *Nahjul Balagha* 542.

Another passage in the *Nahj al-Balagha* argues against a position labelled as Kharijite. According to this tradition, when Ali heard the cry of the Kharijites “The verdict is for God alone,” he said “The sentence is right but what (they think) it means, is wrong. It is true that the verdict lies only with Allah, but these people say that governance is only for Allah. The fact is that there is no escape for men from the ruler, good or bad.”¹ This tradition is interesting today, because the cry “Sovereignty is God’s alone” has been revived as the rallying-cry of Islamic integrism.

For 75 years following the **Mongol invasion**, the eastern Islamic lands were ruled by non-Muslims, completely severing the link between political power and orthodox religion, Sunni or Shiah. The Shiah still enjoyed freedom and even some influence at court, but so did various forms of popular religiosity that had previously been suppressed. These forms of popular religion prospered more than either the Sunni schools or the formalised form of Shi‘ism, with its articulated and detailed doctrines and laws, that had developed before the invasion. The Shiah elite continued to be politically prominent in the service of the Mongol and Il-Khanid dynasties,² while popular religious life was dominated by locally organized Sufi orders, which were also patronized by the new rulers. These Sufi orders were not at first Shiah, but did emphasise devotion to Ali and his descendants. Some orders gradually adopted Shiah notions including the doctrine of the twelve Imams. At the same time, the Shiah jurists continued to elaborate the Shiah legal corpus, which assumed something resembling its ‘final’ form in the work of Muhaqqiq al-Hillí (d. 1277) and ‘Alláma al-Hillí (d. 1325). It differed in many ways from the various Sunni schools, most importantly in allowing a continuity of *ijtihád* (*ijtihád*), the ‘discovery’ of new rules of law by the jurist, by applying grammatical and logical analysis to the traditions transmitted from the Imams.

In Shiah Iran

The pre-Safavid period

The pre-history of Persian Shi‘ism can be said to begin in the **14th century**, with the rapid spread of popular Sufism in Iran following the Mongol invasion. In this popular religion, suffused with Sufi and Shiah ideas, the doctrine of the Hidden Imam, who would return to bring justice and free the oppressed, was gunpowder waiting to be ignited by charismatic leaders who would claim to be the Mahdi, or his agent and precursor. Northwest Iran and Anatolia were at that time occupied by

¹ Ali Ibn Abu Talib, *Nahjul Balagha* 175. English grammatical errors in the translation have been silently corrected.

² Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 29.

Turkoman tribes, some settled there under the Saljuqs and others displaced by the Mongols. The islamisation of these tribes was superficial, and there was an affinity between their earlier shamanistic religiosity and the more popular forms of Sufism, which involved the veneration of Shaykhs and a strong element of the miraculous. Although Ali was venerated among the Turkomans as a divine being, they were not – yet – Shiah.¹ Some of the more successful Sufi shaykhs became wealthy and influential, to the point that they were in a position to grant legitimacy to local rulers, for there was no centralized state in northern Iran at the time.

The **Mar'ashi** (*Mar'ashí*) order actually established a short-lived state, in which the Shaykh was head and spiritual guide, while his sons took care of political and military matters. Although this order was formally Shiah (but primarily Sufi), it did not call on the image of the imminent Mahdi to mobilise support. Others however did do so. The city of Sabzavar in Khurasan had a Shiah Mahdist state in the 14th century, known as the **Sarbidar** (*Sarbidár*) state (1338-81), which was destroyed by Tamerlane. The Sarbidar state was post-millennial, that is, it was based on the *expectation* of the coming of the Mahdi, rather than his actual arrival, and it sought to establish an ideal moral kingdom that would please the Lord of the Age when he came. As such, it leaned towards formal Shi'ism, with its systematic theology and law, and might well have adopted Shi'ism as its state religion had Tamerlane not intervened. The last of the Sarbidar rulers commissioned the Shiah theologian and jurist, Shahid al-Awwal (1333-1384), to write a legal treatise with a view of implementing Shiah law.² This was an important step towards making this law practicable and predictable, by stipulating rules of evidence. Shahid al-Awwal also laid the grounds for the later acceptance of jurists as deputies for the hidden Imam, at least in so far as allowing them to lead congregational prayer.³

Northwestern Iran in the 14th century also saw purely **messianic movements** with political pretensions. One of these, the Hurufi (*Hurúfi*) sect, involved a mysticism in which letters and words, in their forms, their numerical values and their grammar, constituted a microcosmic reflection of the cosmos. This is interesting for Babi and Bahai studies⁴ because Babi religious practice prescribed numerous rituals of writing such as making talismans, transcribing scripture, and

¹ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 67.

² Momen, *Shi'ī Islam* 319-20.

³ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 69-71.

⁴ The Hurufi movement had a successor in the late 16th century, in the Nuqtaví movement, an urban millenarian movement that was suppressed by Shah 'Abbas in 1593. If there is any historical link with the Babi movement, it might be via the Nuqtavi.

writing a testimony of faith (a written *shaháda*, in place of the spoken testimony that is one of the essential duties of Islam). The written shahada is incorporated in Babi and Bahai religious practice, but in the latter it has usually been understood only in legal terms, as the requirement to make a Will. A study of the mysticism of writing, in Hurufi, Babi and similar movements, would help to move this teaching from the category of transactions to that of ritual acts (*‘ibadát*).¹ For our present purposes the political development of the Hurufi movement is more interesting. Its founder, Fadl Alláh, claimed to be the “Lord of the Age.” His movement was actively missionary, and gained adherents in the cities of Azerbaijan, Syria and Anatolia and as far as Herat. He attempted to convert Timur (*Tímúr*), but was killed by Timur’s son. The movement was condemned as a heresy by the Sunni ulama, suffered persecution, and became clandestine. Some hundreds, including Qurrat al-^cAyn, the daughter of the founder, were massacred. With their leader executed, the surviving Hurufis developed a belief that he would return as the Hidden Imam, the “Lord of the Sword.” Some became politically active, and were implicated in an attempt to assassinate the Timurid king, Sháhrukh.²

Another such movement which suggests interesting parallels to later history is that of **Muhammad Núrbakhsh**, the shaykh of the Kubraví Sufi order, who claimed to be the Mahdi, but taught the renunciation of the world and devoted himself to giving spiritual guidance in the greater jihad – that is, to aiding his followers to overcome their lower selves. Some of his followers, however, expected more of the Mahdi, and struck coins and delivered the Friday sermon in his name – in effect claiming that he was the legitimate ruler. The actual ruler, the same Sháhrukh who was just mentioned, brought him to Herat and ordered him to deny any claim to the Caliphate, from the pulpit of the mosque at Herat. He

¹ This is discussed further by the author in ‘Some considerations relating to the inheritance laws of the Aqdas.’ The question affects not only Bahai inheritance law, but also the question of succession to Shoghi Effendi. If the writing of a testament of faith is a personal devotional duty, there is no requirement that anyone should open or read the testament until, having been handed down through the generations, it is presented to the next Manifestation of God, who alone is empowered to accept or reject the testimony of Faith. Abdu’l-Baha’s requirement that the Guardian should, in his own lifetime, appoint his successor and obtain the approval of a body of Hands of the Cause for his choice is a legal duty and a necessarily public procedure, since it is designed to remove any question about the rightful succession. Thus the questions of whether Shoghi Effendi wrote a Will, and why he did not appoint a successor, questions that are often discussed in one breath in the Bahai literature, are two entirely separate issues.

² Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 72-74; 253-4.

later claimed that this denial did not diminish his spiritual authority, as deputy to the Lord of the Age.¹ While the movement was messianic, and messianic movements tend to collapse the distinction between the worldly and religious powers, it also shows that the ‘messiah’ in question may have a more nuanced view. His problem is to prevent his followers committing excesses, based on their more popular understandings of the messianic mission, which would lead to conflict with the state.

The movement that was to give rise to the Safavid dynasty in Iran and to the spread of formal, doctrinal Shi‘ism in Iran again rose from a Sufi order in Northwest Iran. The **Safavid order** had achieved an importance in the town of Ardabíl that could be compared to that of the monastery at Cluny. In 1447 the leader of the order, who was allied with the Qaraqúyúnú dynasty ruling a principedom based in Tabriz, sent his nephew, Junayd, into exile in Anatolia, where he established something resembling the Knights Templar: a military-religious order with a messianic character, which engaged in raiding the neighbouring Christian territories for wealth and slaves. Junayd was the first of the Safavid shaykhs to claim the title of ruler.² He allied himself by marriage with the nomadic Aqqúyúnú tribe of Turkomans, who were to provide the shock troops of the *ghuzát-e súfiyya*, the crusading Sufis, who were later renamed the Qizilbash (*Qizilbásh*).³ His son Haydar conquered Ardabíl and achieved control of the Safavid order and its resources.

The Safavid Era

Haydar’s son, Isma‘il (*Ismá‘il*), assumed the leadership aged only six or seven, and was raised under the protection of a Shiah shaykh in the Persian province of Gilan. In 1499, at the age of twelve, he returned at the head of an army of followers to conquer Ardabíl and Tabriz, and all of Azerbaijan. Isma‘il proclaimed that he was the Mahdi whom his Turkoman followers were expecting, the Mahdi who is one with Ali and thus himself a Manifestation of the Godhead, who was to be worshipped by his followers.⁴ He also claimed to be the reincarnation of Iranian cultural heroes such as Jamshid, Khusraw and Alexander the Great (the last being a very questionable hero in Iranian eyes). His troops are said to have gone into battle without armour, with the battle cry “There is no god but God, and Isma‘il [not Ali] is the *walí u’llah*, the Friend of God,” and also to

¹ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 74-76.

² Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs* 140.

³ Morgan, *Medieval Persia* 109.

⁴ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 77-81.

have eaten their enemies after the battle.¹ In 1501 he was crowned as Isma'íl I, and proclaimed that the Shiah religion, that is, the formal religion of the twelve Imams, with its doctrine and legal system, was to be the state religion of his kingdom. Yet there must have been few Shiah among his followers, for it is said that there was some difficulty in finding a book of Shiah law in Tabriz, and it is certain that he had to import Shiah ulama from Syria and elsewhere to serve as judges and teachers. In the following ten years he and his Sufi warriors conquered all of Iran, including Baghdad in Iraq and Herat in what is now Afghanistan. He also sent Shiah missionaries into Anatolia and Syria, in a bid to extend his borders into Sunni Ottoman territory. This was a real ideological and also military threat to the Ottomans, since their elite corps, the Janissaries, also derived from a Sufi order, and there was a considerable Shiah minority in Syria. The Ottomans responded by deporting tens of thousands of Shiah from the border territories, and reportedly massacring 40,000 of them.² On both sides, religion had become an ideology of inter-state competition.

At the same time, Isma'íl was pursuing an internal religious policy. At first little was demanded of the Iranian population, beyond the cursing of the first three caliphs. The call to prayer had a slightly different form, and Ali was mentioned in the Friday sermon. Isma'íl was provided with a genealogy to prove his descent from Ali. The main thrust of the religious policy was directed at eliminating the possibility that someone else might, like Isma'íl, use messianism and Sufism as vehicles to power. Sunni Sufi orders were extirpated, and the Shiah Sufi orders were marginalised, except for the Ni'matu'lláhí order, which was allied with the state.³ He, and especially his son Tahmásp (r. 1524-76), disciplined their Sufi warriors, the Qizilbash, and distanced themselves from claims to divinity. Millenarian extremism had become a liability and, like Falstaff, was to be put away for reasons of state. Tahmásp's son, Isma'íl II (r. 1576-77) and 'Abbás the Great (r. 1587-1629) actually massacred a large number of Turkoman Sufis. Under 'Abbás, the Qizilbash were replaced with Georgian slave soldiers, which freed the state from dependence on religiously motivated soldiery.

The political order of the early Safavids could be described as caeseropapist, with the reservation that the reach of the official religion among the population was fairly limited. We have seen that Islamic societies normally have a relatively

¹ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 192. This was transformed in Safavid times into the ritual eating of people who had been executed, in order to complete their disgrace (*op. cit.* 111). Babayan, in *Mystics Monarchs and Messiahs* page L n27, says that practice continued into the reign of 'Abbas I (1587-1629).

² Momen, *Shi'í Islam* 106.

³ *Op. cit.* 109.

autonomous religious space, centring on the sacred texts, which is able to assert itself against the ruler in matters of doctrine and public morality. But this was hardly the case in early Safavid Iran, because the spokesmen for orthodox Shi'ism were few and scattered, and were largely non-Iranians brought to Iran by the Safavids, who paid their salaries. Moreover the ulama were hardly likely to criticise the Safavid rulers while those rulers were engaged in establishing Shi'ism in the land, and were in an ideological struggle with the Sunni Ottomans.¹ Nevertheless, Safavid patronage of the Shiah religion led to the establishment of Shiah institutions and traditions of learning, and so inevitably to the re-creation of an autonomous religious sphere.

The Mar'ashi, Sarbidar, Hurufi, Nurbakhsh and Safavid movements reveal the power of the messianic hope to mobilize support to overthrow the established order. While they are not themselves Shiah, the mixture of undisciplined popular Sufism and extreme adoration of Ali was a prolific generator of messianic expectations. The codified forms of Shi'ism – which were almost unrepresented in Iran at that time – contained the same hope in the form of the indefinitely suspended return of the Hidden Imam. The meeting of the two created Shiah Iran. The parallels between these movements and the Babi movement are relevant in three senses: because there may be certain patterns and motifs in Iranian religiosity which are repeated, because we must suppose that the parallels to these movements, and to the Abbasid rebellion, were evident to some of the Babis and also to the statesmen who had to decide whether the Babis were a threat, and because they show that the management of the relationship between religion and state in a dynamic religious environment calls for exceptional insight and skill, on the part of the religious and political leaders. Millenarianism is not an inevitably destructive force, as we can see in Sarbidar and the Nurbakhsh movements, but it can ignite in three ways: if the messianic leaders themselves seek political power through violence (as in the 15th century Musha'sha' movement in Khuzistan, which was Shiah),² if state repression prompted by a religious orthodoxy drives the movement to political extremism, and where the religious leader loses control of his followers, who may act out pre-conceived roles in the apocalyptic drama without much regard for more constructive readings coming from the leader – the fate that almost befell the Nurbakhsh. The second and third of these are relevant to the Babi and Bahai cases. I think it is helpful, in considering what Baha'u'llah is doing in the period before about 1866, to suppose that he is well aware of the latter two dangers and, like a bomb

¹ Momen, *Shi'i Islam* 108.

² Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 76-77.

disposal expert, is taking hold of the messianic charge with care, in order to disarm it.

The Safavid state presents us with an alternative way of disarming the millenarian danger, where the state establishes a routinized religion and suppresses dangerous religious movements by force. Following the establishment of Shi'ism as the state religion of the Safavids, Shiah ulama were imported from Arab countries to propagate the religion, while the business of administering the state was carried out by the class of educated Persians who had fulfilled the same role before the Safavid time. The Persian clerisy were in many cases drawn from families with large landholdings, a claim to *sayyid* lineage, and hereditary responsibilities for administering endowments and local shrines. They held positions as judges, served as patrons distributing endowment money to students and teachers, and collected the religious taxes. Their educational tradition included literature, history, philosophy and refined arts. They were in short the 'old money' in the equation, while the imported Shiah ulama were newcomers and depended on the Shah for income, chiefly through their appointments as leading religious experts (*Shaykh al-Islam*) and leaders of Friday prayer (*Imam-e Jum'ah*) in important cities. The competition between the two classes meant that it was a long time before the complex of religious institutions – endowments, schools, mosques and courtrooms – were consolidated into something resembling a 'state church.'¹

The position of the ulama, now serving as professional state-appointed religious officials rather than as the advisors of a minority sect, led to important changes in Shiah doctrine. These changes drew on the earlier world-embracing shift initiated by al-Murtada, who had authorised the acceptance of political offices. The first officially designated leading Shiah theologian, or 'Mujtahid (*mujtahid*) of the Age,' under the Safavids, **al-Karaki** (*al-Karaki*), went further by ruling that Friday prayer was incumbent even in the absence of the Imam. These changes were opposed by some of the Shiah ulama, who continued to regard links to the ruler as evidence of greed or ambition, rejected Friday prayers, and attempted to organise a clerical party opposed to 'the Mujtahid of the Age.' Some of this may be attributed simply to internal competition for the highest offices, and some to the continuance of the sectarian attitude of principled rejection of links with worldly powers.² Something of a compromise can be observed in the strengthening of trends noted earlier in relation to at-Tusi: eschatological salvation justifies a devaluation of the political, and the indefinite

¹ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 122-132.

² *Op. cit.* The state's initial difficulties in establishing the authority of its religious authority are discussed in Arjomand, 'The mujtahid of the Age and the Mulla-bashi' 81.

suspension of the eschaton means an indefinite period in which patience and resignation, rather than heroism, are the virtues of the faithful.¹ Al-Karaki also provided arguments justifying the collection of land taxes (*kharáj*) by the ruler, at rates determined by customary law.² Al-Karaki's arguments have been seen as the first steps towards a political theology in Safavid Shi'ism. The Shahs in their turn paid lip service to the inferiority of the political sphere. The obedience of the believers to government was legitimated, but on a basis that led to political passivity rather than to participation.

It is important to note that this solution to the problem of the relationship between 'church' and state could only work in an absolutist state, and preferably one in which the religious institutions are too weak to turn disdain for politics into delusions that they could do better. A democratic state depends on popular participation, and withholding participation from it amounts to sedition by non-violent action. This is why the solution required for a modern state cannot be based on religious devaluation of the political, but requires a positive theology of the state and endorsement of political participation.

Despite the beneficial exchange of patronage for legitimation, the Shiah ulama did not immediately assume great importance in the administration. Their informal 'courts' had limited functions in the field of family law and as notaries, and had no means of enforcing their verdicts. In marked contrast to the situation in the Ottoman empire, there was no judicial hierarchy or coordination between the judges of religious courts. They were of lower status than the secular courts, which functioned under customary law and royal regulations and were presided over ultimately by the Shah as father of the nation. The secular courts dealt with criminal law, particularly where the offences were relevant to public security or public revenues. The shariah courts dealt primarily with family and commercial law.³

The continuing self-limitation of shariah courts to family law was in part because of a primarily ethical concern in Islamic law. In the *Jami' Abási*, an official 17th century code of Shariah law, the judge is also expected to mediate between the parties and to remind them of Islamic virtues⁴ – a feature that has continued in Iranian courts of family law to this day. Another reason for the limitation is that the shariah prescribes punishments such as death and amputation for some criminal offences. Ulama who felt that these punishments were excessively harsh could avoid the quandary by leaving criminal cases to a court

¹ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 173.

² *Op. cit.* 193.

³ *Op. cit.* 195-6. Algar, *Religion and State* 12-13.

⁴ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 209.

of customary law. Such pastoral and personal concerns do not favour the development of formal clarity and rules of evidence, producing a legal system which is unsuited for the fields of public and criminal law.¹ The general pattern of shariah courts dealing primarily with family law and personal status, and secular courts dealing with criminal justice and public administration, is not a division imposed on Middle Eastern countries by colonial rulers: it has been the normal pattern of most Islamic societies, most of the time. The duality of the judicial system continued in Iran until 1911.

One important figure to note in the early Safavid period is Muhsin Fayd **Kashani** (*Mullá Muhsin Fayd Káshání*, 1600-1679), a court theologian under Shah ʿAbbas II. His ‘Royal Mirror’ (*Á’ína-ye Sháhi*), written in 1650, reveals a mature distance from the extremist claims of the early Safavids, and a recognition that society needs both religious law and civil rule (*saltanat*). These are distinct, but the latter needs the former and must be in accordance with it.²

It is not until the **mid-Safavid** period, more than a century after the Safavid’s first victory, that we can say that the Shiah ulama had taken control of most of the complex of religious institutions, had established an institutionalised hierarchy of offices of religious professionals (which Weber calls a ‘hierocracy’), and had control of the highest state-appointed religious office, that of Mulla-Bashi (*Mullá-Báshí*).³ The state recognition of Shiʿism in the Safavid period gave the Shiah community the freedom, for the first time, to develop a class of professional ulama and the theological education to train them and to complete the structure of its distinctive jurisprudence.

Over the same period, the ulama were displacing the *Sayyids* and *Shaykhs* as leaders of popular religiosity, in part by adopting for themselves, and for the formal knowledge they represented, the charisma that had adhered to the lineage of the Persian Sayyids and the mystic expertise of the shaykhs. Chardin, who visited Isfahan in the 1660s, reports that there were at that time mujtahids who claimed that the temporal rulers were usurpers and the leading mujtahids should rule.⁴ The great ulama were said to be in contact with the Hidden Imam by way of dreams, and to be able to intercede for the dead and perform lesser miracles

¹ Weber, *Economy and Society* 809-831 contains an important discussion of theocratic and secular law in relation to the rationalisation of law, including a section on Shiah law in Iran. This will be considered in a later volume on Bahai family law (God willing), since the question of what kind(s) of law Bahai laws are should be dealt with before interpreting particular laws.

² Translated by William Chittick in ‘Two Seventeenth-century Persian Tracts’ 274.

³ Arjomand, ‘The Mujtahid of the Age and the Mulla-bashi’ 81.

⁴ Cited in Keddie, *Iran: Religion, Politics and Society* 55; Algar, *Religion and State* 28.

(*karámát*). The functions of the ulama included practices taken from popular religion, such as writing prayers for particular purposes, choosing suitable hours and days for particular actions, and divining by means of bibliomancy. Majlisi the Elder (d. 1660) wrote some of these in a layman's prayerbook, thus obviating the need for the faithful to consult a *shaykh* or dervish to meet daily needs.¹ The ulama with sufficient expertise in a particular field were competent to provide interpretations of the scripture and law in that field (*ijtihád*), and the believer was permitted (but not at this stage required) to proceed by imitation (*taqlíd*), that is to follow their rulings in any matter too complex for the layman.

This form of Shi'ism later came to be known as **Usuli** Shi'ism, in contrast to Akhbari or traditionalist Shi'ism. According to the Usuli account, it was their opponents, the Akhbaris, who first emerged during the 17th century, but the truth of the matter seems to be that the Usuli's elevation of the role of the mujtahid in late Safavid Shi'ism is the innovation.² There would appear to be broad continuity between the Akhbaris and the Persian clerisy referred to earlier.³

In its later form, Usulis taught that the Shiah community consisted of two sorts of person, laymen and mujtahids, and that it was the duty of the former to imitate (i.e., accept the legal reasoning of) the latter, since they did not have the necessary learning themselves. This argument is vigorously opposed by Baha'u'llah, for instance in his *Kitab-e Iqan*. The duty of imitation went beyond following the mujtahid in matters such as criminal and family law. A ritual act such as prayer or ablutions that was not performed with the right intentions and in imitation of a properly selected mujtahid was believed to be invalid. Every layman had the duty to select from among the mujtahids one who would be his exemplary guide.

Both the clerical role of the ulama in matters of sin, salvation and protection, and the doctrines of *ijtiḥád* and imitation, had been rejected by the early Shiah doctors. Both doctrines contributed to the institutionalisation of an hierocracy in Shiah Iran. They are clearly inter-related, and related to institutional development: as the definition and authority of the mujtahids became clearer, imitation evolved from a practical dispensation for the layman to a religious duty. Al-Karaki further ruled that only the opinion of a living mujtahid had validity, thus foreclosing the possibility that the works of previous generations of Shiah

¹ Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs* 457-8.

² MacEoin, *Charismatic Authority* 158; Arjomand 'Imam and Community' 38.

³ Riesebrodt, *Pious Passion* 103.

doctors might provide a basis for lay resistance to the authority of the present hierocracy.¹

Al-Karaki articulated the claim that the Shiah ulama collectively functioned as deputies for the Hidden Imam. Some claimed that the authority of the *mujtahid* must be general (*ijtihád-e mutlaq*), which would focus it on the person of the mujtahid, while others said that competence and authority could be confined to a particular field. The prevalence of the former view meant that the hierarchy was a pyramid with only one or a few leading mujtahids at its head. Some even gave tacit encouragement to the idea that the mujtahid, like the Imams, was infallible or sinless (*‘ismat*). Some Usulis advanced a strong claim for the mujtahid vis-à-vis the state, saying that “the supreme throne of the universe belongs only to a mujtahid ... however, as the mujtahid is peaceable, he should have a king at his service to exercise his sword in the cause of justice as his minister.” On the other hand, the renowned Mullá Muhammad Báqir Sabzavári (who it must be said, had a royal appointment as *Shaykh al-Islam* of Isfahan), said that the absence of the Imam made a king necessary to provide for order, thus implicitly accepting that the king’s duty to provide security was on his own account, and not as a deputy of the mujtahid of the age.²

The ultimately unsuccessful resistance to these innovations in the 17th century came from the **Akhbari** (*Akhbári*) or traditionalist movement, who rejected the possibility of applying rational interpretation in religion, and advocated exclusive reliance on the traditions (*Akhbár*) recorded from the Imams, including many ‘traditions’ that were previously considered unreliable or were simply unrecorded. The resistance to Usuli innovations was associated particular with Astarabadi (*Shaykh Muhammad Sharíf Astarabádi*, d. 1624). Its proponents included the Persian clerisy referred to earlier, as well as proponents of a gnostic Shi‘ism. By emphasising a devotionism focussing on the Imams, it also enhanced the position of the sayyids within the ulama.

‘**Abbas II** (r. 1642-66) was hostile to the Shiah hierocracy, which had become a rival centre of power, and allowed Akhbarism, gnostic philosophy and an eclectic intellectual form of Sufism to flourish, as well as expanding the religious toleration accorded to Christians. His successor **Suleymán** (r. 1666-94), however, restored the Usuli doctors to favour. More important however, was that the Usulis found a great leader, in **Majlisi the Younger** (*Muhammad Báqir Majlisi*, 1628-1699), who through his works in Persian on the lives of the Prophet, Fatima and the Imams, was able to appropriate popular devotionism to serve the

¹ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 140.

² *Op. cit.*; respectively pages 242, contemporary accounts by European travellers at 185, and 185-6.

hierocracy.¹ Majlisi provided simple catechistic statements of Shiah doctrines for the masses, and vivid pictures of heaven, hell, and the eschatological drama. The faithful were obliged to pray for the success of their king, if he was just, or for the improvement of his character if he was oppressive, because their own interests were bound up with his.² The kings in turn should rule with justice, but were not accorded any religious authority by Majlisi. The wisest course for the faithful is to keep their distance from the corruption of the court, yet the leaders of the Shiah community may be obliged to associate with kings and rulers, since those who have the power to right a wrong are obliged to do so.³

The gnostic philosophical strand of Safavid Shi'ism continued through this period, but was excluded from the hierocracy, and was too elitist to appeal to the masses. In gnostic Shi'ism the doctrine of the imamate was spiritualised: the Hidden Imam served as a spiritual guide to the mystic, and the question of his eventual temporal power was regarded as non-essential.⁴ This variety of Shi'ism evidently had no political weight, except that its existence undermined the claims of the hierocracy to speak for true religion, and its anti-legalist ethos worked against any religious policy enforcing moral rigorism.

The state's own doctrine of the state also evolved during the Safavid period, as the monarchy first freed itself from the Qizilbash and renounced extremist claims to divinity and the ritual of prostration to the king, and later, and progressively, accepted the logic of the doctrine of the Hidden Imam who is sovereign in religion. The implication of this doctrine was that claims to authority in religious matters, even to the extent of the Sunni title of caliph, and claims to religious charisma, based on the Safavids' supposed descent from Ali, had logically to be considered as *lesse majesteit*, attempting to sit in the seat of the Hidden Imam. The legitimation of the Safavids came to be based more on the charisma of monarchy itself, with an appeal to the ideal of the just king and the need for a king to provide the law and external security that subjects needed. The king was also *din-panah*, the protector of the faith,⁵ and could be presented, if not as the Imam himself, then as the worldly precursor whose just rule would prepare

¹ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 152-159, 168; Momen, *Shi'i Islam* 118, 316-7. Because Majlisi appropriated from the Akhbaris their devotionism and traditions attributed to the Imams, and the lack of a developed doctrine of imitation and interpretation by the mujtahid, he has been seen in retrospect as a moderate Akhbari (Momen, *op. cit.*, 118). Nevertheless, his willingness to use deductive reasoning, combined with his popularity and political influence, made him the key figure in the rise of the Usuli school.

² Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 176.

³ Chittick, 'Two Seventeenth-century Persian tracts' 294-299.

⁴ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 173.

⁵ *Op. cit.* 181.

the way for the Imam. This was expressed in the formulaic wish, “may there be no interval between the end of his rule and the appearance of the Imam.” The Safavid claim to descend from Ali was not forgotten, but it legitimated secular rule rather than religious authority. The Akhbari multiplication of biographical information about the wisdom of the Imams, and the veneration of the Hidden Imam as a spiritual guide, both provided incidental support to Safavid legitimacy in this limited form.

At the same time, the hierocracy’s position as exponents of an other-worldly salvation that depended on observing the ethics of Islam and its laws, and even as intermediaries in salvation, enabled them to voice opposition to unethical state action and immorality in high places. The example of Mulla Qásim, a Savanarola figure who denounced the wine-loving °Abbas II and his court for immorality and declared that the king should be replaced by another Safavid, has been cited in support of the view that Shiah Islam regards all government as illegitimate. But it was the morals, and not the legitimacy, of the Shah that were attacked.¹

It is typical that the watch-dog function of religious leadership in the religions of ethical salvation should be exercised by low-ranking members of the hierocracy, since the credibility of the mulla, pastor or priest who calls his flock to walk the godly path depends on his own daily example and on his applying the same ethical standard to political rulers and, more rarely, to the senior hierocracy. Such a religious critique of particular rulers that is embedded in the religious orthodoxy and ethics as taught and practised in the everyday life of the people should be distinguished from the critique of the state by an independent senior hierocracy (as in the case of Khomeini) and also from the critiques of both the rulers and religious orthodoxy made by millennialist sects and more recently by Islamic integrism.

Safavid history is a progression from the millennialist militancy of a religious movement that could barely be described as Shiah and was certainly aberrant compared to the historical norm in Islamic societies, by way of a caeseropapist Shiah state, to a strong form of religious establishment in which the state provided protection, endorsement, patronage and, to some extent, coercion, in support of the state religion, and appointed its leading functionaries, while the hierocracy provided legitimation and services in the fields of ritual, law, education, and charity. While the establishment of Shiah institutions was strong by the late Safavid period, the division of law into shariah and secular fields, with the latter much more important, the fact that many significant religious leaders did not hold state appointments, and the fact that leading ulama were seldom

¹ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 201.

called on to play roles in state administration,¹ mean that late Safavid Iran cannot be described as a strongly caeseropapist state.²

The accession of **Shah Sultan-Husayn** (*Sultán-Husayn*) in 1694 marked the defeat of the Akhbari movement in Iran, although it continued to dominate in Iraq during the early part of the interregnum (1722-1785). There were at least some Akhbaris in Iran much later, in the time of Fath Ali Shah (*Fath ʿAlī Sháh Qájár*, r. 1798-1834),³ but the Usulis held the levers of power from 1694. The Shah was very much under the influence of the leading Mulla of the day, Majlisi the Younger, and gave him a free hand. His religious policy was characteristic of a secure, state-established religious hierarchy: banishing the wine and the Sufis from Isfahan, setting up planned programmes for the conversion of the minorities,⁴ and demanding doctrinal compliance with orthodoxy, as embodied in his own writings. This marks the completion of the construction of an institutionalised, established Shiah hierocracy, headed first by the *Shaykh al-Islam* of the capital, Isfahan, and from 1712 by the Mulla-Bashi. This hierocracy had hegemonic control of a relatively autonomous religious sphere, to the exclusion of doctrinal rivals such as Sufism, gnostic philosophy and ‘heretical’ movements. Its head might be state-appointed (in contrast to the Exemplary Guide of Qajar times), but the hierocracy had sufficient authority to claim supremacy in religious matters, thus legitimating the rule of the King only as worldly rule, and to claim that the sphere of religion was morally superior to worldly rule. The hierocracy had the necessary schools and institutions to perpetuate itself, its own sources of finance, and even private armies,⁵ as well as a legal system and religious courts. Moreover, the Usuli hierocracy had sufficient grounding in popular religion to ensure mass support, and to enable it to deliver the obedience of the masses to the government.

The elaboration of a doctrinal system compatible with its role as a national religion, the patronage it received from the state, and the establishment of its own internal institutions all contributed to the strong position the hierocracy was to assume under the Qajar dynasty (from 1785), but none of these were sufficient until Usuli Shiʿism had also been anchored in popular religiosity in practice (Friday prayers), sentiment (devotionalism in relation to the Imams) and doctrine.

¹ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 196.

² Weber has observed that a caeseropapist state in which “the religious charisma [has] developed a doctrinal system and an organizational apparatus” will contain “a strong hierocratic admixture” (*Economy and Society* 1161).

³ Algar, *Religion and State* 64-66.

⁴ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 191.

⁵ Algar, *Religion and State* 14-16, 19.

State patronage may be as much a constraint as an empowerment, as under the early Safavids, and it can be withdrawn, as it was withdrawn from the Shiah hierocracy under °Abbas II.

The Usuli school remained dominant in Iran until the 1980s, when the Islamic Republican Party and its Khomeini'ist supporters among the ulama seized the initiative from the more traditional Usuli ulama,¹ producing a new synthesis that can best be called Khomeinism, although other thinkers had a large role in its formulation.

The interregnum

The efforts of Majlisi to convert the Sunni minority to Shi'ism and to suppress the intellectual gnosticism that still survived led to discontent, particularly among the Sunni minority who were concentrated in what is now Afghanistan. Rebellion in Afghanistan was followed by an invasion that destroyed Safavid rule in 1722.² Afghans ruled part of the country for eight years, while Russians, Ottomans and various local rulers established themselves in other parts. One of these local rulers, **Nadir Khan** (*Nádir Khán*, later Nadir Shah, r. effectively 1730-47) extended his rule from the North to control all of Iran and much of Afghanistan. He attempted to reconcile Shi'ism with Sunnism by defining Shi'ism as a school of Islamic law, on the same basis as the various Sunni schools of legal interpretation, and by abandoning some Shiah practices that were designed to offend Sunnis. The plan was unsuccessful. He also confiscated many of the religious endowments, abolished the post of Sadr and the shariah courts, and ended the stipends paid to leading ulama. His religious policy was not so much a return to Sunnism as the exclusion of religion from politics.³ Following his murder, **Karím Khán Zand** established a kingdom based on Shiraz, and reestablished Shi'ism as the state religion, without recreating the system of royal patronage. As a tribal coalition, the Zand regime offered little room for the urban ulama to exert any influence.⁴ His death in 1779 was followed by more years of turmoil until the first Qajar rulers succeeded in eliminating their competitors.

In the interval between 1722 and the effective establishment of Qajar rule in 1785, the Shiah hierocracy in Iran suffered along with the rest of the country, but not so badly as to destroy the basis of the hierocracy, and they also learned to do without royal appointments and state patronage. During this period the doctrinal innovations mentioned above took the shape of the Usuli movement under the

¹ Keddie and Hooglund, *The Iranian Revolution*: see 'Islamic Republican Party' in the index.

² Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 191. This period is referred to in section 12 of Abdu'l-Baha's *Sermon on the Art of Governance*, see page 386.

³ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 217; Algar, *Religion and State* 31.

⁴ Algar, *Religion and State* 32-3.

leadership of **Muhammad Baqir Bihbihani** (*Áqá Muhammad Báqir Bihbihání*, 1705-1803) who was based in Iraq and succeeded in making the shrine cities there into the centre of Shiah learning. Bihbihani's formulation of the nature of the authoritative interpretations of the Usuli mujtahids, and his systematic approach to jurisprudence, are still in use today. His declaration that the Akhbari school were 'non-believers' polarised the struggle, and set a precedent for similar declarations in the Qajar era directed against Shaykhis, and by the Usuli mujtahids against one another.¹ Sufism attracted a wide following during the interregnum, and Gnostic Shi'ism developed. The mystic Bidabadi (*Áqá Muhammad Bidábádí*, d. 1783), in opposition to at-Tusi and Majlisi, said that the Hidden Imam has a purely spiritual function, and that the perfected mystic can claim vicegerency to the Hidden Imam, and even *khiláfat* (Caliphate, Deputyship). But this means leadership as a mystical guide, and precedence in calling people to God, and not a claim to earthly rule.²

The Qajar Era

The most brutal and able of the Qajar leaders who emerged following the murder of Karim Khan Zand was **Muhammad Khan** (*Áqá Muhammad Khán Qajar*). The period offered him more opportunity for warfare than for ruling, and the true history of the Qajar dynasty is generally dated only from his own murder, in 1797.³ During his reign, he sent his Mulla-Bashi to invite Muhammad Baqir Bihbihani's son, **Muhammad Ali Bihbihani** (*Áqá Muhammad 'Alí Bihbihání*, known as *Súfi-kosh*, the Sufi-killer) to come to Tehran – not as Shaykh u'l-Islam or as Mulla-Bashi for the court, but in his own right, as a mujtahid. Thus the Qajar state was set to relate to the Shiah hierocracy as an independent power. The state-appointed Mulla-Bashi had been demoted to chaplain of the royal household, and envoy to the ulama, without the caeseropapist pretension of 'heading' the religious order.⁴ However the Shah continued to appoint and support cities' leaders of Friday worship and the leading legal expert.⁵

Muhammad Khan's successor, **Fath Ali Shah Qajar** (r. 1797-1834) endorsed the position of Shi'ism as the state religion, and was generous in building and endowing religious institutions and in providing pensions for deserving ulama. He was noted for the respect that he paid to leading mujtahids, to the extent that he is reported to have said "we consider our kingship to be exercised on behalf

¹ MacEoin, 'Charismatic authority' 160.

² Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 163.

³ Algar, *Religion and State* 41; Morgan, *Medieval Persia* 157.

⁴ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 230; 'The Mujtahid of the Age and the Mulla-Bashi' 90.

⁵ Algar, *Religion and State* 50; Arjomand, 'The Mujtahid of the Age' 92-3.

of the mujtahids of the age ...”¹ The Shah is reported to have followed Sayyid Muhammad Tabataba’i (*Áqá Sayyid Muhammad Tabátábá’i*, d. 1797) in all matters. Algar describes him as implementing “a constant policy of favouring clerical influence, winning their approval by pious acts, and accepting their mediation.” He invited leading Usuli mujtahids, many of whom had studied under Bihbihani in Iraq, to settle in Iran, and sponsored the development of centres of Shiah scholarship in Tehran and Qom.² He was personally pious, frequently going on pilgrimage to shrines within Iran.

As for the ulama, they recognized the state’s existence, but as “a subordinate body that should take its guidance from the religious institution.”³ Algar cites the example of **Shaykh Ja’far Najafi** (*Ja’far Najafí*), who “permitted” the Shah to mount the throne “on condition that a Muezzin be appointed to each brigade of the army, and a prayer leader to each battalion, and that the troops listen to a preacher once a week.” This illustrates the autonomous role the hierocracy had now attained, as partners to the state in a dual structure of authority. While the regional ulama could frequently intercede with the Shah to ease the punishment of rebellious governors or tribes, they also interceded in their regions to urge rebels to submit.⁴ At the same time, the continuing state appointments of the leaders of Friday worship and the leading legal expert could be used by the Shah to counterbalance the influence of major mujtahids.⁵

These mujtahids established courts of law with a wider scope than under the Safavids, eclipsing the courts of state-appointed qadis. The earlier disdain for political affairs, and reluctance to deal with criminal cases that would involve the harsh Islamic specified (*hudúd*) punishments, gave way to a more positive attitude to the administration of law. One mujtahid in Isfahan, **Muhammad Baqir Shafti** (*Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Shaftí*, d. 1844) is said to have executed some seventy persons, and ruled virtually as a king.⁶ The same mujtahid had refused a royal appointment as the leader of Friday worship in Tehran. Algar attributes this to “the fundamental illegitimacy of the whole apparatus of state” in Shiah Islam.

¹ Algar, *Religion and State* 56. This chapter in Algar’s book is a remarkably thorough reconstruction of ‘The Clerical Policy of Fath ‘Ali Shah.’

² *Op. cit.* 56; Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 218.

³ Keddie, *Iran: Religion, politics and society* 92.

⁴ Algar, *Religion and State* 52-3.

⁵ Amanat, ‘Clerical Leadership’ 107-8.

⁶ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 232-3, 243. Algar (*Religion and State* 61) puts the number at 80 to 100, perhaps aware that a round seventy in Islamic historiography is likely to mean ‘a large number.’ There is a hagiographic life in Tunikabuni, ‘*Qisas al-‘ulama*’ 309-318. It would appear (p. 315) that his actual use of the death penalty was something of an innovation in Isfahan.

But Shafti appears to have served, later, as leading legal expert in Isfahan, a well-paid position.¹ Perhaps Shafti simply had his own plans for career development, which did not include leaving his power base in Isfahan.

Other mujtahids, however, including the great **Shaykh Murtada Ansari** (*Shaykh Murtadā Ansārī*, 1799-1864) continued to reject direct involvement in the legal system.² Ansari was based in Najaf, and led the Usuli school there in the direction of ethical and pastoral concerns rather than the systematisation and application of a positive law for the state. He was to become the first Shiah mujtahid to be universally recognised as the sole ‘exemplary guide’ in his time.³

Cole has commented that:

The triumph of the usuli school and the emergence of the institution of the supreme source of emulation are as important in the history of modern Shi'ism as the victory for papal power at Vatican I was for modern Roman Catholicism. ... While Ansari himself tended to stay out of politics, the ideology and institutions of usuli Shi'ism provided a framework for an activist body of ulama with a clearly defined leadership.⁴

However since laymen were in principle free to choose any mujtahid, and there has not always been an exemplary guide who is generally recognized as the supreme point of imitation, the institution did not develop the power that the papacy had following Vatican I.

Fath Ali Shah also acted with the ulama to suppress popular Sufism, which had enjoyed a revival in the unsettled conditions of the interregnum.⁵ The Shiah hierocracy maintained its relative autonomy from the state despite this patronage, for the central government was in any case weak, and the hierocracy still had the popular foundation that Majlisi had created by emphasising otherworldly and eschatological themes and by incorporating practices and beliefs from popular religion into official Usuli Shi'ism. It was its ability to mobilise its masses, as

¹ Algar, *Religion and State* 50, 50n42 respectively.

² Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 236.

³ MacEoin (‘Charismatic Authority’ 161) suggests that the title was first used in relation to Ansari’s teacher, Shaykh Muhammad Hasan al-Najafi, but it was Ansari who was first recognised in that role throughout the Shiah world. Even in his case, it must be said that the use of the actual title to describe his recognised leadership (*riyāsāt*) came only posthumously (Amanat, ‘Clerical Leadership’ 101-2).

⁴ ‘Imami Jurisprudence’ 40.

⁵ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 243-4.

much as state patronage, which enabled the hierocracy to virtually eliminate popular sufism: this also explains the continuity of aristocratic sufi orders.¹

The result of these policies was that the clergy achieved unparalleled political power. Algar describes several occasions on which they were able to secure the dismissal of oppressive city governors.² In 1826 a coalition consisting of local chiefs from the Caucasus, who had been dispossessed when the Russians occupied Gökcha, the crown prince and governor of Azerbaijan, °Abbás Mírzá, and clergy who were agitating for the liberation of the largely Muslim population of the occupied territories in the Caucasus acted together to stir up mass support for a renewal of the war with Russia. Leading mujtahids issued fatwas (legal opinions) that such a war would be a holy war and thus obligatory on all Muslims. Algar writes:

The direct intervention of the ulama brought the agitation to a new stage of enthusiasm ... [and] showed the ulama as the *de facto* leaders of the nation. ... Such by now was the temper of the ulama that they declared themselves ready to go to war even without the consent or participation of the Shah.³

The Shah found himself virtually isolated. Courtiers who argued against war were silenced by a fatwa that opposition to jihad was a sign of unbelief,⁴ and the Shah gave way. The ulama generously authorised the Shah to use ‘their’ half of the khums (*khums*) tax to arm those fighting the jihad (thus establishing a claim to that half after the war!).⁵ The Persian forces were ignominiously defeated. The mujtahid Sayyid Muhammad Isfahani (*Áqá Sayyid Muhammad Isfahání*), who had organized the ulama to preach the virtues of jihad, turned back early in the campaign. One of the leading ulama of Tabriz compacted with the Russians and organized the capitulation of that city, and Tabriz was occupied. The Shah was forced to accept the Treaty of Turkumáncháy, a humiliation not to be forgotten. Prince °Abbás Mírzá, who had initially spurred the ulama on, wrote to his Vazir (*vazír*) that he should cease all association with the ulama and instead cultivate “the company of capable men of affairs.”⁶

¹ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 244.

² *Religion and State* 57-60; Tunikabuni, ‘*Qisas al-°ulama*’ 306-7.

³ Algar, *Religion and State* 87.

⁴ *Op. cit.* 89.

⁵ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 230.

⁶ Algar, *Religion and State* 80. These events are dramatically described by Abdu’l-Baha in the *Sermon on the Art of Governance* (see Appendix 1).

On other occasions in Fath Ali Shah's reign, notably the sack of the Russian legation and the massacre of its staff and household in Tehran in 1829, leading mujtahids and other ulama used their influence with the people to rouse mobs who could temporarily negate the power of the state. Under his successors, relations grew worse: dual centres of power had been created, and the nation became the battlefield on which they fought. The king's authority was generally respected, so long as he lived up to his responsibilities as the King of Islam in the eyes of the leading clergy. Where he was seen as failing to support Muslims against infidels, or Shi'ism against Sunnis (as in the cases of the Russian legation, of economic concessions granted to Europeans, and of the Ottoman sack of Karbila in 1843) the leading mujtahids could lead popular action to fulfil the duty the Shah had neglected.¹

During Fath Ali Shah's reign the ulama used their power to counter the rise of **Shaykhism**, an anti-usuli movement from which many of the early Babis were drawn, which developed in Iran and Iraq in competition with, and somewhat later than, the Usuli school. Shaykhism is built on the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad Ahsa'i (*Shaykh Ahmad Ahsá'i*, d. 1826). These included spiritualised interpretations of the Resurrection. The literal and graphic portrayal of the Resurrection was one of the cornerstones of the Usuli hold on the popular religious imagination. Shaykh Ahmad and his successor, Sayyid Kazim Rashti (*Kázim Rashtí*, d. 1843) rejected the role of the mujtahids as intermediaries and interpreters. The will of the Hidden Imam, according to them, was mediated by a 'perfect Shiah.' Shaykh Ahmad Ahsa'i took a stance rather similar to the Christian approach based on 'Render unto Caesar ...'² – civil government is seen as a necessary evil, with at least the implication that when the Promised One came and the world was put in order, temporal government would become unnecessary. He was much favoured by Fath Ali Shah, and wrote theological works at his request, but he refused to take up residence in Tehran, saying:

In my opinion all kings and governments enforce their edicts and orders by means of oppression, and since the people consult me and take refuge with me in all matters, and the defence of the Muslims and provision for their needs is incumbent upon me, my intervention with the king can have only one of two results: either he will accept it, and thus his rule will be suspended; or he will reject it, and I will be humiliated.³

¹ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 251-2.

² Matt. 22:15-22, Mark 12:13-17, Luke 20:20-26.

³ Algar, *Religion and State* 67.

I do not have access to the original here (a history of Shaykhism by ‘Abdalláh b. Ahmad Ahsá’i). It could be that the word Algar translates as “suspended” is *mawqúf*, which means suspended, discontinued, established, supported, and also consecrated to God. If the word is *mu‘allaq*, it can mean suspended, but also ‘turned on its head.’ Given Algar’s tendency to explain Iranian history in terms of a supposed religious rejection of the state, one would need more evidence before concluding that Shaykh Ahmad thought that the perfect Shiah, if recognized, would rule in place of the Shah. It is tempting to read this passage as a recognition (without condemnation) that the core business of the state is to provide coercion, so that the state is necessarily distinct from religion and the two should maintain their distance. If Shaykhism did have a positive theology of the state, this would also be consonant with the great respect the Shaykh received from the Shah and his governors, to the extent that most of the Qajar princes were Shaykhis,¹ which would be difficult to explain if the Shaykh was looking forward to the suspension of royal rule!

The Shaykhis were treated as infidels by the ulama,² and the movement survived for a time only because of Fath Ali Shah’s protection. A Qajar prince and leading disciple of Rashti, **Karim Khan** (*Muhammad Karím Khán Kirmání*, 1810-1870) led an important part of the Shaykhi movement after Rashti’s death, in competition with rival claims from the Babi movement and the Azerbaijan branch of Shaykhism to inherit the mantle of Shaykh Ahmad. Karim Khan was regarded by his followers as the ‘perfect Shiah,’ but insisted that this bestowed only a spiritual authority, and not political authority.³ This is reminiscent of Bidabadi’s theology, a century before, and to Qumi and Mulla Sadra before that. In accordance with that theosophic tradition, he thought that the division of power was in itself a corruption: each age should ideally be ruled by a single ruler. It appears that this was not to be achieved by the submission of all rulers to one of their number (as in Dante’s ideal of a world monarch), but by the subordination of all temporal rulers to the true ruler, the Perfect Shiah (himself), who would however not displace the executive function of government. It was not this subtly expressed claim to out-rank the Shah that led to his downfall, but his explicit challenge to the legitimacy of the mujtahids’ authority. He was forced to defend his orthodoxy, to advise his followers to conceal their views, and ultimately to acknowledge the authority of both the Shah and the mujtahids.⁴

¹ Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent* 182.

² See MacEoin, ‘Charismatic Authority’ 164-5.

³ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 153, 252.

⁴ Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent* 63-86.

The political ascendancy of the hierocracy under the Qajars had negative effects on the state and the nation. Dual systems of law with rather loosely defined spheres of jurisdiction coexisted uncomfortably, with the ‘customary’ (i.e., state) courts sometimes being trumped by the ruling of a mujtahid in a religious court. As the competition between the ulama and the state became more acute, some of the ulama shunned association with state institutions. In some cases, state property was even thought to be ritually unclean.¹ Certain religious appointments remained the preserve of the Shah, but there was an increasingly strong custom for them to be hereditary. But the hierocracy’s power was limited, in the first place by internal disagreements in which mujtahids declared one another to be heretics, but also because the hierocracy lacked internal coordination and depended on the state to some extent, since its courts had no regular means of enforcing its verdicts (although gangs of talibs or lutis (*lútis*) could in some cases provide a decidedly irregular enforcement, as in Isfahan under Shafti).² The lack of hierarchy among the mujtahids meant that litigants could obtain different verdicts from different courts in the same case, a situation that Abdu’l-Baha parodies in his *Secret of Divine Civilization*:

In this town there used to be seventy different governments functioning in good order, ... but the number has steadily decreased; there are only twenty-five left now, as a memento. It used to be that two hundred contradictory judgments were handed down by the same mufti in any one day, now we hardly get fifty.³

The Qajar dynasty could not rely on a genealogy traced back to Ali. Instead, they referred back to the leadership structures of Turkoman tribal culture. These had certain practical disadvantages, since they did not include the principle of primogeniture to regulate the succession to the throne, but these need not be considered here. It is important to note that the shift entailed the further desacralisation of worldly rule, and increased the regime’s dependence on external religious legitimation that could only be provided by the ulama. Mirza Abu’l-Qasim Qumi (*Mirzá Abu’l-Qásim Qumí*, d. 1817-8) was one of the mujtahids who obliged. His theory of kingship endorsed the use of the royal title “Shadow of God on earth” but not in the sense of reflecting the divine will. The king is rather the shadow of divine justice, and will be judged by God according to his justice and equity. Kingship and religion are interdependent: kings are

¹ Algar, *Religion and State* 23.

² Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 243.

³ *The Secret of Divine Civilization* 56-7, see also 37-8.

needed to preserve order, and the ulama are needed to protect religion.¹ Both of these positions will be encountered again in the writings of Baha'u'llah.

A more theological legitimation of the rule of kings was provided by Ja'far **Kashfi** (*Áqá Sayyid Ja'far ibn Abí Isháq Kashfí*, 1775-1851), in an influential work entitled the 'The Gift of Kings,' written about 1817-18.² This is devoted primarily to logic, ethics and cultivated behaviour, but includes a chapter on civil governance, supported by the text and translation of Ali's instructions to Malik al-Ashtar.³ He says that the imamate entailed two functions, political and religious leadership, which in the time of the Hidden Imam are exercised by two pillars, the rulers and the mujtahids. Ideally both would be exercised in one person, but because of the contention of the rulers with the ulama, the latter have abandoned sovereignty and the use of the sword, while the rulers, because of their inclination to baser things, have failed to acquire religious knowledge. "Thus, the function of vicegerency inevitably became divided between the ulama and the rulers."⁴ The ruler exercises a 'specified' vicegerency, limited to secular matters, which did not inhibit the king from making some clerical appointments. The political ethic draws on Ali's supposed instructions to Málík al-Ashtar, with a strong emphasis on justice, paternalism and charity. The separation of the religious and political spheres is given only a conditional theological justification: it is a necessary evil due to the misdeeds of the rulers, and the way it is justified entails a religious devaluation of the political.

Kashfi's thought at first sight resembles the two sovereignties, two powers or two 'calls' described by Baha'u'llah in the *Kitab-e Iqan* and Abdu'l-Baha in his *Sermon on the Art of Governance* and elsewhere, which will be described below, but there are important differences. The Bahai leaders present these two orders as representatives of two fundamental metaphysical principles underlying the

¹ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 223.

² The *Tuhfat al-Muluk* (*Tuhfat al-Mulúk*). Kashfi is of interest in Babi history, as the father of Sayyid Yahya Darabi, who was sent to Shiraz by Muhammad Shah to investigate the affair of the Bab, and was himself converted. A.L.M. Nicolas describes him as "one of the greatest and most celebrated Ulama of that period. His high moral character, his righteous ways had attracted to him universal esteem and consideration. His science had won for him the glorious name of Kashfi, that is to say, one who discovers and explains the divine secrets." (Shoghi Effendi, *The Dawn-Breakers*, 171, citing A. L. M. Nicolas' *Siyyid Ali-Muhammad dit le Bab*, 233). According to Abdu'l-Baha in *A Traveller's Narrative* (page 7), Darabi informed his father of his findings before proclaiming them to the ulama. (See also Shoghi Effendi, *The Dawn-Breakers* 177). For more on his writings see Ahang Rabbani, 'The Family of Vahid Darabi.'

³ Kashfi, *Tuhfat al-Muluk*, beginning at pages 245 and 257 respectively.

⁴ Translated in Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 226.

creation, so that the sovereignty of the promised Qa'im (*Qá'im*) refers to the 'prophetic' office and not to temporal rule, whereas Kashfi says that the two pillars should coexist in the Imam's deputy, and do coexist in the Imam. Kashfi's solution is consolation for a fallen world, a *modus vivendi* between the state and quietist strands of Shi'ism.

Kashfi can also not be considered typical of Usuli theories or later Shiah theories of the state. Arjomand writes:

The importance of Kashfi's political theory cannot be exaggerated. It is a consistent synthesis of the traditional Persian theories of kingship and the Shi'ite doctrines of imamate and occultation. As such, it represents ... the definitive reconciliation of the secular and the religious cultures of premodern Iran.¹

Elsewhere Arjomand calls this theory the 'final resolution' of the problem of the legitimacy of the state in the Shiah polity.² But this is rather a truce than a definitive reconciliation. A state founded on these principles would remain liable to millennialist fervour, since the theory specifies that the two pillars are to be combined with the arrival of the Qa'im. Moreover Kashfi derives his theory not from scripture and tradition, but from reason, deducing the implications of legal norms for a present situation. Such deductions (*ijtihád*) are specifically defined as fallible and as valid only for the lifetime of the mujtahid who makes them, and then only for laymen who have accepted that mujtahid as their exemplary guide. Although Kashfi argues for a close partnership between government and religion, it is a marriage in which both the orthodox ulama and potential millennialist movements reserve the right to unilateral divorce. It is also notable that the theory was developed in the early years of the reign of Fath Ali Shah, who had a very positive relationship with leading mujtahids. It rationalized an existing relationship based on current policies, rather than providing a basis on which that relationship could be made an organic part of the polity. As subsequent Qajar history proved, Kashfi's theory was not a lasting contribution. Despite such efforts at reconciliation, the trend of Usuli thought in the Qajar period was to create competing claims to temporal power, something that Baha'u'llah resolutely excludes.

Fath Ali Shah's successor, **Muhammad Shah** (r. 1834-48) was himself a Sufi and reversed some of the policies favouring the Usulis, but the reestablishment and consolidation of the Shiah hierocracy and of its hold on popular religious sentiment, had become so complete during the long reign of Fath Ali Shah that

¹ *Shadow of God* 228.

² *Op. cit.* 224.

Muhammad Shah's policies could not cause fundamental change. The ulama continued to act against popular sufism, using their pulpits in place of state patronage. But they were at first unable to kill the Bab, because Muhammad Shah was unwilling to order his governors in Shiraz and Isfahan, and later in Tabriz, to act.

The rivalry between the state and its institutions and the autonomous religious hierarchy, which was potentially present in Kashfi's theory (since kings are not likely to enjoy being told that they should be guided by the mujtahids), came to the fore. The leading mujtahids within Iran, led until 1844 by Shafiqi in Isfahan, became in effect the opposition party, while the Shah attempted a flanking move to seize the high ground of popular religion, by encouraging the construction of theatres for the performance of religious plays and narratives of mourning, for which the lower-order ulama were recruited.

Kashfi's theory can be taken as a background assumed to be known by the readers of the political theologies of both Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha. It was restated in 1873 by the mujtahid Mulla Ali **Kani** (*Mullá 'Alí Kání*, d. 1888) as a theory of 'two powers' exercised through two vicegerents (*na'ib*) during the occultation of the Hidden Imam. These vicegerents are the ulama – the 'learned' who exercise the religious office – and the rulers (*salatin*).¹ This is a view supported by Abdu'l-Baha in his *Sermon on the Art of Governance* written at the same time, and opposed at that time by Afghani, the forefather of the Islamic integrists of the 20th century.² The legitimation that this theory provided was limited to worldly matters, as in Bahai theology. However, unlike Bahai theology, it was coupled with a 'high church' ecclesiology. The monarch, like every other person, was a 'son of the church.' Unless he was to attain the rank of mujtahid himself, he would be obliged, according to the doctrine of imitation, to imitate a mujtahid and carry out his rulings. The state's existence was recognized, but as "a subordinate body that should take its guidance from the religious institution."³ In 1873, Kani issued a fatwa requiring the dismissal of the Prime Minister in relation to the Reuter's concession, and a few years later he wrote to the governor of Khurasan enquiring which mujtahid he obeyed.⁴

The Bab and the Babis

The Bab's mission, and the Bahai calendar, begin during Muhammad Shah's reign (in 1844). Muhammad Shah's reputation for heterodoxy, and his distance

¹ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 228; Dabashi, 'Exchange' 330-331.

² Jansen, *Dual Nature*, chapter 2. See further the introduction to the translation of the *Sermon on Divine Governance* in Appendix 1.

³ Keddie, *Iran: Religion, politics and society* 92.

⁴ Dabashi, 'Exchange' 329, 330.

from the Shiah hierarchy, are part of the background of the Bab's story: they explain for instance the attempts to arrange a meeting between the Bab and the Shah, and the willingness of some government officials to shelter him against the wishes of the ulama. However we will only mention the Babi movement briefly here, since anything I had to say would suffer from comparison with the best monograph to date in the field of Babi and Bahai studies, Abbas Amanat's *Resurrection and Renewal*, which provides a detailed history of the movement.

The Babi religion had its roots in the Shaykhi school and shares many doctrines with it, but the difference between living in expectation of the imminent return of the Mahdi, and believing that he has actually come, is fundamental. The realized eschatology of the Babi religion places it in a similar position in some respects to the extremist (*ghuluw*) sects of Iranian history, such as the Qizilbash, who helped the first Safavid monarch to his throne: a God-king who was expected to put the world to rights, and did succeed in turning it upside down. But the realized eschatology should not obscure the fact that the Babi religion did not share key *ghuluw* features such as the belief in reincarnation, exalting the Imams above Muhammad, and antinomianism. Nor does the Babi religion seem to have been world-denying. **Fischer and Abedi** characterize Babism as "a qualified egalitarian, politicized, and even revolutionary, millennialism."¹ In calling it 'politicized and revolutionary' they intend to link it to activist millennialist groups that seek to prepare for and promote the millennium by 'awaking' the population, in contrast to quietist groups who believe that the time is fore-ordained and the true believers need only endure passively until it comes. The 'politicized' label, as Fischer and Abedi use it, is not intended to support the charge that Babism was a political movement, and it does not in itself tell us anything about the question of church and state in Babi belief. They say that "The return of the Mahdi implied the institution of a just society, and thus Babis brought property rights, the taxation system, and the political hierarchy into question,"² but there is a great difference between questioning the ethics of the state (seeking to moralize it) and denying its right to exist.

Among those who have interpreted Babism as a political movement we should mention **Peter Smith**, who says that the Bab "asserted the Shi'i principle that only the Imam or his representative might exercise legitimate authority,"³ but since he fails to provide a reference for this, and makes a false generalisation about Shi'ism, it is hard to know what weight to give to it. He states that "The Bab's claim to Mahdihood was an explicit challenge to the entire existing

¹ *Debating Muslims* 229.

² Fischer and Abedi, *Debating Muslims* 230.

³ *The Babi and Baha'i Religions* 20.

religious, social and political order. His followers' attempt to establish a theocracy was inevitably a political as well as a religious endeavour," but does not say whether this 'explicit challenge' was explicit in the Bab's own teachings or was a function of the way his followers, and the state and the ulama, understood the implications of the title of Mahdi.

Smith and Momen, in 'The Babi movement,' say that "The Babis were explicitly political in their demands. The Bab's claim to Mahdihood challenged the legitimacy of the existing institutions. Their attempt to establish a theocracy entailed the displacement or cooption of the existing regime."¹ Similarly **MacEoin** refers to the "essentially theocratic hopes of Babism"² and **Browne** says that the Babis looked "for an immediate triumph over all existing powers, culminating in the universal establishment of the True Faith and Reign of God's Saints on Earth."³ It is notable that all these authors attribute the theocratic aims to the Babis rather than to the Bab himself. But **Mangol Bayat** says that the Bab himself "incited his followers to conquest" and quotes him admonishing Muhammad Shah to "lay aside ... your dominion which belongeth unto God" and "subdue, *with the truth* ... the countries."⁴ The point that Bayat seems to have missed is that it is the truth not the sword that is to be used.

Shoghi Effendi on the other hand says that the Babis involved in the Mazindaran and Nayriz upheavals categorically repudiated "any intention of interfering with the civil jurisdiction of the realm, or of undermining the legitimate authority of its sovereign," and that the Bab and his leading disciples had no political intent, for "the sovereignty of the Promised Qa'im was purely a spiritual one, and not a material or political one."⁵ He supports this with reference to what Baha'u'llah, who was a contemporary and partial eyewitness, writes in his *Kitab-e Iqan*, and by pointing to the willingness of leading disciples to lay down their arms and return to their homes. This is also **Amanat's** conclusion:

The Babi theory ... recognized, at least in principle, the de jure legitimacy of the temporal rulers as the protectors of the true religion. The Bab

¹ Page 80. They also claim that the Babis "wanted to establish a theocracy, initially in Iran and ultimately in the whole world" and that they intended "to establish the theocratic kingdom of the Mahdi." (45, 49)

² 'From Babism to Baha'ism' 220.

³ *The New History* xvi. An almost identical summary is given in his *Materials* xv. The terminology in both cases is Christian rather than Islamic, and is repeated by Maceoin in 'Baha'i fundamentalism' 70, suggesting the Browne's view has been influential here.

⁴ *Mysticism and Dissent* 106-7, emphasis added, citing *Selections from the Writings of the Bab* 41-3.

⁵ For Mazindaran see *God Passes By* 39-40, for Nayriz, *ibid* 43; *Unfolding Destiny* 426.

envisaged himself as a prophet, not a ruler; his misgivings about the state were directed at the conduct of the government rather than its legitimacy. The religious discipline of the *Bayan*, however, was considered comprehensive. The rulers of the *Bayan* era were to comply with the teachings of the new religion and after that with the teachings of future manifestations. Most Babis shared the observance of this duality of religious and political spheres.¹

Zabihi-Moghaddam points out that there is little contemporary evidence that the Bab was seen as a threat by the state, or that his teachings were perceived to imply anything but coexistence between the religious community and the state.² Yet Zabihi-Moghaddam also cites contemporary observers who saw the Babis as revolutionaries, not really concerned with religion. Perhaps it depended on which Babis one met.

When we turn to what the Bab himself wrote, with due caution about the limited range of the Bab's works that are available, the evidence seems to support the views of Shoghi Effendi, Amanat and Zabihi-Moghaddam. The great majority of the Bab's works are devotional or scriptural commentaries which would not be expected to contain a political theory. Of the early works, the first two chapters of the *Qayyumu'l-Asma* (1844)³ do refer to the two sources of authority, the state and the ulama. The opening of the *Qayyumu'l-Asma*, dealing with these two groups, is interesting in relation to Kashfi's *Tuhfat al-Muluk* (page 50 above), especially since the Bab read and praised another work by Kashfi.⁴ The authority of the king is maintained, "for in this world you have been mercifully invested with sovereignty." In the passage that Bayat quotes, kings are rhetorically asked to lay aside their dominion, but they are also to use their position to aid the cause of God, and are promised 'a vast dominion' in the hereafter.⁵ The subjugation of India and Turkey, which Bayat refers to, is to be achieved not by conquest but by promulgating the writings of the Bab.

Among the later works, the **Arabic Bayan** (1847) contains a prayer and other actions to be performed by kings until the day of the manifestation of him whom

¹ *Resurrection and Renewal* 407.

² 'The Babi-State Conflict' 92, 108-9.

³ I have made grateful use of a provisional translation, posted on the Talisman email discussion group by Stephen Lambden, of the first Surah of this work, the Surat al-Mulk. MacEoin, ('Holy War' 101) suggests that the writing of the *Qayyumu'l-Asma* was continued and completed in 1845, which seems likely.

⁴ See Fazil Mazandarani, *Zuhuru'l-Haqq*, Vol. 3, n.d. [1941 or 1942?], 479.

⁵ *Selections from the Writings of the Bab* 41-3.

God will make manifest,¹ and specifies contributions to be made by kings and officials such as viziers and governors, according to their rank.² Such verses require the continuance of the state order, which is remarkable if one considers the interpretation of Muhammad at Medina that one would expect the Bab to have taken as a model. By calling such officers ‘masters of order’ and giving them duties relating to the good order of the market, the Bab seems to also endorse the existence of civil powers as good and necessary in itself.³ The righteous king has the right to collect a religious tax analogous to Baha’u’llah’s *huguqu’llah*.⁴ This looks like the classical Sunni polity in which the state provides part of the institutional structure of religion. Babi kings are called on to select twenty-five learned men (ulama) who will manage all affairs.⁵ In the light of other statements in the Bayan concerning ulama, in the sense of leaders or religion, it seems possible that the ulama in this case are ‘learned men’ rather than divines; that is, that kings are called on to devolve day-to-day government to a chosen cabinet. Babis, according to the Bayan, are to be broadly educated in physical and political geography, religious history and economics.⁶ The twenty-five learned men are to be chosen, not from the mujtahids or ulama class, but from all the inhabitants of the kingdom. They should learn the commandments of God, but religious learning is not a condition for appointment. (Parenthetically, this looks rather like the council of the learned advocated by Abdu’l-Baha in *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, who are also to be broadly educated in these fields, but in *The Secret of Divine Civilization* this council apparently functions alongside an elected legislature, as an upper house.)

The **Persian Bayan**, also from 1847, contains similar references to the rights and duties of kings,⁷ and some references that may point to a distinction between public and private spheres. On the one hand there are duties such as confiscating the goods of non-believers which fall on the rulers and explicitly not on ordinary people.⁸ Other duties are explicitly laid on Babi kings and on all people.⁹ Others,

¹ *Le Bayan Arabe* 137-8 (Vahid IV); 148-9, 155-6 (Vahid V); 173, 175 (Vahid VII), 197-8 (Vahid IX), and 239 (Vahid XI).

² *Op. cit.* 213 (Vahid X, Bab 16).

³ *Op. cit.* 215-6 (Vahid X, Bab 17).

⁴ *Op. cit.* 157 (Vahid V, Bab 19).

⁵ *Op. cit.* 220 (Vahid XI, Bab 2).

⁶ *Op. cit.* 232 (Vahid XI, Bab 15).

⁷ *Le Beyan Persan*, Vol. 3 pages 53, 55-6 (V:19); Vol. 4 pages 20 (VII:9) and 145-6 (IX:3).

⁸ *Op. cit.*, Vol. 3, pages 12-13 (V:5).

⁹ *Op. cit.*, Vol. 4 page 44 (VII, 16). In this case the duty is not to allow anyone to remain

such as the ban on pronouncing judgement on any soul,¹ are admirable as rules of conduct in the private sphere, but would be impracticable in the public sphere.

In a **letter to Muhammad Shah**, written in 1847 or 1848, the Shah is called on to act towards the Bab's cause in a way that befits "the station of thy sovereignty." This resembles a topos we find again in the writings of Baha'u'llah to the kings and rulers: their high station is affirmed, in order to call them to equally noble conduct. His earlier messages to the Shah, he says, were not delivered to the king personally, "however, now that the fateful hour is drawing nigh, and because it is a matter of faith, not a worldly concern, therefore I have given thee a glimpse of what hath transpired." "I seek no earthly goods from thee, be it as much as a mustard seed. Indeed to possess anything of this world or of the next would, in My estimation, be tantamount to open blasphemy."² In a similar letter a few months later the Bab says "I have no desire to seize thy property ... nor do I wish to occupy thy position."³

In the **Persian Seven Proofs** (1848) the Bab writes that the Muslims have been looking forward to the 'dispelling of grief' for the thousand years of the occultation of the hidden Imam, but did not recognise this solace when it appeared (in his own person). "Do you think it lies in sovereignty, in military power, or a kingdom? But from the time of the Prophet until the present, God alone knows how many powerful kings there have been in Islam, and they (too) waited ardently for this dispelling of grief."⁴

The Bab also addresses the "assembly of the rulers of the earth and descendants of rulers," which would appear to foreshadow the assembly of kings and rulers foreseen by Baha'u'llah,⁵ and to recognize the legitimacy of their rule.

⁹(...continued)

on earth who does not believe in this (Babi) faith. If ordinary believers are not permitted to seize the possessions of non-believers it seems unlikely that they are required to kill them. Presumably the duty is to be carried out by converting the non-believers with reason and without raising the voice, as prescribed elsewhere in the two Bayans.

¹ *Selections from the Writings of the Bab* 144: this extract is from the *Kitab-e Asma'* (The Book of Names), XVII:4.

² *Selections from the Writings of the Bab*, 13-14.

³ *Selections from the Writings of the Bab*, 26.

⁴ *Le Livre des Sept Preuves* 32; Zabihi-Moghaddam 'The Babi-State Conflict' 95.

⁵ The situation is somewhat confused because he goes on to speak of this recognition as accorded to the Shah of Iran, who is to use his soul and sword to "subdue the countries" and "purge the Sacred Land from such as have repudiated the Book." The 'Sacred Land' may refer to a Babi kingdom, or to Tehran as Shoghi Effendi glosses it in *The Promised Day is Come* 42, but it might also be used in a conventional sense as the region around

Since the Bab considered himself in some senses to be the Mahdi and the promised Qa'im, it may be that he himself had gone beyond Kashfi's conditional theological legitimation of the state pending the coming of the Qa'im to full recognition of state and religious orders as equally established by God. Although the rulers are threatened with punishment if they do not support the revelation of the Bab, this punishment is to take place in the next world and not in this. The Bab as Qa'im has the right to denounce impious rulers, but not apparently to depose them, which implies a recognition of their independent legitimacy.

This evidence would seem to support Amanat's conclusion that the Bab recognized the legitimacy of the state *de jure*. However not all Babis understood his teachings in those terms. Many of the early Babis, particularly those drawn from the ulama rather than the bazaar, understood their new faith in terms of the overthrow of both church and state orders. Browne cites an example of a Babi leader writing to the Governor of Mazandaran, "We are the rightful rulers, and the world is set under our signet-ring."¹ Fischer and Abedi cite two Babis who assert, to the governor of Shiraz, that all property and the right to make all political appointments belong to the Bab.² The Babis who assembled in Karbila in 1844-5 brought weapons with them in expectation of an eschatological battle against the anti-christ.³ During the two years in which the Bab was imprisoned in Mah-ku and Chihriq we know that at least one of the Babis manufactured and distributed swords and arranged military training,⁴ and the success of the Babis in defending themselves in Zanjan and Nayriz is evidence that there must have been a degree of military preparedness among the activist strand of the Babi community even before they were attacked. In the Nayriz uprising, Vahid appointed officers including a gaoler, executioner and military leaders, which might be an emergency measure but does suggest that the state has been replaced by the religious polity. When in 1848 the Bab called for them to "proceed towards the land of Kha" [Khurasan], many assumed that they were to take part in the cataclysmic battle prophesied to occur when the Mahdi returned. Mulla Husayn

⁵(...continued)

Kufa and Karbila in Iraq, containing shrines especially sacred to the Shiah. If so, the Shah was being called on to support a Shiah revolt against the Ottomans, who had bloodily put down such a rebellion in 1842. A similar command in the Bab's *Qayyumu'l-Asma* to purify the 'holy land,' is glossed by MacEoin as referring to Karbila ('Holy War' 104).

¹ From the Nuqtatu'l-Kaf, cited by Browne in his notes to *The New History* 362.

² *Debating Muslims* 230.

³ Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions* 45; MacEoin, 'Holy War' 111-112.

⁴ Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 350. MacEoin also refers to an instruction to purchase arms in the *Qayyumu'l-Asma* (see 'Holy War' 104).

was apparently delegated authority to lead whatever action was intended. Perhaps that was the Bab's intention, yet at about the same time he sent letters to the Shah and his chief minister in which he denies having any interest in the mundane possession of worldly trifles, while threatening the Shah with divine punishment. At this time at least, he stands over against the state in prophetic denunciation, while recognizing the separation of the religious and political spheres.¹ This is in marked contrast to the prevailing Islamic, and particularly Shiah, concept of the universality of the Imam's authority.

The particular question of Babi militarism (as distinct from millenarianism), and its relation to the Shiah expectation of an apocalyptic war between the followers of the Imam and all who oppose them, has been explored in some depth by MacEoin in 'The Babi concept of Holy War.' While not strictly relevant, this question is parallel to the question of church and state, in as much as the Shiah theory was initially that only the Imam had the authority to declare a holy war, but the mujtahids came to exercise this authority in the course of the Qajar period. From the references provided by MacEoin, it would appear that the Bab claimed the authority to prescribe rules of conduct for armies engaged in holy war, but expected the Shah to proceed to Karbila and lead the fight. The Shah failed to satisfy these hopes, yet there is no indication that the Bab conceived of any other institution displacing the Shah and thus the state in waging war. Instead, this hope was postponed, to rest upon some future sovereign who would support the cause. Zabihi-Moghaddam too notes that the model of holy war in the Bayan centres on the person of a Babi king, and it seems odd that MacEoin, who studied these texts, did not realise that they are not compatible with a theocratic state. So far as it goes, the evidence regarding the Babi doctrine of holy war supports the view that the Bab recognized the legitimacy of the state from first to last.

Fischer and Abedi's conclusion that "The Babi movement was a mixture of progressive ideas and initiatives and reactionary theocratic ones"² may well be true of the movement, but the mixture consists of the variety of ways in which the Bab's message was heard, rather than contradictory motifs in the message itself. This variety is partly to be attributed to social differences. Amanat points out that Babism in effect had two wings: the moderate wing consisting of the Bab himself and followers from the bazaar (merchant) and cultured classes (which would include Baha'u'llah, although Amanat does not say so) and the radical wing including Quddús, Qurrat al-^cAyn, lower ranking ulama (and a few mujtahids), artisans and peasants. Smith's account (Chapter 3) also shows that the Babi

¹ Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal* 383.

² *Debating Muslims* 230-31.

message appealed to distinct social groups who understood it in distinct ways.¹ The ‘progressive ideas and initiatives’ might well correspond largely to converts from the merchant class, the ‘reactionary theocratic’ ideas to the many members of the lower clergy and heterodox schools who expected Babism to deliver the end of the world rather than its modernization. The radical wing prevailed, and its millenarian militancy in armed uprisings in 1848 and 1849 justified the state repression that cost the Bab his life, drove the movement underground, and broke its organisation and unity.

The martyrdom of the Bab, and repression by the state, tended to polarise the Babi community into activist resistance, exemplified by the Zanjan and Nayriz uprisings, and quietism, with the former perhaps dominating within Iran. As Arjomand has noted:

the initial difficulties encountered by the Babis, and especially the failure of their armed uprisings, generated intense messianism. This messianism was reflected in, and in turn encouraged by, the Bab’s foretelling of a new cycle of resurrection ...²

Baha’u’llah’s half-brother, Subh-e Azal, was among those who advocated the overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of a theocratic state, thus beginning a tradition of revolutionary activism that continued among the Azalis until the Iranian Constitutional Revolution. There seems no doubt that the community as a whole was characterised by intense messianism and disdain for the Qajar dynasty.³ They may well have been expecting the task of creating a Mahdist state to be taken up by ‘He whom God will make manifest.’ Perhaps because of the emphasis placed by the Bab on this figure, the Shiah messianic hopes that he had not himself fulfilled were not reinterpreted by the Babi community, but rather transferred. This is the community in which Baha’u’llah was operating in the Baghdad period, and addressing in early works such as the *Kitab-e Iqan*. These therefore are the views that Baha’u’llah had to displace.

The Qajars again

Muhammad Shah’s successor, **Nasir ad-Din Shah** (*Násir ad-Dín Sháh*, r. 1848-96) was the king who finally authorised the Bab’s execution, following six years of pressure from the ulama and numerous fatwas condemning him to death.

¹ The importance of social background as an explanatory factor in the diversity of Babi attitudes to the state is supported by Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal* 407, and Smith and Momen, ‘The Babi Movement’ 82.

² *Shadow of God* 254

³ Zabihi-Moghaddam, ‘The Babi-State conflict’ 108-111.

During his long reign the number of mujtahids increased from a handful at any one time to many dozens, further reducing the ability of the senior hierocracy within Iran to act in concert.¹ The high tension between the court and the hierocracy during Muhammad Shah's reign abated in the 1850s, because of the deliberate policies of Nasir al-Din Shah. When the Shah began to sell economic concessions to Europeans, the initiative in arousing opposition was taken by dissident intellectuals such as Afghani (see page 35 above) and lower-level ulama. The competition for sources of income among the multiplying ulama, and the corruption of the state apparatus, led many of the ulama to enter the political arena as power brokers, while others, particularly in Iraq, held to the ideal of pious aloofness from worldly matters. There were rivalries among those who did enter the political arena, between those opposing the state as oppressive, and those who became partners of the state in oppression and received titles and allowances in return, and within the latter group, between the supporters of rival princes and ministers.² The hierocracy was more sharply split than ever, and more corrupt than usual.

During Nasir ad-Din Shah's reign there was a renewed interest in Iran's pre-Islamic past, which is reflected in Abdu'l-Baha's *Secret of Divine Civilization*. To the extent that this reinforced Persian cultural ideals of patrimonial kingship, it reduced the dependence of the court on legitimation provided by the hierocracy.³

The Babi uprisings in the first years of Nasir ad-Din Shah's reign, and the execution of the Bab, have already been noted. When a group of Babis launched a failed attempt to assassinate the Shah in 1852, the state and ulama joined forces to break the community completely. Abdu'l-Baha estimates that more than four thousand were killed,⁴ a figure that is in line with the verifiable figures from major incidents (higher figures in many Bahai sources cannot be substantiated). Much of the violence was unfocused, embracing women and children and quite possibly a number of victims who were not Babis. However in many cases we hear of women and children being taken captive or sold as slaves rather than being killed, and in the incident at the Shrine of Shaykh Tabarsi some sixty percent of those killed were ulama. These observations suggest that the four or five thousand victims must have included a very large part of the educated men of the community.

¹ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 245-6.

² Algar, *Religion and State* 218-220.

³ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 248.

⁴ *A Traveller's Narrative* 28.

This brings us to the beginning of our main topic, since it is this broken Babi community that Baha'u'llah refers to in describing his call to prophethood, in a vision in a dungeon in Tehran, as a mission "to arise ... and undertake, with the utmost vigor, the task of regenerating this people."¹

Shi'ism in essence?

If we look back over the history of Shi'ism, we see it began with political pretensions, followed by political pragmatism and, after the sixth Imam rejected worldly power, developed into an innerworldly gnosticism, giving rise, through the alliance of Safavid Sufis and extremist Turkomen, to millennial fury which, by the late Safavid period, was tamed in a rigorist 'established church.' And we have seen that in the Qajar period the caeseropapist influence of the kings over the religious establishment evaporated, and in some instances the hierocracy, by appealing to mass support, succeeded in seizing the political initiative. We have also seen that at virtually every period, Shi'ism has been multi-faceted. The Shi'ism of the ulama has had to live alongside popular religion, sufism and gnostic philosophy. The states that have been called Shiah have had a range of forms, from the post-millennial puritan state of Sarbidar, and short-lived charismatic theocracies in the micro-states ruled by the Mar'ashí and Safavid orders, to strong caeseropapism (late Safavids) and pluralism (Nadir Khan). What we cannot find is any essential Shiah rejection of the legitimacy of worldly government as such.² The theocracy of the present Islamic Republic of Iran, and the theories that underlie it, are recent aberrations and not the logical endpoint of the internal logic of Shi'ism.

All religions of otherworldly salvation differentiate between the world and the spiritual. The position of the early Shiah community as a sect for whom the state

¹ Cited by Shoghi Effendi in *God Passes By* 114.

² The view that Shiah beliefs make the worldly rule of the king illegitimate appears in Gobineau's work, and then in Weber and a series of more recent writers such as Lambton, Algar and Keddie. More recent works have rejected this view (Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 22; Fischer *Iran* 5). The earlier view might derive from simple misunderstanding as much as from orientalist attitudes. The 20th-century pro-constitutionalist mujtahid Nai'ini (*Mirzá Muhammad Husayn Ná'ini*, 1860-1936), in an argument addressed to anti-constitutionalist ulama, speaks of the illegitimacy of the state in the absence of the hidden Imam. Evidently he expects his learned audience to agree on the premise. But this is in the context of an argument *for* the relative and contingent legitimacy of human government, and for constitutional government as the best form of human government. It is only ultimate and absolute legitimacy that Na'ini takes to be self-evidently reserved for the Hidden Imam on his return (see Hairi, *Shiism and Constitutionalism* 192).

was an external reality, and particularly the doctrine of the Hidden Imam, have given twelver Shi'ism a stronger emphasis on otherworldly salvation than Sunni Islam, meaning a *stronger* disposition to separate the political from the religious. This is what Arjomand refers to when he says, with a touch of overstatement, that there is a “fundamental separation of religious and political authority in the Shi'ite world view.” This is not a contradiction to the Sunni view, but is a stronger and clearer expression of it. Historical developments from the later Safavid to Qajar periods led to the development of a strong Shiah hierocracy, which amplified the prior disposition in the Shiah worldview.

In general we can say that the lack of a strong institutional order in the religious sphere tempts the political sphere to colonise the religious, and tends to result in sycophant theologies, while strong religious institutions provide a ground for theologies that support and maintain the autonomy of the religious. This is important for our main topic, since it means that the very strong institutionalisation in the Bahai religion should be taken as a factor favouring continuing separation of church and state. Other authors have already noted that policies to support the development of ‘church’ institutions in Sunni countries will favour the separation of church and state there.¹

We have also seen that the doctrine of the Hidden Imam was a factor that strengthened acceptance of the distinction between worldly and spiritual powers in Shiah Islam, but only provisionally. The same incidentally can be said of Christianity: in its eschatological ideal society, Christ rules and the kings have thrown their crowns at his feet and vanished from the picture. It would be reasonable to fear that the removal of eschatological deferment in Bahai theology – where the Imam is no longer hidden, but has ‘returned’ – might collapse the distinction between the religious and the political. If the Bahai Faith was simply gnostic Shi'ism with a consummated eschatology, this would be a reasonable expectation, and perhaps it is this logic that has led some authors to suppose that the Bahai Faith does not recognise the separation of church and state. While Bahai teachings on the separation of church and state are in part an extension of the trajectory we can see in Shiah history, continuing Kashfi's theology without the denigration of the political that is evident in late Qajar Shi'ism, there must be a new element to sustain the recognition of the state even in the Day of God.

While we are considering Iranian Shi'ism, we should briefly consider some claims that **Hamid Dabashi** has made about Babi and Bahai political theologies in relation to Shi'ism, in an article entitled *The End of Islamic Ideology*. The article is ideological rather than scholarly, an extension of 'Ali Shariati's ideological work in order to support the claim of contemporary student protesters

¹ Charfi (Shárfi'í), *Islam et Liberté*.

to represent the true spirit of Shi'ism. Like Shariati, Dabashi works with a marxist and nativist ideological framework, claiming both that global capitalism has Iran in its full and tightening grip and that the logic of production of capitalism is "faltering" and "erratic." The implication is, everything that is wrong, is wrong because the West is strong, but we can be assured of imminent victory because the West is weak. Iran is to be "rescued" from the global markets by a social revolution "predicated on social-structural class formations," based on ideologies put forward by "material forces" and "underlying economic forces" which have unfortunately been obscured by the "demands of Iranians for freedom of expression."

In this article Dabashi presents a brief overview of the current political situation in Iran, against a background of Shiah political history which is curiously distorted, and sometimes barely readable through the haze of malapropisms and paradoxical postcondemnerist formulations. To give just one short example, he writes:

Shi'ism had to bifurcate itself into a site of insurrectionary revolt and then into its own negation in order to see itself in the speculum of its own defeat, so that it could always-already rise again and remember itself triumphantly. Shi'ism does not forget but dis-remembers itself.¹

The principle of the Rule of the Jurist (*vilayat-e faqih*) is said to be "medieval" (a period that he defines as ending with the establishment of the Safavid state in 1501), and also to be based on "ideological foregrounding" that developed in the anti-colonial movements of the early 19th century, specifically in the Babi and Shaykhi movements – of which he approves. Shi'ism is essentialised, it is "a tempestuous template of revolutionary uprising," "ipso facto a religion of protest." "Not an historical moment has lapsed in which Shi'ism has not transmitted itself into one form of massive social movement or another." The quietist and state-supporting periods of Shiah history are dismissed as aberrations, as "a monstrous negation of itself." The Shiah dynasties "drained every ounce of revolutionary energy from the creative memory of Shi'ism" by making it a state ideology. The true essence of Shi'ism, the Shi'ism of Ali (thus, Alivid Shi'ism) is presented as a religion of "revolutionary resistance to tyranny," which is contrasted to Safavid Shi'ism, which is "the historical metamorphosis of an aggressive mode of revolutionary resistance into an ideology of repression."

One has to take issue with this picture of Safavid history, for while the late Safavid Shi'ism of Majlisi was oppressive (and brought disaster to Iran), it is perverse to take early Safavid Shi'ism (both before and soon after 1501) as a

¹ No page numbers are given because this article is a web publication.

prototype of true Shi'ism. The early Safavid movement consists of two elements, the Safavid sufi order, which was Sunni rather than Shiah until 1501, and extremist Turkoman tribesmen who have a dubious claim to be considered Muslims. By way of comparison, the cargo cultists of the Pacific during and after World War II seized on "Johnson" as a name of power, found both on outboard motors and in the distant White House, but they did not become any more American by seizing on the name alone. The Aqqúyúnlu tribe, who provided the Qizilbash warriors, are known to have worshipped Ali and revered the Imams, but also to have practised ritual cannibalism.¹ They are not, to my knowledge, known to have performed the pilgrimage or obligatory daily prayers (*salát*) of Islam, to have applied aspects of Islamic law, or built mosques and Quran schools. It is preposterous to consider them the ideal type of Shi'ism. Moreover their action was not "revolutionary resistance to tyranny" but cross-border raiding to seize booty from the Byzantines and neighbouring Muslim states. Dabashi, like Shariati before him, is building an ideology on an insubstantial fiction.

Within this framework, the Babi movement is seen as incarnating the "insurrectionary spirit of Shi'ism." The constitutional movement of the late 19th century is seen (correctly in my view) to have continuities with the Babi movement, as its legitimate successor, while the Bahai religion is regarded as the degenerate form of Babism. Babism is surprisingly said to have degenerated "at the point of its success" (what success is not specified), into "a pathological universalism," a "jaundiced reactionary religion."

According to Dabashi, the Bab led his "glorious revolutionary uprising" in 1848 (a year in which he was in strict confinement in the remote prison of Chihríq) which corresponded with the significant year 1260 in the Islamic calendar (in fact 1844 CE corresponds to 1260 AH). After his execution:

Baha'u'llah systematically eradicated every ounce of revolutionary energy from Babism and put it squarely at the service of the reigning monarchy and of Russian and then British colonialism. By the time that Iranians were getting ready to tear down the very foundation of Qajar monarchy in the course of the Constitutional Revolution, Baha'u'llah officially sided with Mohammad Ali Shah. His son and successor Abd al-Baha went even further and was knighted by George V and under the British Mandate established the center of his vanity in Haifa. And thus Shi'ism succeeded once again in giving revolutionary momentum to one massive social protest in the form of Babism and then degenerating upon its success into Baha'ism.

¹ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 80, 192.

Dabashi claims here that Baha'u'llah, who died in 1892, posthumously supported Mohammad Ali Shah, whose reign begins in 1896, and the British and the Russians – the three competing centres of political power in early 20th century Iran. This is a tired old anti-Bahai slander, the claim that the Bahai Faith is not really a religion, but a political movement created by colonialist conspiracies.¹ Dabashi writes as if Abdu'l-Baha went to Israel voluntarily because it was a British Mandate, but in fact he went there (in enforced exile) before the British arrived. He was knighted by the British when they drove the Ottomans out, for charitable work he had performed in the years Palestine was under Ottoman rule, and he never used the English honorific. Dabashi is selectively telling some bits of the story, producing an anti-Bahai polemic rather than a historical analysis.

It is not true that Baha'u'llah removed the revolutionary *religious* energy from Babism: quite the opposite. It was the Azali wing of the Babi movement that routinized the charisma, became concerned with conserving rather than expanding, and so lost its religious dynamism. Baha'u'llah on the other hand claimed to be not the next leader of the Babis, but the next theophany, the manifestation of God's will and God's attributes. Abdu'l-Baha, 'the mystery of God,' wore the mantle of charisma as well possessing the claim of rightful appointment.

There is however some truth in saying that Baha'u'llah removed the revolutionary *political* energy from the Babi *community*, if we distinguish the radical wing of the Babi community from what the Bab taught. Iranians who have sought to bend religion to the service of what they saw as political reform, such as Afghani and modern successors such as Shariati and Dabashi, see the stance of Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha as *de facto* helping the political establishment, by refusing to activate the political potential of religion. But for Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha, the most critical element of political reform for Iran, and one of the central planks of their religious doctrine, was the separation of religion and politics. That meant on the one hand that the state should grant freedom of religious practice, but also that religious leaders should confine themselves to religious matters, and that there should be one system of secular state law. Iranian reformers of 1892, 1905 and 1978-9 and even today have thought they knew better, that they could form a political coalition between selected strands of political religion and political modernism. In doing so they have sacrificed one

¹ This is based on the publication, in 1943, of what purported to be a Persian translation of a 'Political confessions, or the memoirs of Count Dolgoruki,' the Count being the Russian minister in Tehran from 1845 to 1854. According to these 'memoirs,' the Russians fostered the growth of Babism in order to undermine the unity of Islam. The memoirs are a 20th century forgery. See MacEoin, 'Charismatic Authority,' 148.

of the essential principles of the modern state, its secularism, for a short-term gain in mobilising the masses. Iran's curse has been reformers who have not understood the logic of a modern state, but have tried simply to incorporate some of its features and procedures – and because they do not understand, they have been willing to waken the dragons of religious activism, of class ideologies, and of ethnocentric nationalism which have then swallowed each attempt at reform.

Muhammad at Mecca and Medina

The power of a paradigm

In the history of Islamic societies we can see that, with few exceptions, there has been a de facto division of power between the holder of actual power and the enterprise of religion, centring on the Quran and religious sciences, and more or less institutionalised around the ulama (but never entirely excluding the self-taught 'layman' and the Sufi shaykhs), and that the ulama, at most times and places, did not concern themselves directly with matters of power. But there has also been a powerful paradigm of the ideal society, based on Medina in the time of Muhammad. The historical basis of that paradigm will have to be addressed.

The tension between the reality and the paradigm was perhaps always evident, but it has certainly been highlighted by the shift from patrimonial Middle-eastern states to the modern nation-state, whether under colonial rule or dominated by western-educated elites. In effect, the political realm that had previously existed, with some autonomy from religion but within the same cultural environment as the religion, was now transposed, culturally, towards the West. Islamic integrists have focussed on the traditional division of power – often incorrectly perceived as a western import – claiming that it is inadmissible according to the paradigm of Medina. They have sought to overcome it, in part by opening the religious enterprise to those without the formal training of the ulama, and in part by recasting Islam as an ideology on which they would build an 'Islamic state' and an 'Islamic society.'

In looking at the history of Islam in the early and classical ages, I have made grateful use of Ira M. Lapidus' massive overview, *A History of Islamic Societies*, from which we have seen that most Islamic societies at most times have in fact had a distinct religious sphere, relatively autonomous from the politics of the state. We have also seen, from Lapidus' work, that the basis of this autonomy was not the administrative order of the community of believers (the hierocracy), but the sacred texts and those individuals whose learning and reputation for piety made them, and not the Caliph and his apparatus, the centre to which people turned for religious guidance. Both of these themes were present also in an earlier article by Lapidus, 'The Separation of State and Religion in the Development of

Early Islamic Society,' in 1975,¹ in which he also makes another claim not found in the *History of Islamic Societies*. In the time of Muhammad, he says, "religious and political values and religious and political offices were inseparable," a situation that continued under the rightly guided caliphs:

The Caliphs personified Islam – the one element of identity common to the tribal factions that made up the community ... Yet *despite* the origins of Islam and its own teachings about the relationship between religious and political life, Islamic society has evolved in un-Islamic ways. In fact, religious and political life developed distinct spheres of experience, with independent values, leaders, and organizations.²

Two broad considerations should alert us to the possibility that the word '*despite*' here may be incorrect. The first is a dynamic that we have seen at several points in the survey of Islamic history, and earlier in the discussion of the first beginnings of functional differentiation in society: the concept of metaphysical transcendence creates the secularity of the world, and religions that claim to bring a revelation from the transcendent create a presence of the transcendent that is *in* the world but not *of* it. The powers of the political order may try to appropriate access to this transcendent, and they sometimes succeed, but their right to do so is no longer self-evident or uncontested. The priest, prophet or seer may also claim access to the transcendent, and denounce the king on that basis. So there is an inherent affinity between transcendent monotheism and the appearance of distinct religious and political spheres.

It could be that Muhammad, who felt and honoured the transcendent oneness of God as no other, did not really understand its social implications. Perhaps his teachings about the relationship between the religious and political life were simply inconsistent with his fundamental theological premises. But from what we know of him, this possibility does not appear *prima facie* to be very plausible. Perhaps Lapidus' supposition that "the origins of Islam and its own teachings" do not favour the development of autonomous religious and political spheres should be reconsidered.

¹ Lapidus does not claim to be the first to reject "the prevailing view among Islamists that classical Islamic society did not distinguish between the religious and political aspects of communal life" ('The Separation of State and Religion' 363). He cites a 1955 essay by H.A.R. Gibb that referred to the implicit recognition of the secularity of worldly rule in the work of Ibn Taymiyya (*ibid*, 365). Nevertheless, Lapidus' article in *IJMES* in 1975, by making his challenge to the accepted view in Islamic studies its central theme, can be regarded as a turning point in Islamic studies.

² 'The Separation of State and Religion,' 364, emphasis added.

The second point that should raise questions here is that Lapidus supposes that the source texts and origins of the Islamic community are hostile to the autonomy of religion and politics, but has also shown that a *de facto* autonomy did exist from Umayyad times on, and that the key role was played by the proto-ulama, “private students of religions who were without office, without institutional means of support, and without priestly status were the real authors of the new religion.”¹ These were the people who were understood by their contemporaries to be experts in the ‘source texts and early history’ of the Islamic community, and they – and later the Hanbalite school in particular – provided the basis for the differentiation of the secular and religious. It would be a strange historical irony if the texts and history did not contain any support for the differential structure erected and protected primarily by the masters of the texts and history.

If we turn to Lapidus’ evidence for an early, undifferentiated stage in Islamic history, we can see that it is cursory. Although he refers to Islamic teachings in the passage cited above, he does not provide any sources in the Quran or in the Islamic traditions of the sayings of the prophet, so the argument is in fact based only on what he supposes to be the origins of Islam, that is, on the historical situation of Muhammad at Mecca and Medina, and it is this that we will have to reexamine first.

We may begin by stressing the contemporary importance and solidity of the historical paradigm that is to be challenged:

... one need only skim the literature of the ulamas or the Islamists, or listen to the sermons ... to admit that there is an Islamic political imagination dominated by a single paradigm: that of the first community of believers at the time of the Prophet and of the first four caliphs. Independently of its historical reality, this model offers the militants of political Islam an ideal for Muslim society. Islam was born as ... a political and religious community in which there existed neither institutions nor clergy nor specialized function ... an egalitarian, undifferentiated society ...

From this paradigm result a certain number of recurring themes in Islamic political thought. The non-separation of the religious, legal, and political spheres is affirmed. The *sharia* should be the sole source of law as well as the norm for individual behaviour, both for the sovereign and for the simple believer. The definition of an autonomous political space, with its own rules, its positive laws, and its own values, is prohibited ...

¹ ‘The Separation of State and Religion,’ 369.

It is thus commonplace to say that in the Islamic political imagination, no distinction is made between the religious and the political orders. This idea is one of the deep convictions of the political actors in contemporary Islam ...¹

The Islamic consensus on this reading of early Islamic history has been almost unanimous. But it has been a qualified consensus: every historical manifestation of the supposed Islamic political community, including the reigns of the first four caliphs, has faced religious opposition from within the Muslim community. Revolts and assassination have been as common as peaceful reigns. One could say that the consensus that is preached and the consensus that is practised point in opposite directions.

It will be argued below that Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha regarded the essential separation of religion and politics not as a specifically Bahai teaching newly revealed for the contemporary world, but as a 'spiritual teaching,' that is, one of a class of religious teachings that may be stated in differing terms by the founders of the 'true' religions,² but are essentially the same teachings at all times. Therefore, although the time of Muhammad can hardly be thought of as the immediate historical background for our main topic, we should briefly consider this very large topic so as to establish that it is at least plausible that Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha would have thought the separation of church and state to be consonant with the original teachings of Islam, as revealed in the life of Muhammad and, in the next section, in the Quran.

Among the few ulama who have challenged the assumption that the Medinan model allows no room for distinct religious and political spheres is **Ali Abd-ur Raziq** (*Ali Abdurráziq*, 1888-1966), in *Islam and the Fundamental Principles of Government* (1925). He formulated the question in these terms: "Was

¹ Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* 12-13.

² The Bahai Faith recognises at least Zoroaster, Abraham, Moses, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad and the Bab as Manifestations of God, that is, as founders (as distinct from renewers) of divine religions. These figures serve as paradigms of a larger undefined set, the doctrine being that God has never left humanity without guidance. 'Founders' of religions of whom we know nothing, such as Adam and Noah, are assumed to conform to this paradigm. Other religious figures not mentioned in the Bahai writings, such as Mani or the founders of tribal religions, are accepted or rejected by individual Bahais, or classed as minor prophets, according to whether their behaviour and teachings resemble those of the paradigmatic figures. Thus while the potential set of Manifestations is unbounded, in practice the 'spiritual teachings' are those identified in the religions of the paradigmatic figures only, with a strong emphasis on the more recent.

Muhammad the master of a political government and the head of state, in the same sense as he was the Messenger (charged with) a religious Call, and the leader of a religious solidarity, or not?"¹ His answer to this rhetorical question is that "The (earthly) kingship of the station of prophecy is a task distinct from calling (people) to Islam, and outside the strict definition of being a Messenger Do not be shocked to hear that the Prophet had a function so distinct from the office of Messenger, and that the kingship he manifested falls under the category of mundane actions that are not linked to the status of a Messenger."² His position is that Muhammad did establish something resembling a state in Medina, and was its head, but that this state was rudimentary and *ad hoc*, the child of necessity and not of Islamic principles.

Abd-ur Raziq's message has been taken up (without acknowledgement) by **Qamaruddin Khan** (1916-1985), arguing against "the false theory of the Islamic State."³ He too describes the state established by Muhammad in Medina as rudimentary and incidental to Muhammad's calling as a Messenger, but also says that "He was the head of the state in virtue of his being the Messenger of God, and not because of any constitutional enactment."⁴ His point of course is that Pakistan and other nations cannot model themselves on the state of Medina, because they lack the essential element, a Prophet. This is a good point, but he retains the supposition that a Messenger is head of state by virtue of his station, which is inconsistent with his own demonstration that the Messengers of God recognised by Islam have not, generally, been the heads of any state (the exceptions being Solomon and David), and with his own earlier statement:

... the functions of state and religion are fundamentally different, the one governs the material interests of men and the other the spiritual. So if the one intrudes into the jurisdiction of the other it is bound to breed mischief and corruption. The state can never control the conscience of men, and religion can never manage the affairs of state.⁵

Abd-ur Raziq's thinking centres on the idea that the religious task of Muhammad is central and quite distinct from his political enterprise, which is not part of the message, while Khan shifts the emphasis to the uniqueness of the Prophet. Both agree that no identifiable institutions of state were established by Muhammad. While making grateful use of their work to identify Quranic texts and Islamic

¹ Ali Abd-ur Raziq, *Islam and the Fundamental Principles of Government* 47/98.

² *Op. cit.* 55/105-6.

³ Khan, *Political Concepts in Sunnah* 10.

⁴ *Op. cit.* 74.

⁵ Khan, *Political Concepts in the Quran* 52.

traditions, and agreeing with its broad lines, I would like to ask, given that Muhammad neither founded or changed state institutions in Medina, why they do not draw the conclusion that he never intended to found a state, did not do so, and was not a head of state?

Muhammad at Mecca

The first period of Muhammad's ministry spans approximately three years, from the first revelations until the time he announced his mission publically. The themes of the early revelations are the transcendence of God, hatred of idol worship, and rejection of the attitude, associated with paganism, that all that matters is advantage in this world. The message includes a strong this-worldly ethic, for instance regarding the right use of wealth,¹ but says nothing about the way Mecca or the individual tribes were structured politically. This preaching should not, in my opinion, be regarded as millennialist, but rather as reformist, because it is non-political and because these early revelations focus on an individual judgement, which only later is placed under the shadow of a looming judgement of the world.²

The new religion was at first shared in private, attracting new believers one by one. The Quranic verses, when used in prayer within the sacred enclosure at Mecca, were recited quietly. This period continued for some three years, and ended with a proclamation first to Muhammad's own family, and then in public. From this time on, the accounts speak of Muhammad preaching and reciting in public, at the fairs where people gathered, and visiting nearby cities and the encampments of groups underway, and of the humiliations he sometimes suffered. "The apostle offered himself to the tribes of Arabs at the fairs whenever opportunity came, summoning them to God and telling them that he was a prophet who had been sent. He used to ask them to believe in him and protect him until God should make clear to them the message with which he had charged his prophet."³

The reference to protection requires a brief explanation of the political structures of Mecca, and of North Arabia, at the time. These are non-state structures, preceding even a city-state, if we define the state as an enduring

¹ Rodinson, *Mohammed* 88.

² I have avoided addressing here another issue, which is that many of those verses that refer to a 'coming' judgement, for instance in the Surah of the Cave, in fact use the perfect tense and lack markers to show that Muhammad thought of this judgement as lying in the future. The issue is usually resolved by commentators with reference to a *sui generis* 'prophetic future tense,' which is hardly a satisfactory explanation.

³ Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad* 117 (proclamation), 141-2 (recitation), *passim* throughout this section (to page 207), and 194.

institution exercising a monopoly on coercion over the people living within a geographic area. Tribal authority was political only in the broadest sense. North Arabia was surrounded by states – the empires of Byzantium and Persia, the kingdoms of Yemen and Ethiopia, and princedoms along the Byzantine and Persian borders – but its peoples had not established any states. They had built up three significant cities, Mecca, Ta'if (*Tá'if*) about 180 kilometres to the south, and Medina about 320 kilometres to the north, but the social organisation was based on tribal identity and tribal authorities. Agricultural groups in the fertile oases, living as they were in the midst of open country from which nomadic warriors could appear at any time, tended to buy protection from one or other group of nomads.¹ Trade passing through could also be 'taxed,' unless it was very strongly escorted. Fairs provided meeting-places between the nomadic groups, and between nomads, agriculturalists and traders. The basic units were clans, with several clans acknowledging a common ancestor being grouped together in a tribe.

Raiding (*ghazú*) between tribes was common, but was constrained by truces at fixed times. This raiding should be distinguished from warfare, in that its main goals were theft and prestige: a small group would launch a surprise attack on another encampment, or on travellers who had not paid their dues to the clan claiming the territory, would steal mobile wealth and take captives (to be ransomed later), and then retreat to celebrate the exploit in poetry. The killing of a member of another clan or tribe could lead to a vendetta and disrupt the lives of both groups.² While there were customs and treaties between clans and tribes, this was not a system of civil law, because there was no provision for enforcement within the law itself. The vendetta substituted for this lack.

Within the clan, a chosen *sayyid* would lead by consent, and in consultation with other men of the clan. He would also serve as a battlefield leader. Where more than one clan joined in a battle, one person would be appointed to lead, since the situation did not allow for long arguments and debate³ – which is not to say that they did not happen. In one account that speaks volumes about the nature of authority within a tribe, the leader of the Hawazin (*Hawázin*) tribe, after arguing with others about the disposition of their forces for battle, says "You will either obey me, O Hawazin, or I will lean on my sword until it comes out from my back." On this occasion they obeyed.⁴

¹ Rodinson, *Mohammed* 12-13.

² For an example of such a vendetta, see Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad* 291-2.

³ The *sayyids* resemble the 'judges' who led the Hebrew commonwealth in times of war.

⁴ Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad* 567.

A clan would protect its own members from outsiders, by the threat of a vendetta if any were killed, and could extend this protection to freed slaves and other clients (*mawlá*). An individual without a protecting patron could be robbed or killed with impunity. If this appears primitive, it might be well to reflect that in Britain at that time, the tide of Rome had receded and the Celts, Angles, Saxons and Jutes were battling over tribal territories.

Mecca at the time of Muhammad was dominated by the clans of the Quraysh (*Quraysh*) tribe, who had developed the city as a trading centre and pilgrimage site. There was no leader for the city as a whole. Rivalry between clans was regulated by consultation in an assembly of clan chiefs and notables, in which the more important clans naturally had more voice than the smaller or poorer clans.

There is no evidence that Muhammad tried to replace this political structure with another, nor that he sought to lead his clan or to unite the clans under himself as a tribal leader. Rather, when his protectors in his own clan died, and the new leaders of his clan proved hostile to him, he sought the protection of other patrons who could ensure he would be able to continue his preaching.¹ That is, he conformed to the existing political structure, such as it was. In one of the Surahs dated about this time, God tells Muhammad, “Call to remembrance, for you are only one who calls to remembrance. *You are not (set) over them as a ruler.*”²

At first Muhammad had the protection of his wife and his clan, and good relations with the leaders of the city, and evidently shared their pride in the famous sanctuary of Mecca. “There was nothing at all revolutionary or shocking in the message – or not, at least, at first sight.”³ It might be argued that the individualism of his teaching undermined the ethics of tribal life:

The individual assumed a very special importance. The concern of the Supreme Being was for him. He had created him and would judge him without consideration of kinship, family or tribe.⁴

One of the most persistent complaints against Muhammad by the Quraysh, reported in the early *Life of Muhammad* by Ibn Ishaq (*Muhammad Ibn Is-háq*, circa 85-151 AH/ 704-767 AD), is that he separated kin from kin and sons from their father. While this individualism would undermine the tribal ethic, and eventually contribute to the largely urban character of Islamic civilization, it would not unambiguously cause tension with the city leaders, since their own

¹ Sanhoury, *Le Califat* 260.

² Quran 88:21-24: we will return to the Quranic texts below.

³ Rodinson, *Mohammed* 96.

⁴ *Op. cit.* 98.

urban mercantile way of life itself required a more individualistic ethic, and was at odds with the old nomadic ethic.

If the message of Muhammad was not a threat to the political structures of Mecca, his persuasiveness did make him a force to be noticed. The picture we have is of an active preacher and debater of religious issues. In a late Meccan Surah, God tells Muhammad that he should “Issue the call to the path of your Lord with wisdom and mild exhortation. Dispute with them, using that which is most gracious.”¹ He gained a following, and his having a number of male followers – that is, potential fighters – made him, in the eyes of the city leaders, a political actor. So they tried to co-opt him. One tradition has it that the chiefs of the Quraysh sent an emissary to Muhammad to ask him what he wanted of them, and to offer him of money, honour, kingship or medical treatment to drive away his spirits. This offer of kingship is said to have been repeated later, but Muhammad refused it, saying he was only an announcer and a warner.²

The persecution in Mecca appears to have begun following the incident of the satanic verses, in which a henotheist compromise with the tribal gods was first proposed, and then resolutely rejected by Muhammad.³ The organised persecution seems to have been relatively mild at first, amounting to an awareness among the elite that Muhammad’s success, if not his message, undermined their position in relation to their own clans. Attempts were made to discourage young men of good families from joining him, along with economic boycotts, propaganda, and beatings for the less important Muslims.⁴ Whether this was caused by the claim that the tribal gods and goddesses did not exist is not clear. After all, Jews and Christians and perhaps the *Hanif* would have said the same, and they were tolerated. It is clear that there was something of a polemic spiral, with opposition leading to increasingly biting personal denunciations by Muhammad of some important individuals in Mecca. The relative importance of wounded pride, alarm at the seduction of the young, and the desire to protect the tribal gods cannot be estimated. However we can say that so far as political factors played a role, it was not because Muhammad advocated or attempted to establish a new political order, but at most because he refused to be coopted as part of the existing order. Another factor was the death of Muhammad’s uncle Abu Talib, who had protected Muhammad, and his replacement as head of the clan by Abu Lahab, an opponent of the new religion.

¹ Quran 16:125.

² Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad* 132-134.

³ *Op. cit.* 165-7; Rodinson, *Mohammed* 106-8.

⁴ Rodinson, *Mohammed* 108-9.

Muhammad at Medina

In the light of the persecution for the Muslims in Mecca, Muhammad decided to take his followers to safety elsewhere, to the city of Medina (Yathrib), which lay on a fertile plain in a shallow valley extending north of Mecca. The political structure there was different to that in Mecca.

... Yathrib consisted of individual cultivated plots of ground and permanent houses which lay strewn about between palm plantations, gardens, and sowed fields. The rulers of this oasis were the [Arab] tribes of Aus and Khazraj ... they considered themselves South Arabs. Before they immigrated into Medina, the city is supposed to have been in the hands of the Jews. But the latter's economic power was apparent broken as a result of the ... South Arabian campaign of the Abyssinian satrap Abraha; from then on the Jews had lived dispersed among the Aus and the Khazraj, who had begun by being squatters on their land. Only the Qaynuqa^c (*Qaynuqá^c*) tribe [of Jews] had kept its enclosed quarter, but had likewise lost its land. Land was held only by the [Jewish] tribes of Nadir and Qurayzah, who lived among the Aus and had just recently attained an equal footing in their political relations with them.¹

The two main Arab tribes had adopted an agricultural way of life in the same oasis, but without any central authority. In a civil war between them, the Aus had at first lost to the Khazraj, but had recovered by means of an alliance with the Jewish tribes of Nadir and Qurayzah, leading to a balance of power and continuing tension. One would suppose that it also meant that neither party could send out the roving patrols that would be necessary to control the surrounding area, maintain links with the nomadic tribes, gather intelligence and forewarning of any attacks, and 'protect' any passing caravans, for a price. The internal tensions would have deprived the city of most of its external security, and threatened its economic life. As Islamic history is traditionally understood, the solution was to call on an external arbiter to create peace between the Khazraj and the Aus. I would suggest that Muhammad's role as arbiter in Medina developed over time, and the initial deal made with him envisioned only that he and his followers should provide external security and intelligence.

In the year 620, some men of the Khazraj tribe who were attending the pilgrimage festival in Mecca met Muhammad. The men of Khazraj converted, and returned to Medina to propagate the new faith, winning converts among the Aus

¹ Brockelmann, *History of the Islamic Peoples* 19.

as well as the Khazraj.¹ Muhammad sent a Quran teacher with them, and they developed a community with enviable speed, holding Friday prayers in open ground and making planned trips to surrounding areas to convert other tribes, sometimes with success. It is said that 40 men attended the Friday prayers in the open.²

In 622 Mohammad's followers in Mecca moved to Medina, followed soon after by the Prophet. Those of his supporters who were able, dispersed throughout the city, but the poor remained living in the Khazraj quarter, where Muhammad had a house whose courtyard served as a place of prayer. They slept in a covered gallery around this courtyard. They formed in effect a militia body-guard for Muhammad, a force of men permanently assembled and more or less ready.³

Muhammad's presence was more than an answer to the need for an arbiter to settle the quarrel between the Khazraj and Aus, but that is part of the story. From the sources we have about pre-Islamic Arabic culture, it would appear that the appointment of an arbiter to settle a serious dispute was a common custom, especially as a way of ending a blood vendetta. An arbiter had no means of enforcing his verdict, and the arbiter's own status would be harmed if one of the parties decided to ignore his decision. The result was that an arbiter would only accept appointment if he was sure that both parties were so desperate to end the vendetta that they would accept a decision against themselves as preferable to continued fighting. The appointment was simply to solve a particular dispute, and did not lead to any position of leadership over either party. A similar form of adjudication is set out in the Quran for dealing with marriage disputes: "If you fear discord between the two, they should appoint an arbiter from his people, and an arbiter from her people. If they desire a reconciliation, God will reconcile them."⁴

One would like to know more about precisely how Muhammad came to have the role of arbiter in Medina, and what he said himself about it, but the reliable records do not appear to provide a great deal of information. The fact is however that he did become an important arbiter in Medina, and evidently to general satisfaction, for two years after his arrival he is given that role in the text of the Treaty of Medina, which has survived in Ibn Ishaq's *Life of Muhammad*.⁵

¹ Brockelmann, *History* 20. Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad*, 196-199.

² Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad*, 199-200.

³ Brockelmann, *History of the Islamic Peoples* 21.

⁴ Quran 4:35.

⁵ Pages 231-233 The exact dating is difficult, since the structural evidence seems to me to indicate that the treaty is a compilation that has been amended at least once.

In the agreement, the various clans agreed to form one commonwealth (*umma*) under Allah's protection. The basic political units in the treaty are the tribes, some Jewish or pagan, and some partly pagan and partly Muslim, while the emigrants from Mecca (treated as a 'tribe' in the treaty) were entirely Muslim. The believers, who would be of various tribes, whether from Mecca or Medina, are also mentioned as if they were one unit ("Believers shall not leave anyone destitute among them by not paying his redemption money ..."). Other articles govern the relation between the pagans and believers, believers and Jews ("To the Jew who follows us belong help and equality. He shall not be wronged nor shall his enemies be aided") and confirm the customary laws of the various Arabic clans. Feuding was eliminated, not by replacing it with a criminal system but rather by allowing blood vengeance against a murderer while forbidding the murderer's own tribe responding. The Jewish tribes were obliged to contribute to the cost of war, and to participate in defensive war in the event of an attack on the city itself, and are guaranteed freedom of religion ("The Jews.... are one community with the believers: the Jews have their religion and the Muslims have theirs."). There is a certain degree of inconsistency, in that some articles group people by their belief, and others by their tribal affiliation, and some refer to individual duties. In some cases this is natural given the nature of the duty. In other cases it may reflect the fact that part of the treaty was drawn up quite early, when various tribes were holding prisoners belonging to other tribes within the city, or had unsettled blood-wit with them, while other sections reflect later conditions in which the Arabs could be treated as one unit, 'the believers,' and the Jews in their tribes as separate units. Muhammad is named as both the arbiter in disputes, which are to be resolved in "mutual advice and consultation," and as the apostle of God.

Far from reflecting a primitive unity of "religious and political values and religious and political offices," as Lapidus says, this treaty clearly shows that they were understood as two different things. Membership of the commonwealth of the believers crossed tribal boundaries and entailed mutual obligations not imposed on all members of the city, such as the duty to ransom one another. Membership of the city entailed other obligations, some of them equally imposed on all ("In every foray a rider must take another behind him") and some specifying the rights of tribes.

Although the two kinds of loyalty came together in one person for the Muslims who had accompanied Muhammad from Mecca, this does not mean that they were of the same quality. One could be a member of the city confederacy without being a believer, and there were Muslims who were not in Medina and were not covered by the treaty. Members of the city could bring disputes before

Muhammad as adjudicator for consultation and resolution, and Muslims (whether of the city or living elsewhere) could take their questions to the Apostle who might ask God for a revelation to resolve the issue. The reference of important political disputes to Muhammad as arbiter was made automatic (an innovation compared to Arab tradition), for the treaty says “if any dispute or controversy likely to cause trouble should arise, it must be referred to God and to Muhammad the apostle of God.” The believers however did not always refer their personal disputes to Muhammad as leader of the Muslim community, for a Surah revealed in Medina complains about the half-hearted believers “They do not (truly) believe unless they make you judge (*hakim*) in what has happened between them.¹ The religious duties of the believers that did not relate to the constitution of the city (such as the giving of alms (*zakat*), stipulated punishments for some crimes, and congregational prayer) were specified during the same period,² but are not included in the city constitution, nor limited to believers living in the city. Thus two kinds of identity, in the spheres of religion and of tribal and inter-tribal politics, can be clearly distinguished.

The fact that memberships of the political and the religious communities were distinct is reflected in the position of slaves. As believers, their status in the religious commonwealth was no different to that of freemen, but their status as slaves continued within the ‘political’ context. Muhammad taught a high *ethic* of slave-ownership, but did not change the customary legal context within which slavery existed. He himself sold some Jewish women, of the tribe of Qurayza, as slaves, to buy horses and weapons.³

Under the treaty arrangements, affairs within the tribes are separate to those between the tribes. A Surah dating from later in the Medinan period, after the surrender of Mecca, asks why the Jews come to Muhammad to be their arbiter, when they have the Torah which contains the judgement of God. The Mosaic law is endorsed, as among the Jews, and the Gospel as the law among the Christians, and the Book (the Quran) as among the Muslims. “We have prescribed to (each) of you a religious law (*shari‘ah*) and an open way. If God had wished, he would have made you a single religious commonwealth (*umma*).”⁴

Soon after Muhammad had moved to Medina, open feuding developed between the Muslims who had come from Mecca and the people of Mecca. It is notable that the Muslims who had converted among the tribes at Medina did not take part in the early raids led by Muhammad. It would appear that Muhammad

¹ Quran 4:65.

² Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad*, 235.

³ *Op. cit.* 466. The massacre of the Qurayza men will be described below.

⁴ Quran 5:47-51.

was acting as a political ('tribal') leader only on behalf of the Meccan group of his followers, who had become in effect a clan unit within the political structure of the city, rather than as the *political* leader of all the Muslims, and certainly not of the city as a whole.¹ Although we have seen that there was a substantial and active Muslim community in Medina before Muhammad arrived, the early expedition led by °Ubayda (*°Ubayda ibn al-Hārith*) consisted of 60 to 80 fighters, none of them from Medina.

Muhammad sent armed groups into the surrounding area, sometimes leading them himself.² During these expeditions he also made treaties of friendship with tribes outside of Mecca.³ Some of these patrols were as small as eight men, and not all of the expeditions led to battles or even meetings, which gives the impression that they were routine patrols to prevent the city being surprised and assert control over the open country. From this control would follow the right of the city to collect dues from those passing through its territory. If in any other situation we saw a group of homeless outsiders allowed to stay in a city, and immediately behaving this way, we would conclude that they had traded shelter and upkeep for mercenary services: that they had been hired in as security services. A sedentary community in an open landscape has two options: either it spends a good deal of its resources in maintaining military forces to monitor the lands around and protect its settlements and fields, or it submits to one group of mobile raiders, paying dues in return for protection from other raiders. The first option was not available in Medinah, because of the internal warfare. No group in the settlement could send any substantial part of its men out of the settled area. The tribal leaders of Medinah may well have imagined that, in welcoming Muhammad, they had bought external protection at a bargain price, without having to pay a share of their crops and without losing their independence. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that the bedouin clan of Banu Nasr, under Málík ibn °Auf, already served as a mercenary security force for the town of Ta'if⁴ while a group known as the Ahábísh did the same for Mecca.⁵

¹ Pace Sanhoury (*Le Califat* 262, 266), who claims that Muhammad was forced by necessity to assume the direction of temporal affairs on arrival in Medina, although the religious element of his teaching continued to predominate.

² The raids are reported in Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad* 281ff. The fact that only the emigrants from Mecca took part is confirmed by the lists of participants, and by Surah 2:218.

³ Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad* 285.

⁴ H. Lammens, article on Málík b. °Awf, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.

⁵ M. Watt, article Habash, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.

One of these patrols was sent with the specific instruction to observe the Quraysh, but in fact surprised a small Meccan caravan on the last day of the month of truce. The patrol captured the caravan and killed one of the Meccans.¹ This would be sufficient cause for a vendetta, and perhaps it is the origin of what later became full-scale warfare. Several of the stories and Quran verses show a strong resentment that the Muslims had been kept from worship at the shrine in Mecca,² so it could also be that Muhammad already considered he had a cause to fight the Meccans, and was simply waiting for the month of truce to end. But perhaps no war was intended, perhaps war grew from vendetta, and vendetta from raiding. According to one tradition, Muhammad later said, “Alas, Quraysh, war has devoured them! What harm would they have suffered if they had left me and the rest of the Arabs to go our own ways?”³ One interesting point about this incident is that Muhammad at first refused to allow the distribution of the booty taken from the caravan, on the grounds that the truce had been broken. That is, he accepted existing customs and political arrangements, until there was a revelation to the contrary.⁴

Muhammad’s forces had initial military successes in raids on the Meccan caravans, including a dramatic battle at Badr in which substantial Moslem forces left Medina to attack a large Meccan caravan and Quraysh forces from Mecca went out to defend it.⁵ For the first time, the Moslem forces included Arab converts from Medina. The military success and booty won by the Muslim forces, and the success of the peace within the city, no doubt raised Muhammad’s prestige. The political balance in the city must have changed because of the increasing numbers of converts among the Arabs in Medina, even if not all of them declared their faith out of complete conviction (if we may judge by the criticisms of doubters in the Medinan surahs). The position of the Jewish tribes was also shifting. A month after the battle of Badr, a Muslim killed a Jew of the Qaynuqa^c tribe in a quarrel, and the dead man’s tribe in turn killed the killer. Muhammad summoned his forces, besieged the tribe, and forced them to surrender. At the intercession of the head of the Khazraj, he changed the initial sentence of death to dispossession and banishment.⁶ Some time later Muhammad attacked the Nadir Jewish tribe, apparently because he suspected them of an attempt to assassinate him. They were expelled from the city, many of them

¹ Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad* 286-9.

² See e.g., *op. cit.* 288.

³ *Op. cit.* 500.

⁴ Quran 2.217.

⁵ See Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad* 289ff.

⁶ Brockelmann, *History of the Islamic Peoples* 24. Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad* 363.

settling at the existing Jewish settlement of Khaybar, a day's journey north of Medina.¹ Despite this, we read that one Jew joined the Moslem forces that went out to meet a Meccan force at the battle of Uhud (*Uhud*).² If there were more reports of the pagans and Jews joining the Muslim forces, one might think that, in the minds of the people of Medina, the city was becoming a city-state, with Muhammad as its governor. A single report of one individual who acted in this way is not sufficient.

In 627 the Meccans brought a great army against Muhammad, and he resolved to meet them in the city itself, which meant that the treaty of Medina would oblige all of the clans in the city to join in its defence. Muhammad organised workers from all of the clans in building a defensive trench to defend the city. The defence was successful. During the brief siege the Meccans apparently negotiated with the Jewish tribe of Qurayza within the city, hoping that they would switch sides, and did persuade them to renounce their alliance under the treaty of Medina. The Qurayza were accused by the Moslems of having invited the Meccans to attack, and of persuading clans outside Mecca to join the Meccans in the attack.³ According to the story, Muhammad prevented the Qurayza actually fighting against him during the siege, by sowing distrust between the Qurayza and the Meccan forces, in a way so cunning that one suspects the story has been embroidered.⁴

Once the Meccans had withdrawn, Muhammad attacked the Qurayza. After a siege of three weeks they had to surrender. Now the Qurayza tribe had formerly been allies of the Aus in their vendetta against the Khazraj, whereas the Qaynuqa^c had formerly been allies of the Khazraj. It is evident that the clans were still functioning as separate political units, and old alliances were still powerful. The Aus claimed that since the Qaynuqa^c had been shown mercy (in being banished, rather than killed), the Qurayza should also be spared. The result was a dispute between the two Arab clans, which was resolved in traditional fashion by sending for an arbiter from among the Aus, one Sa^cd ibn Mu^cádh, who had not been involved in the fighting because he had been wounded earlier. What follows is so astounding that it must be quoted verbatim: "When Sa^cd reached the apostle and the Muslims, *the apostle told them to get up to greet their leader (sayyid)*."⁵ The arbiter obtained an oath from the two Arab clans, that they would abide by his

¹ Brockelmann, *History of the Islamic Peoples* 25, Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad* 437ff.

² Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad* 384.

³ *Op. cit.* 450, 453.

⁴ *Op. cit.* 458-60.

⁵ *Op. cit.* 463. In the edition in two volumes published by Jami^ca al-Haqq Mahfuzeh, 1365/1900) this is volume 2, page 240.

judgement, and also *obtained the same oath from Muhammad*. He then gave his judgement, that the men of the tribe should be executed, their property confiscated, and the women and children sold into slavery.¹ Muhammad carried out the executions himself,² of some 600 or 700 adult men. One report says that some of the Qurayza had converted to Islam during the siege, and were spared, another speaks of a member of the tribe who was offered his life and his family, and refused.³ Sa'd himself died of his wounds soon after.⁴

The organisation of the clans of Medina to build and defend the trench has been cited as a decisive step towards the organisation of a state, "the moment at which the prophetic power assumed the appearance of a state."⁵ Yet it remained an *ad hoc* common action, under a common threat. There does not appear to have been even a temporary centralisation of power for the sake of defence. Muhammad's role still looks more like that of a chief of security, acting on behalf of the collective clan leaders, than the governor of a city state. He implements the decision of the *sayyid*. During the course of the siege Muhammad negotiated a partial peace, on the basis that Medina would pay the Ghatafán tribe a tribute in dates, but this treaty was rejected by the Medinans.⁶

The use of deliberate mass violence has been described as "inaugurating state violence and true warfare, [previously] unknown in Arabia, deriving from the Western practices in antiquity: killing all the men and enslaving the women and children."⁷ This seems in the first place to be an excessively Foucaultian view of the nature of the state, and also to contain an error in logic. Even if one holds that

¹ Brockelmann, *History of the Islamic Peoples* 26, Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad* 464.

² Other reports say that Ali and al-Zubayr performed the executions.

³ Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad* 94-5, 466, 465.

⁴ *Op. cit.* 468. For further discussion of the incident see Kister, 'Massacre' and the earlier treatments cited there. This article includes references to apologetic efforts to minimise the scale of the massacre, using a source-critical approach to Ibn Ishaq's account. These efforts strand on the fact that the lineage of the Qurayza did in fact vanish from history. Moreover (although Kister does not say so), the apologetic arguments that the massacre must be fictional because it would have been contrary to Islamic law and principles supposes that Medina was an Islamic state. But this is clearly not so: the war was an inter-tribal war, the treachery was a breach of an inter-tribal agreement, the conflict that resulted was between two Arab tribes, each protecting its clients, and its resolution by appointing an arbiter was in accordance with tribal custom. Neither state nor Islam is involved.

⁵ Djait, *La Grande Discorde* 40.

⁶ Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad* 454.

⁷ Djait, *La Grande Discorde* 41.

all states are built on mass violence, it does not follow that mass violence by definition institutes a state.

In 627, Muhammad concluded a ten-year truce with the Meccans, under which he and his followers would be free to make the pilgrimage to Mecca during three days each year. Muhammad bound himself to return any youths or clients of Mecca who might come to Medina to declare allegiance to him against the will of their patrons, whereas turncoats from his side going to Mecca would be allowed to remain there.¹

In the following year, Muhammad attacked the Jewish territory of Khaybar, which contained a number of fortified positions. In some places the Jews surrendered, and were allowed to remain as tenant farmers in what became a subservient territory of the Muslims at Medina. At other settlements it would appear that many or all of the men were killed, since we read of the distribution of the women as captives, yet other reports speak of them emigrating.² This is the first war of territorial conquest: its motives are not explained in the sources. The contradictory reports about the fate of the residents, and the distribution of spoils, appear to reflect later debates arising during the Islamic military expansion.³ We must suppose either that some of the reports are fictional, or that they represent a diversity of practices by independent groups of Medinan fighters, later attributed to Muhammad. In either case, we are entitled to question whether this is a war launched by Muhammad as head of the city-state of Medina, or the spontaneous continuation of inter-tribal rivalry in which the stronger raid, subdue or seize territory from the weaker because it is profitable and honourable, and not for religious or political motives.

An example of such raiding can be found in the earlier murder of the Jewish merchant Ibn Abí al-Huqayq (also known as Abú Ráfi^c) in his fortified house in Khaybar by five Muslims of the tribe of Khazraj in Medina. This daring raid seems to have been initiated by the Khazraj, motivated primarily by their rivalry with the Aus tribe in Medina, who had won prestige by carrying out a similar raid. The various accounts have very much the flavour of ‘counting coups’ in North American Indians’ culture of honour. In some accounts Muhammad is said to have approved the raid, but all accounts agree that he stipulated that the raiders should not kill women or children.⁴

¹ Brockelmann, *History of the Islamic Peoples* 27, Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad* 504-5.

² Brockelmann, *History of the Islamic Peoples* 28, Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad* 510-23.

³ Schöller, ‘Sira and Tafsir’ 38-9.

⁴ Harald Motzki, ‘The Murder of Ibn Abí al-Huqayq.’

From the surrender of Mecca

In 629, expeditions against the Bedouins in the northern desert induced most of these tribes to accept Islam.¹ Muhammad's power had grown greatly. In 630, following a brawl between a Bedouin tribe who had converted to Islam and some partisans of the Quraysh, which were said to include townsmen from Mecca itself,² Muhammad marched on Mecca with some 10,000 men, from Medina and the Bedouin tribes. The city fell without serious struggle. The idols in and around the Ka'bah were destroyed, an order was issued that idols in private homes should be handed over, and a few who had displayed treachery were executed.³ However the Meccans were not obliged to become Muslims,⁴ the pagan rites around the Ka'bah were at first allowed to continue, and Muhammad did not make Mecca his home and capital. The privileges of particular Quraysh clans to serve as custodians of the Ka'bah and to provide water for pilgrims were continued.⁵ A few days later, word came that Málík ibn 'Auf had assembled a large force south of the city, and Muhammad marched out to meet him at Hunayn. Muhammad left 'Attáb ibn Asíd ibn Abú'l-'Is ibn Umayya "in charge of Mecca ... to look after the men who had stayed behind."⁶ But this was not the installation of one of his own men to replace the elders who had run Mecca in an informal way previously: 'Attáb was himself a Meccan and had converted to Islam on the day Mecca was captured. He was again left in charge of Mecca when Muhammad returned to his home in Medina, and under the first caliph, Abu Bakr (*Abú Bakr*).⁷

Málík ibn 'Auf's tribe were routed in the battle of Hunayn, and lost all their possessions, but Muhammad treated him well, making an agreement with him and recognising him as the chief of the tribe.⁸ This 'appointment' was in fact to act as battlefield leader, in charge of forces that harried the city of Ta'if and eventually brought about its surrender.

Following the battle of Hunayn, and a brief siege of Ta'if, Muhammad led a military expedition towards Byzantine territory to the north. During this expedition, Muhammad appears to act as the leader of a state, making treaties with other states. He accepts the political submission of several non-Muslim

¹ Brockelmann, *History of the Islamic Peoples* 30.

² Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad* 541.

³ Their names are given by Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad* 550.

⁴ *Op. cit.* 567.

⁵ *Op. cit.* 553-4, 619-20, Sjadzali, *Islam and Governmental System* 59.

⁶ Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad* 568.

⁷ *Encyclopaedia of Islam* article 'Attáb ibn Asíd.

⁸ *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, article *Hawazin*. The terms of this agreement are unclear: did Málík ibn 'Auf pay Muhammad, or vice versa? Cf Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad* 593.

towns, by treaty, in return for the annual payment of taxation. The Byzantine governor of Ayla (*Ayla*),¹ and the people of other towns to the North, submitted and agreed to pay a poll tax. The term poll tax indicates this was a political relationship and not the acceptance of Islam. These leaders were left in their posts. The Christian ruler of Duma (*Dúma*) was captured in an ambush: he was returned to his town on the same terms.² Clearly Muhammad had no intention of replacing the existing methods of government with an Islamic system.

In South Arabia the church at Najran refused to accept Islam, and after attempting to win over the Bishop and prince who had been sent to Medina to negotiate with him, Muhammad agreed on a treaty that granted the kingdom freedom of worship, and obliged it to pay tribute.³

Despite the treaties, we cannot conclude that Muhammad by this time had a concept of an Islamic political entity, or of himself as a head of state. The treaties made with these leaders have the form of personal promises by Muhammad to restrain his followers from attacking the towns, their ships and their caravans. Muhammad is not described in the treaties as the ruler of Medina, of Mecca, or of the Muslims. It would appear that he is still acting as the battlefield leader of a group of Arab tribes, according to the tribal custom.

The Arab tribe of Thaqif (*Thaqíf*) in the town of Ta'if had not accept Islam, but had apparently made a political treaty of some sort with Muhammad, since they sent a deputation to him.⁴ One member of this deputation accepted Islam, and later returned to his people to preach the faith, but they killed him. The tribal leaders – left in place, as in other instances – eventually sent another delegation to Muhammad, to accept Islam, and in this case he did appoint a young man of the tribe (the meaning is perhaps, the youngest of the tribe's leaders), who knew the Quran, "over them." Is this an instance of a governor appointed by Muhammad? He was at any rate not charged with the destruction of the tribe's idols: that task went to older men. The instructions that Muhammad gave to him before he departed concerned how he should lead the congregational prayers.⁵

During this 'year of deputations' (9 A.H/631 AD), various tribes sent deputations to Muhammad. Since the deputations included tribal members who were already Muslims, this must reflect some religious dynamic taking place within the tribe, as well as the political judgement of the tribal leaders that the

¹ Brockelmann, *History of the Islamic Peoples*, 34.

² Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad* 607-8.

³ Ibn Ishaq (*op. cit.* 270ff) places this incident in his account as if it occurred in the early Medinan period, but this cannot be correct.

⁴ Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad* 614.

⁵ *Op. cit.* 616.

two Muslim cities of Mecca and Medina were too powerful to fight. Some apparently came expecting a political deal, and left baffled when they were instead asked to worship.¹ Others came to submit to Islam, and found themselves confirmed in their leadership.² Muhammad would typically send them home in the company of trusted Muslims charged with collecting the alms and instructing the people in Islam.

In several cases, Muhammad is said by Ibn Ishaq to have appointed a governor for the territory and tribe concerned, or to have confirmed one rival for leadership within the tribe as its leader. One such case is a report that al-°Alá' ibn al-Hadramí was appointed by Muhammad as governor of Bahrain, but other reports speak of him only as leading the Muslim forces sent to counter a Sasanid move there, and some reports place these events after the death of Muhammad.³ The reports can be reconciled if we suppose that Muhammad first sent Al-°Alá' as a missionary, to invite the Arabs of Bahrain to Islam, with some success. We know he did not become the governor, since the area already had a centralised leadership, in the person of al-Mundhir ibn Sáwá, who accepted Islam and remained in power. Al-°Alá' did however serve as an intermediary, transmitting al-Mundhir ibn Sáwá's questions to Muhammad, and Muhammad's replies. In one of these, Muhammad says to the ruler "... as long as you act rightly we shall not depose you." Muhammad also sent other representatives to Bahrain, charged with collecting religious dues and instructing the people in religious duties. Al-Mundhir ibn Sáwá died shortly before or after Muhammad's death, and was not succeeded by Al-°Alá', but the latter must have had some military authority since he later led a rash expedition against the Sasanids in Fars.⁴ The reports that Muhammad appointed him governor derive from his later adventures, and his role as an intermediary. The fact that Ibn Ishaq clearly says he was appointed the governor of Bahrain, but other information shows that this is very unlikely, is reason for doubting other such instances. It may be that Ibn Ishaq is interpreting

¹ One of the representatives sent by the tribe of Banu °Amir was asked on his return what had happened. He said, "Nothing, he [Muhammad] asked us to worship something. I wish he were here now and I would kill him with an arrow." Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad* 632.

² The 'deputation of the Kings of Himyar' for instance (*Op. cit.* 643).

³ Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad* 636; *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, articles *al-Bahrayn*, *al-Katif*, *Fars*, and *Kays b. °Asim*.

⁴ *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, article *al-Mundhir b. Sáwá*. The article is the work of Kister, whose approach to the hadith literature is catholic rather than critical. While the synthesis is attractive, "God knows best."

what he has heard on the supposition that the Muslim community under Muhammad had a political structure resembling that in his own time.¹

In the same year, it was announced at the Hajj pilgrimage at Mecca that naked and polytheistic rites around the Ka'bah would not longer be permitted, that after that year no polytheists would be allowed to make the pilgrimage,² and that only Muslims might serve as guardians of the shrines and in the other offices relating to the pilgrims. However we do not have any indication that any of the Meccan leaders concerned were still polytheists.

During the latter part of his life, Muhammad sent messengers to various rulers in surrounding regions. The accounts of these emissaries are not to be relied upon, for they include details of dealings within the foreign courts that the Arabs could not have known about. One of the accounts has the Byzantine emperor proposing to submit to Muhammad, and his leading men arguing with him and refusing, as if the emperor had no more authority than an Arab leader in his tribe! However it seems certain that some such emissaries were sent, since Mary, one of Muhammad's wives, was a Christian slave who was sent to him by the ruler of Egypt. The sending of emissaries has been cited as evidence that Muhammad was acting as a head of state, but are these ambassadors, or missionaries? It is not clear exactly when they were sent. Ibn Ishaq says that it was some time after the battle of al-Hudaybiya (6 A.H./628 AD), at which time Muhammad's standing in Medina was that of a man with a large following, but certainly not a ruler. And the accounts of their messages (which are not to be relied on) present them as a call to faith without political implications.³

Conclusion

We have seen that in the varying circumstances of successive periods in Muhammad's ministry, there is no indication that he taught any political programme as part of the message of Islam, or that he established or sought to establish any state, or sought any political leadership for himself. In the early

¹ Sjadzali, *Islam and Governmental System* (27-8) supposes both that Muhammad "as head of state" was at first the sole judge, although we have seen that this was not so in the case of judging the Qurayza, and further that he appointed some of his companions to act as judges outside of Medina. But since Muhammad left the existing rulers in place, it is difficult to see how such appointees could have established an effective judicial power, in the days before judicial independence from the ruler had been established (during the Umayyad dynasty).

² Quran 9:28.

³ *Life of Muhammad* 652, 499-500, 653-9 respectively.

pluralistic Medina, the polity was *not* defined in terms of religious allegiance,¹ for Muslims outside Medina owed duties to other leaders, and non-Muslims in Medina were members of the confederacy without being bound by the religious laws of Islam. Muhammad accepted the political structures he found, and so far as he acted in a political role himself, it was as the sayyid of a clan providing security for the settlement of Medina, and later as arbiter in some disputes. In taking his followers from Mecca to Medina, he created a schismatic clan of the Quraysh, the clan of emigrants, with himself as its leader. This was a political act forced upon him by circumstances. He did not seek to incorporate the converts made in Medina and elsewhere into this clan: they remained in their own clans with their own leaders, and on occasion even fought against the clan of exiles, as well as fighting among themselves.²

The political structures of the tribes were loose and consultative, but they also knew the custom of selecting a battlefield leader. By the time of the battle of the Trench, Muhammad's standing in Medina was such that he organised both Muslim and non-Muslims in the town for its common defence, yet soon after, when the Jewish tribe of Qurayza had surrendered, and the Aus were disputing with the Khazraj over what to do with them, the dispute was settled by the two tribes appointing an arbiter, and they, and Muhammad, agreed to abide by the arbiter's decision. Thus while the depth of Muhammad's leadership, in terms of status and respect had certainly grown, its scope had not. He was the permanent leader only of the 'emigrants,' who were in effect a new clan of the Quraysh living in Medina.

As first Mecca and then other tribes and cities surrendered to him, the general pattern is that he accepted and confirmed whatever leaders and type of politics prevailed.³ The reports that he appointed governors over them are insubstantial, although he did send people to collect religious dues and teach religious duties. If indeed he sent his governors to rule them, what were his instructions? What system of government was imposed, and what was its theory? The claim that Islam was from the beginning both a religion and a political order appears completely hollow. When we look for the contents of this system in the lifetime of Muhammad, there is a great deal about the ethics of society, but no new

¹ Pace, Arjomand, *Shadow of God*, 33.

² Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad* 491, 496.

³ This has been studied in more detail by Muhammad Husayn Haykal, as described in Sjadzali, *Islam and Governmental System* 125-6. The principle forms that Muhammad encountered and affirmed are the family oligarchy of Mecca, tribal confederation of Medina, varying traditions of authority in the Bedouin of north and south Arabia, and the Yemeni monarchy.

political system. In the long term, the sense of an identity above that of the clans contributed to the caliphal state, and made the clans irrelevant as political units. But that process took generations: in Muhammad's time the clans were the political units, and the Arabs had no ruler.

The succession to Muhammad

The final occasion on which Muhammad might have established a state was at his death, by designating a successor and stipulating for him the authority of a ruler: an obligatory authority with a monopoly on the legitimate exercise of coercion. It is clear, and is admitted also in the Sunni sources, that Muhammad did designate Ali as his *wali*, but it is equally clear that at the time of Muhammad's death it did not occur to the leading Muslims who met immediately after his death, or apparently to Ali, that this designation entailed the political leadership of a nascent empire.¹ Rather, in a scene orchestrated by Abu Bakr, the leading Meccan Muslims were persuaded of the need to establish a ruling authority among themselves, which developed the form of the caliphate. The accounts we have of their discussions concern political issues only, with no mention (at that stage) of religious issues or religious leadership. One opinion at that meeting was that the tribes from Medina should chose one leader (*imám*) and those from Mecca another – in other words, to continue to treat the group who had accompanied Muhammad from Mecca as a clan within the polity at Medina.²

Ali's claim to occupy the office of caliph does not appear to have been raised until later, when the caliphate had already become an established institution. Moreover Ali's later claim, if we exclude retrospective Shiah interpretations, does not seem to have been based on his status as *wali*, but rather on popular acclaim and the immediate threat of civil disorder following the murder of the Caliph Uthman, which required that someone should take charge. The conclusion seems clear: Ali's nomination as *wali* did not establish any office of ruler. We can see that the tribal structures and interclan political system persisted into his time, for

¹ Madelung's reconstruction of events is persuasive, so far as he demonstrates Abu Bakr's determination to seize power, but the small part played by Ali and his partisans at this stage could be explained not by their being weak political players, but by their not yet being aware that the game of political rule was being played. Madelung appears to assume that Ali was already conscious that there could be such a thing as the ruler of the Arabs, and that he or his partisans would have claimed that position had they been able. But I have shown that Muhammad did not rule the Arabs, and I suggest that this implication of Abu Bakr's appointment did not become clear until he had begun the ruthless collection of religious dues and the execution of opponents. (Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad* 42-50.)

² Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah* vol. 1, 397.

at the battle of Siffin (*Siffin*) in the civil war against the founder of the Umayyad dynasty, Ali accepted a truce to allow the adjudication of two arbiters, who were to decide between the parties in accordance with the Quran and the shared ‘Sunnah’ – the latter meaning inter-tribal custom rather than the Sunnah of the Prophet.¹ The rejection of Ali’s compromise by the Kharijites implies a rejection of a dual structure of authority, so that they have with some justification been called the first Islamic integrists.

Why was there a need to establish a ruler, and a state, following the death of Muhammad? Sanhoury (*Ahmad as-Sanhúri*, 1895-1971) neatly divides the issues facing the leaders of the Muslim clans in two: the question of the establishment of an authority in itself, and the question of who should occupy the office. But he slips too easily past the first, asserting simply that *tout le monde* was agreed on the necessity of establishing an authority – and accompanies this with a sneer at Ali Abd-ur Raziq who has been so confused as to question it.² ‘Everyone knows’ is not an argument, but the confession of the lack of one. Nor can the two issues be entirely separated, for if the argument for the necessity of establishing a temporal authority rests on the need to maintain the unity and organisation of the community, then the fact that there was neither a designated leader nor any agreed method of choosing the leader must weigh against this necessity. In the absence of agreement as to the holder or procedure, the establishment of the office of ruler would inevitably lead to *disunity*, which this office was supposed to prevent. In the event, it quickly led to civil wars. A thing can hardly be regarded as a necessity, if it can reasonably be foreseen that it will undermine the cause on which its necessity was argued. Perhaps there was a more limited need, for a military leader? We have already seen that there was a custom of agreeing on a battlefield leader when several clans fought side by side, and also how limited his authority might be (see page 100 above). But the Muslim clans were not at this point engaged in war.

Perhaps then the leaders of the clans at Medina foresaw that some other clans, who had perhaps embraced Islam half-heartedly, would seek to withdraw and avoid paying the alms? This did in fact happen soon after the death of Muhammad, leading to the first internecine wars as these clans were forcibly kept within the Muslim community. These developments might well have been

¹ One of the two versions of this treaty document does specify ‘the sunnah of the Prophet,’ but I concur with Ayoub and most other authorities that the version reported from Abú Isháq ash-Shaybání is likely to be authentic. (The texts are translated and discussed in Ayoub, *The Crisis of Muslim History*, appendix II)

² Sanhoury, *Le Califat* 279. In this Sanhoury echoes the early reception of ‘Abd-al Raziq’s work in Egypt.

foreseen, justifying the need to appoint a war leader or a ruler to prevent secession. But a community from which one may not withdraw, in which membership is compulsory and is maintained if necessary by force, is a state. The argument is thus circular: an authority was established, and with it a state, because they were required to maintain the 'state' character of the community.

From whence the desire for a state, from whom, and for whom? Did it relate to the ambitions of the leaders of some clans to dominate others, a collective ambition to extend an empire over surrounding peoples, or a desire to maintain the unity of the Arabic-speaking peoples? We cannot answer these questions without speculating about what the principle actors might have feared by way of alternative, and also about what might have been, had they chosen to retain the political structures of the clans, while replacing polytheistic with Islamic beliefs and rites, and had the first rulers of the Arabs not set out to expand their rule by conquest. We will leave the reader with history's unrealised possibilities, having at least established the moment and action by which an Islamic state was established, in the decision to accept Abu Bakr, who had been designated by Muhammad only to lead the congregational prayer in his stead, as the first caliph. That decision took force, and the Arabian people first felt that they had become a people subject to a ruler, when Abu Bakr decided to enforce the collection of the alms with military force. Its blasphemous implications emerged when Uthman adopted the title Vicegerent of God. Its logic of social division was realised with the establishment of the Umayyad dynasty, whose justification was to exact revenge for the murder of Uthman, a revenge demanded by Muslims against Muslims. Under the Umayyads, power was in the hands of those who could command the most soldiers. Islam had provided a cover for the introduction of an absolute dynastic rule: the religion had been taken over by a state.¹

The establishment of the caliphate marks the beginning of a short period of politico-religious rule that continued until, in the later Umayyad period, the typical Islamic configuration of religion and politics began to emerge, with distinct religious institutions coalescing around the Book and the ulama, and an attitude of religious distrust of the worldliness of caliphal power. As the seat of the Caliphate moved from Medina to Kufah to Damascus, the centres of Islamic learning remained, geographically as well as functionally distinct from the throne. During this period Islam was, in varying degrees that are much disputed, *din wa dawla*, both religion and government in one. The question is, when the caliphs changed laws found in the Quran or based on the practice of Muhammad (as they undoubtedly did), were they seen as religious leaders standing in the shadow of the authority of the Prophet and redefining Islamic teachings with *religious*

¹ Madelung, *The succession to Muhammad* 46-50, 326-7.

authority, or as political leaders making pragmatic decisions about what was possible and advisable for the state in their day? How deliberate was their undoubted role in selecting and shaping what we have received as the religious teachings of Islam?¹ We can at least conclude that Lapidus is precisely wrong in saying that the early Caliphal period is the norm, and other Islamic societies have developed in “unislamic ways” (see page 95 above). Rather, it is the early caliphal period that is exceptional in relation to both the time of Muhammad and later Islamic history.

One reason for this exception is practical rather than doctrinal. We have seen that in the period of Muhammad at Medina, the difference between membership of the religious commonwealth and membership of the polity was visible to all, since not all members of the Medinan confederation were Muslims, and not all Muslims lived in Medina. With the conversion of most of the Arabs in the peninsula, and the expulsion of the Jews under Abu Bakr, the two forms of membership largely coincided.

Religion and politics in the Quran

We have seen above that Islamic societies have almost always displayed a *de facto* differentiation between the holders of worldly power and the enterprise of religion, which was institutionalised primarily around the ulama. Lapidus represented this as showing that Islamic societies “evolved in un-Islamic ways,” because “the origins of Islam and its own teachings” did not favour this differentiation of religion and politics. Since he did not cite any Quranic sources

¹ The seminal work here is Crone and Hinds, *God’s Caliph*. On the one hand, this takes as a given the traditional view that Muhammad united both political and religious power in his own person (page 2), while on the other hand showing that “the Prophet ... played no legitimacy role in Sufyánid political theory” (i.e., before the year 66 AH/685 CE, see page 25) and that Muhammad’s first appearance on coins and inscriptions after that date is as a religious figure and founder of the Faith and not as a ruler. The letter of Caliph al-Walíd II which they cite in full (appendix 2) clearly shows that in the Umayyad period the official ideology was that “prophets and caliphs alike are ... God’s agents, and both dutifully carry out the tasks assigned to them, the former by delivering messages, and the latter by putting them into effect” (to quote their own summary at page 27). The Umayyad Caliph, as God’s deputy, was even seen as superior to Muhammad, God’s mere messenger (28-30), which again implies that Muhammad was not seen as a ruler, but purely as one bringing God’s message. Why do Crone and Hind’s not draw the obvious conclusion, that Muhammad did *not* unite religious and political power, and was only vested with the role of ruler of Medina retrospectively, by the ulama? They present no counter-evidence at all: they seem simply disinterested in the historical Muhammad and the Quran, and therefore content to follow tradition ‘in matters indifferent.’

to define what he thought would be truly Islamic, we have turned first to “the origins of Islam,” as represented in scientific histories, Islamic traditions and the biography of Muhammad, to see what relationship between religion and power is indicated there. From these sources, we can present three theses about the origins of Islamic society:

- Muhammad did not seek power, try to establish a form of government, or stipulate any design for an Islamic government. He did however preach some ethics, including authority and obedience, consultation, justice, care for the weak, and keeping one’s treaties, which are as applicable in the sphere of government as in any other sphere of life.
- Muhammad’s entry to Medina should be seen not as the arrival of the new ruler, but as the arrival of the new chief of security, with his men: homeless and virtually tribeless men who would be offered a place to live and a way to earn a living, in return for services to the city. They settled in Medina as one small and landless political unit among larger and wealthier neighbours. The services for which they were engaged were first to patrol and dominate the area surrounding the oasis, so as to ensure security for caravans and other travellers and to extract dues for this protection and attract trade to the city; second, to provide the core of a defence force, the substantial forces being provided by the various tribal units of the city when it was attacked; and third, in some circumstances Muhammad was to act as the chosen arbiter in disputes, his decisions being enforced not by his own men but by the Medinan tribes.
- In Mecca, in relation to neighbouring rulers, then in Medina, and again in Mecca following its surrender, Muhammad usually left the existing institutions and customs of rule in place and related to them as if they had a right to exist, and a duty to rule justly. He acted as if he did not have a monopoly on power, and did not have a preference between the various forms of governance he encountered: monarchy, tribal ‘democracy,’ tribal oligarchy, and city federations. Only in some war situations does he appear to act temporarily as if he has the monopoly on coercion within a geographical area, thus satisfying our definition of government. But that is also what one would expect of the chief of security.

We should now turn to the Quran itself to see whether it supports this view of Muhammad’s original intentions, his practice, and his later thinking. Five groups of verses are most striking, the verses of prophetology which we may call the warner verses, those relating to Muhammad’s arbitration, which I will call

judgement verses, those referring to worldly leadership, the ‘authority’ verses, and ‘freedom’ verses.

The warner verses

We have already cited one remarkable example of the ‘warner’ verses:

Call to remembrance, for you are only one who calls to remembrance (*mudhakkirun*). You are not (set) over them as a ruler (*musaytirin*). If anyone turns away to unbelief, God will punish him with a mighty punishment. (88:21-24)

All authorities agree in placing this in the Meccan period, with Muir, Nöldeke and Grimme placing it early in the Meccan period, and the traditional dating by Islamic scholars placing it fairly late in the Meccan period.¹ Watt dates it in the early Meccan period and glosses this verse “that is, Muhammad only conveys a message and has no authority.”² The widely respected commentator Sayuti, author of the *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* which sets out traditional views of the occasions on which verses were revealed, only comments that this verse was revealed before the command of jihad, implying that the latter abrogates the verse above. He is presumably thinking of Surah 22 (eg verse 78), which does indeed postdate Surah 88. However the sentiment of Surah 88:21 is repeated in Surah 9, quite possibly the last Surah to be revealed, which concludes (vv 128-9):

There had come to you an apostle from among yourselves ... but if they turn away, say ‘God is sufficient unto me, no god is there but him...’

This surah also contains extensive references to fighting, and about those who seek to evade their duty to fight. Clearly the regulations of jihad and the principle that Muhammad was not a ruler cannot be incompatible, for they are taught at the same time. Surah 5, which according to the traditional dating is the second-to-last Surah to be revealed, says (v. 102) “Nothing is incumbent on the apostle except preaching (*al-balāgh*) ... “³

The verse (88:21) has a parallel in Surah 6, also from the late Meccan period:

¹ Surah 88:21-24; Watt, *Inleiding tot de Koran*, appendix table, page 219.

² *Companion to the Qur’an* 306.

³ Muhammad Abduh’s (*Muhammad ‘Abduh*, 1849-1905) attempt at reconciling the problem of “You are not (set) over them as a ruler” is interesting: he says that it is only *religious* authority that is denied to Muhammad by such verses! (Cited in Sjadzali, *Islam and Governmental System*, 91) If this were true, the whole treasury of Islamic traditions that reveal Muhammad’s understanding of the Quran and his rulings on particular cases would be irrelevant, but this is not in fact Abduh’s position, nor that of any Muslim.

Say, I am not over you as a guardian (*wakīlin*) (66).

I [Muhammad] am not over you as a warder (*hafīzan*) ... (104) We have not set you [Muhammad] over them as a warder, and you are not over them as a guardian. (107)

Similarly in Surah 4, from the early Medinan period:

We have sent you to the people as a messenger (*rasūlan*) ... whoever obeys the messenger has obeyed God, and as for those who turn away, we have not sent you as a warder over them. (79-80)

And similarly:

We know what they say: you do not have the power of enforcement (*be-jabbārin*)¹ over them. Cause them to remember, through the Quran ... (50:45)

In Surah 25, from the Meccan period, God tells Muhammad:

We have only sent you as one who gives glad tidings (*mubashīrun*), and as a warner. Say, I do not ask your for any recompense for it, except that every person shall make a path to his Lord. (56-57)²

And in a Surah that must date from relatively late in the Medinan period, he is told:

O Prophet, truly we have sent you as a witness (*shāhidan*) and one who gives glad tidings and as a warner, and as one who calls the people (*dā'iyan*) to God, by His leave, and a lamp giving light. (33:45-6)³

The denials of authority cited above might mean only that Muhammad had no authority over those who rejected him, but in Surah 15, Muhammad is told he has been granted the verses and the Quran, and should not envy what has been granted to others (87-88). That is, others *within* the Muslim community might have more wealth and more authority in the tribal or city structures than the Messenger, and Muhammad must accept this situation.

¹ The term typically means 'oppressor' or 'overbearing' but in 59:23 it is a name of God, the Irresistible.

² The individualism of the last sentiment is remarkable, if we consider that Muhammad addresses a society that is still in transition from the old order of tribal structures, collective responsibility and collective religion. See also 2:119, 11:2, 41:4.

³ See also 48:8.

Muhammad's lack of temporal authority is underlined by God's instruction that he should consult his companions "in the affair" (3:159). The word is *al-amr*, which can refer ambiguously to a command, authority, a business matter or simply to any fact or situation, so the scope of the verse is not immediately apparent. It is a Medinan verse, and refers to the battle of Uhud in which Muhammad was also the military commander. In the codex of Ibn Abbas (*Ibn Abbás*), representing the early Quranic text used in Medina, the verse reads "consult them in *part of* the affair."¹ It seems most likely that it refers to consulting the leaders of the various elements of the Medinan federation, in relation to military command. This is in accordance with the customary limitation of authority of the chosen military leader, the *sayyid* (see page 100 above), who had to lead by persuasion.

Once we know what to look for in the Quran, 'warner' verses strike us on almost every page:

7:184 "He is only a clear warner (*mundhírun*)."

7:188 "I am nothing but a warning, and one who brings glad tidings."

10:108 "I am not over you as a guardian."

11:12 "... You are only a warner, and God has all things in his charge."

13:7 "You are only a warner."

15:89 "And say: I am the clear warner."

16:82 "Nothing is incumbent on you except clear preaching."

17:54 "We have not sent you to them as a guardian."

22:49 "Say: O men! I am only a clear warner to you."

27:92 "And if any stray, say "Truly I am only one of the warners."

34:28 "We have not sent you except as that which is sufficient for the people, by way of glad tidings and a warning."

39:41 "You are not over them as a guardian."

42:48 "If they turn away, we have not sent you as a warder over them."

¹ Jeffery, *Materials*, 193, 196.

50:2 “They are astonished that a warner has come to them, from among themselves.”

79:45 “You are only a warner for those who fear it [i.e., the Hour].”

Anyone with a concordance can multiply these examples, by following the Arabic terms indicated for messenger, warner, preacher, witness, summoner, one who calls to remembrance and one who brings good news, and also the terms for the roles Muhammad does *not* have: warder, guardian and ruler and similar.¹ When we put these verses together, it becomes clear that the very meaning of Muhammad’s most common title, *rasūl* or messenger, is “the one who warns, preaches summons and bears witness, but who does *not* have the function of warder, guardian or ruler, nor any power to compel.” And when we see how numerous such verses are, it begins to appear as if the distinction between prophetic and temporal authority is in fact one of the central themes of the Quran. Rather than claiming that Islamic societies “evolved in un-Islamic ways,” we may have to concede that Islamic societies did in fact understand what Islam means, better even than some orientalist.

Similar declarations about demarcated religious authority are made concerning the Quran or Furqan, which is a warning (25:1), about all the prophets collectively (6:48, 34:34,44, 35:24, 18:56, 29:18, 36:17) who are all sent only to preach (16:35), and also about individual prophets such as Noah (71:1-2), Moses (17:105, 5:21, 5:28), Hud (46:21), Lot (54:33-36), and Jesus (5:49). The Prophet Shu’aib says ‘I am not set over you as a warder’ (11:86).

Muhammad is called “one of the warners of old” (53:56), placing him in the same line as all of these figures, whose warnings have been rejected, along with the prophets who brought them. Like Baha’u’llah after him, it appears that Muhammad understood the demarcation of religious and temporal authority as the basic pattern of God’s dealing with humanity, and not as something particular to his own person or the exigencies of the time.

If we look at the contexts of all of these ‘warner’ passages, we can generalise about the point that is being made. The limitation of the authority of the prophets has two aspects: on the one hand, the prophets do not have any right to worldly authority over people, the power to compel them (for the people must be free to hear the warning or not), or the right to judge and punish. Nor are the prophets responsible if the people reject the message (2:272). On the other hand, God, and not the prophets, has the power to judge and punish people for their free choices,

¹ Without pretending to be exhaustive, see also 2:119, 11:2, 13:40, 14:52, 28:46, 29:50, 32:3, 34:46, 35:23, 37 and 42, 38:65 and 70, 41:4, 42:6, 44:12, 46:9, 51:50-1; 67:8-9 and 26.

and God and not the prophet has the knowledge of the Hour of judgement. The power of the prophet is limited on two sides, in relation to the worldly powers, and in relation to God.

Judgement verses

It might be objected that Muhammad is excluded only from the executive function of government, but still has the legislative and judicial functions. The distinction would be anachronistic if treated as a theory of government. Moreover, although Muhammad did in fact serve as an arbiter in some disputes, this was a function that existed under the customs of the time, and which could be filled by any honourable man acceptable to both parties. Where Muhammad did act as arbiter, it was not by virtue of his station as a Prophet, but by the free consent of the parties, given either at the time of the dispute, or pledged in advance under the treaty of Medina. We have seen that, even in the presence of Muhammad, the parties to a dispute could and did choose some other honourable man to be the arbiter (see page 110 above), and Muhammad was obliged to obey the adjudicator in the matter like everyone else. Moreover, Muhammad could decline to serve as arbiter when asked. God tells him:

Either you judge between them or you turn away from them, and if you turn away from them, they cannot harm you in any way. (5:45)

It appears in fact that Muhammad is counselled *not* to intervene in matters between the Jews in Medina, for God then asks: “Why do they come to you for judgement, when the Torah is among them, containing the judgement of God?” (5:46)

Another verse that appears to show that Muhammad had a judicial function, at least between the believers, is 4:65:

They will not believe until they turn to you for adjudication in whatever arises among them. Then they will not find any resistance within themselves to what you have done,¹ and they will submit entirely.

The verse is from the early Medinan period, and refers to those who say that they believe, as the context shows:

¹ The verb here is *qadayta*, and this is the origin of the anglicised noun *qadi*, the term for a judge applying Islamic law. But the verb has a much wider variety of connotations than the noun. It could be translated as ‘what you have ruled,’ but also ‘what you have achieved.’

Have you not seen those who pretend to believe ... they wish to go for judgement to at-Taghut (*at-Taghút*), although they have been ordered to reject him, and the Satan wishes to lead them astray. (4:60)

Some have said that at-Taghut is a derogatory eponym for a particular arbiter, and that Satan has inspired the nominal believers to turn to this man for arbitration. But as Watt has said, the various stories about the supposed incident and arbiter differ and some are frankly fantastic.¹ It appears to me rather that at-Taghut is used as the personal name of the devil (it can also mean ‘evil’, ‘oppression’ or an idol), and ‘the Satan’ is used as a characterisation of the same devil. That is, the nominal believers turn to the devil, not Muhammad, for judgement, and since the devil does not literally provide legal rulings or arbitration, the meaning must be that these nominal adherents still govern their own daily conduct according to precepts taught by the devil, while they should govern them according to precepts taught by Muhammad, accepting his teachings wholeheartedly. In that case, the verse does not imply that Muhammad should literally adjudicate each case specifically, or that the believers were required to turn to him and no-one else when seeking arbitration. Muhammad provides the rules, the customs and methods for daily life that replace those of at-Taghut. He may also adjudicate particular cases, but is not required to do so. This should be borne in mind when reading the previous verse (4:59), which does direct the believers to refer disputes among themselves to Muhammad (but as a good deed rather than a command).

Another early Medinan verse refers to those who say they believe in God and the Messenger:

When they are summoned to God and the His messenger, that he may judge between them (*li-yahkuma baynahum*), one sect among them

¹ Watt, *Companion to the Qur'an*, 66; Sale's translation of *The Koran* 81 n.3. One difficulty with identifying at-Taghút as a particular man is that the verse says that the believers have been ordered to reject ‘him,’ and while there are many verses telling the believers to reject evil and idols, under various names, it is difficult to find a suitable earlier verse in which they are told not to turn to a particular person for arbitration. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that the early codex of Ibn Mas'úd, who learned the bulk of his Quran directly from the Prophet and began to write it down during the Prophet's lifetime, says “they have been ordered to reject *her*.” The feminine pronoun might refer to at-Taghút as a goddess, or to evil in the abstract (see 16:36), but hardly to a particular man (Jeffery, *Materials* 20, 37). Ibn Mas'úd understood the word as a class name for evil spirits, since he provides a plural form at 2:257 (where it is required by the grammar) and at 39:17 (Jeffery, 31, 82).

protests. But if the right was on their side they would come to him obediently (24:48-9)

Like 4:59, this points to a duty of the believers to refer matters for arbitration to Muhammad, but only “when summoned.” It leads on to a famous ‘authority verse’ (24:54):

Say: Obey God, and obey the messenger, but if they turn away, the only thing incumbent on him is the duty he has been charged with, and the duty you have been charged with is incumbent on you. If you obey him, you will be rightly guided. Nothing is incumbent on the messenger except clear preaching.

We can see that this duty is a moral obligation only, and that it applies to the believers in the time of Muhammad. It does indeed reveal an authority that Muhammad had in the religious community, and a duty of obedience, but it would be a considerable stretch to make this the foundation for a theory of the state.

Verses of worldly authority

Not only does the Quran say clearly that the prophets are only warners, and that Muhammad is not appointed as a ruler over men, it also speaks clearly if infrequently about temporal rulers, sometimes in the same breath as the prophets:

They [the chiefs of Israel] said to a Prophet among them, “Appoint for us a King ...” Their Prophet said to them, “God has appointed Talut (*Tálút*) as a king for you... *God grants His authority to whomever he pleases.*” (2:246-247)

The reference here is to the story of the Prophet Samuel and the appointment of King Saul (Talut), which begins the institution of monarchy in Israel’s history.

Joseph (who is a prophet according to Islamic criteria) is another example of a prophet and king who are mentioned together. He served the Pharaoh, and if he sought and held authority as a ‘warder’ (*hafizun*, 12:55) over the grain stocks, it was by virtue of his ability and virtue, and not his station as a Prophet. Despite his religious status, his temporal authority is limited by the king’s laws (12:76). Joseph and the Pharaoh, and Samuel and Saul, represent the ideal relationship between religion and power.

While **Moses** is said to have had clear authority (*sultánin mubínin*), this is at the same time as the Pharaoh had command (*amr*), and the people followed Pharaoh (11:96-7). The use of two different terms here shows that, in the presence of a king, the authority of the prophet is not the same as that of the king, and is an authority that does not compel. *Sultán* is often translated as ‘warrant,’ for in

the Quran it means an endorsement from God, not an actual authority over men (12:40; 7:71; 10:68).

The position of Moses as leader of the exile tribes is anomalous (and a magnified version of the position of Muhammad as leader of an exile group), because Moses like Adam functions as a leader in the absence of a state. The further history of Israel as presented in the Quran, including the verse just cited, tells us that God's plan was fulfilled by the establishment of a state and a king. The period of wandering in which the Prophet was also the temporal leader is a suspension of that plan, prolonged by the disobedience of the Israelites which rendered them unfit to do the work of developing a civilization. Although the Quran contains these instances in which the figure of religious authority is at the same time the temporal authority, this is the product of circumstances and not a picture of the ideal society that Islam intends.

One might point to Solomon and David as similar anomalies, since both kings are accounted as Prophets in the Islamic tradition. But at some point we must be critical of that Islamic tradition, for it has also counted Alexander the Great as a prophet: a man known from historical sources as a violent drunkard, who took satisfaction in inflicting cruel and unusual punishments on those who stood in the way of his boundless ambition, a destroyer not a builder. His acceptance as a prophet represents in an extreme form the accommodating definition of prophethood in the Islamic tradition, and a fascination with power in itself. Together these have created a tendency to categorise all powerful and successful pre-Islamic figures as prophets. We do not need to make a normative stance as to whether Alexander, Solomon and David 'really were' prophets, because the purpose of this excursus into political teachings in the Quran is to clear the ground for an argument to be made in relation to the writings of Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha: that both Bahai figures seem to have regarded the separation of religious and civil authority, of church and state, not as a new social teaching for this age but as part of God's eternal plan. This is only plausible if they could have seen this teaching reflected in the figures whom *they* considered as true prophets and founders of religions.¹

David is not directly called a messenger (*rasúl*) in the Quran, but is called 'our servant' (38:17), and he is included in a list of those who are rightly guided

¹ We need not consider their prophetology, which distinguishes between Major Prophets or Manifestations of God who establish new religions and the Minor Prophets who are rightly guided and convey God's will within the framework of an existing religion, because if the separation of church and state is indeed part of God's great plan, it will not be contradicted by either minor or major Prophets.

(6:84), and who have been given the Book, authority (*hukm*)¹ and prophethood (*nubuwwat*) (6:89). His ‘book,’ the psalms, is part of the Hebrew and Christian canon. So there are good reasons why he is considered a prophet in the Islamic theological tradition. At one point, Baha’u’llah too names David as a prophet:

None of the many Prophets sent down, since Moses was made manifest, as Messengers of the Word of God, such as David, Jesus, and others among the more exalted Manifestations who have appeared during the intervening period between the Revelations of Moses and Muhammad, ever altered the law of the Qiblih.²

Despite the term ‘more exalted Manifestations’ (*anbiyá-ye a’zam*, literally ‘greater prophets’) the reference must include minor prophets, since Baha’u’llah recognized only Jesus as a Manifestation or major prophet between Moses and Muhammad.³ Similarly, Abdu’l-Baha names “Solomon, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel” among the “second sort of prophets,” that is, the minor prophets.⁴ In the Quran, David is granted both ‘divine gifts’ (*min afzulan*, 34:10) and ‘a station of successor on earth’ (*khalifatan fi al-ard*, 38:26).⁵ When he did not have the latter, because Saul was king, his relationship to power resembles the ideal relationship of Joseph and the Pharaoh.

Solomon, like David, is among the rightly guided who are granted the station of prophethood (6:84-89), and he is also granted a kingdom (*mulkan*, 38:35). The Song and Proverbs of Solomon too are part of the Hebrew and Christian canon, yet he appears in the Quran primarily as a figure of fable, rather than as a prophet and king. He does not seem to have been called a prophet by Baha’u’llah. Abdu’l-Baha honours him as a great king and builder of the temple, and mentions him as

¹ *Hukm* here does not have the connotation of government, since Job, Joseph, Elisha and Lot are among those named. It is possible that it should be translated ‘wisdom’, as Sale does, and refers to the last of the three divisions of Hebrew scripture: The Torah, the Prophets, and Wisdom literature. But against this see 4:54, where wisdom is intended, and the word used is *hikmat* not *hukm*.

² *The Kitab-i Iqan*, 51; Persian editions: Germany 1988 page 33, Cairo 1352 AH. page 39.

³ In the semitic line, that is: leaving aside questions of the dating of Zoroaster, Buddha, and prophets and Manifestations outside of the Indian, Iranian and Semitic lines.

⁴ *Some Answered Questions*, 164; page 116 in the Persian text.

⁵ *Khalifa* is the Arabic source of our word Caliph, and because the ‘successors’ to Muhammad were rulers, it became the title of rulers. But our concern here is with its meaning before the institution of the caliphate had begun. Here it means simply succession in time, because David takes the throne after Saul. For a summary of the discussion on this term see Khan, *Political Concepts in the Quran*, 7-16.

a minor prophet only in lists of the prophets of Israel. One such list has been quoted above, because it includes David. On another occasion, when he was in Paris in February 1913, Abdu'l-Baha spoke at what appears to have been a seminary or bishop's palace, and said "The first thing [Jesus] said was: "The Torah is the Divine Book; Moses is the Messenger of God; Aaron, Solomon, Isaiah, Zechariah and all the Prophets of the people of Israel are true [Prophets]."¹ In the synagogue of San Francisco, Abdu'l-Baha presented proofs that the religion of Abraham had been a cause of progress, one of which was the greatness of his lineage:

His Holiness [Abraham] founded a family, and God blessed it. He gave His blessing to the establishment of a religion, and through this blessing the prophets of that house appeared: individuals such as Jacob were sent. A Joseph was raised up. A Moses was manifest. Aaron, David, Solomon and the divine prophets came out of that family."²

The only instance I have found in which Abdu'l-Baha mentions Solomon individually, rather than as one example of God's blessings to Israel, is in a story about Solomon that he told to visiting pilgrims, which is recorded by Zia Bagdadi. In this story, Solomon is introduced as "a truthful man (*mardom*)."³ Such a term, without any honorific connotations, could not have been used if Abdu'l-Baha regarded Solomon as a prophet. And if we consider the writings and reported talks of Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha as a whole, the word most frequently associated with Solomon is sovereignty: it is the splendour of his reign rather than any divine inspiration that is mentioned.

As for **Alexander**, he is traditionally identified by Muslims with *Dhu'l-Qarnain*, whom God granted power on earth (Surah 18:84). But there is nothing in the fables told about him in the Quran to suggest that he was a prophet or messenger. He does not appear to be mentioned at all by Baha'u'llah, and is mentioned by Abdu'l-Baha in the same breath as Hulagu Khan (*Halágu Khán*, Mongol leader at the sack of Baghdad), Tamerlane and Napoleon the First "who

¹ My translation from Persian notes published in *Khitabat-e Abdu'l-Baha* 740-41 (roman). A translation by Ahmad Sohrab was published in *Star of the West*, Vol. 4, 53.

² *Khitabat-e Abdu'l-Baha*, 611 (roman), my translation. English notes of this talk are published in *Star of the West*, Vol. 3, No. 13, page 3. One other list that refers to "the whole line of prophets who descended from Adam, like David, Solomon, and Aaron" is found in *Star of the West* Vol. 7, No. 12 page 109, but in this case I have not been able to locate any Persian notes of the talk.

³ Persian notes published in the Persian section of *Star of the West*, Vol. 12, page 61.

stretched their arrogant fists over three of the earth's five continents."¹ This is not surprising, since Alexander is known in the Persian cultural area as 'the Destroyer' rather than 'the Great.'

In short, David is a probable minor prophet, Solomon a dubious one, and Alexander was probably not a prophet, in the eyes of Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha, and this ranking reflects these figures' relative claims based on the Quran. David had a clear double appointment, as prophet and king, and must be regarded as an anomaly, a counter-example that weighs against my thesis that Muhammad thought that the role of prophets was only to warn, and not to be rulers. The Davidic kingdom is a strong paradigm of ideal and eschatological government in Jewish and Christian theologies, but does not appear as an ideal in Islamic or Bahai scriptures.

On the other hand, there are at least twenty other prophets mentioned by name in the Quran, and others unnamed. Their common characteristic is that they were rejected and even killed by the people, and by the rulers of the people. David (and Moses as an example of exceptional circumstances) provide us with two possible objections to the thesis that the Quran recognises the differentiation of religious and temporal authority. But if we consider the many other prophets who never had any temporal authority, there are ten times as many objections to the thesis that the Quran presents the union of religious authority and temporal power as an ideal. Considered as a whole, it is clear that the Quranic norm is the separation of religious authority and temporal power, and the Quranic ideal is harmony between them.

The Quran also shows less ideal examples of the relationship of religion to authority, most notably in the relationships between Muhammad and the rulers of Mecca, and Moses before Pharaoh (7:103-137). In the latter story (revealed in the late Meccan period), Moses does not seek to displace the temporal power, yet the assumption that this must be his real aim leads to distrust in the Egyptian court, and ultimately to conflict (7:110). Similarly, at the time of the incident that caused Moses to flee to Madyan, the accusation made against him was that he sought to become a man of power (*jabbáran*) in the world (28:19). It can hardly be an accident that Muhammad tells the story of Moses and Pharaoh in these terms: despite Muhammad's own repeated statements that he is only a warner and seeks nothing from them, the leaders of Mecca treat him as a rival to power. For Bahais, the story also reads as a type of the tragedy of the Bab and the exile and imprisonment of Baha'u'llah, for the same reasons. When Pharaoh decided to continue a policy of killing the male children of the Israelites, Moses said to his people, "Pray to God for help, and be patient. Truly, the earth is God's, that he

¹ *The Secret of Divine Civilization* 67.

may will it to whomever He wills among His servants” (7:128). The implication of this story for the oppressed believers in Mecca was that the powers that be in the city, however unjust they might be, were not to be opposed or deposed.

An even stronger expression of this is found in Surah 3:26, from the early Medinan period: “Say, O God, Lord of Power, you grant power to whomever you will, and you take power from whomever you will.” This is traditionally said to have been revealed in reference to the pending fate of the Persian and Byzantine empires.¹ In contrast to the aura of indefinite divine endorsement that promised the continuity of the Persian throne and European royal houses (particularly the French), in Islamic thinking the belief that God has appointed those who presently rule is coupled with an awareness that this appointment is for a time, and that God will depose one dynasty and appoint another, will remove one people from centre stage in history and raise another to succeed them.² As such, the concept is closer to the ‘wheel of fortune’ than ‘the divine right of kings.’

The power that passes from one to another may be used by them for good or evil, but the Quran is distinctly pessimistic about the usual pattern of history:

Thus we have created great men in every town, the wicked men of the place, that they may connive there ... and when a sign comes to the them, they say, we shall not believe until we receive the like of what the messengers received ... (6:122-4)

Authority verses

We have seen that the Quran says that God appoints prophets, and that they have a book and an authority,³ and in the case of Muhammad this includes the authority to call believers to submit to his arbitration of their disputes, and also that the Quran says that God awards temporal power, but not (with some exceptions) to the prophets, and not necessarily to the good. The inescapable conclusion is that the Quran contains the concept of two distinct sorts of authority. Within this framework, we can turn to the verses that deal with authority *per se*, the various individuals to whom it is granted, and its corollary of obedience. The most famous of these is known simply as ‘*the authority verse*,’ Surah 4 verse 59, but we should include something of the context:

God commands you [believers] to return your trusts to the people to whom they are due, and when you arbitrate (*hakam*) between people, do so with justice O you who believe, *obey God, and obey the messenger*;

¹ Sayuti, *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*.

² 16:133; 11:57.

³ 6:89, cited above.

and those entrusted with command (amr) among you. If you differ in anything, refer it to God and to the messenger, ... (4:58-60)

We have not sent any messenger except to be obeyed, according to the will of God ... (4:64)

They will not believe until they turn to you for adjudication in whatever arises among them....(4.65).

We have sent you to the people as a messenger (*rasúlan*) ... whoever obeys the messenger has obeyed God, and as for those who turn away, we have not sent you as a warder over them. (4:79-80)

When a matter of security or danger came to them, they concealed it.¹ If only they had referred it to the messenger and those entrusted with command (*amr*) among them, so that the discerning among them might know it. (4:83)

The Surah is from Medina, about the years 625-7. As we have seen above in relation to 3:159, *amr* may relate specifically to the military command exercised by the leaders of the various elements of the Medinan federation, including Muhammad. This seems the most likely reading of 4:83 as well, but in 4:59 it might refer to the tribal leadership in general, bearing in mind that most of the Muslims in Medina and elsewhere who had not accompanied Muhammad from Mecca were living in their tribal structures which would impose certain obligations on them. In the authority verse itself (4:59), the dual structure of authority quite naturally creates dual duties of obedience for the believers, whereas in the specifically military situation envisioned in 4:83, no distinction need be made because Muhammad was the chief of security for the whole city (and the duty to pass on information to someone discerning applies to all the Medinans, not just to the believers).² The commandment to refer differences to Muhammad in 4:59 cannot be a reference to his role as adjudicator in inter-tribal disputes under the Treaty of Medina, since the verse is addressed to believers. Thus it refers to Muhammad's other role, as the head of a religious community.

¹ My translation here is the opposite to that of Watt, Sale and Yusuf Ali, but see 84:23.

² Baha'u'llah offers a Shiah interpretation of this verse in *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, 89-90: "By 'those invested with authority' is meant primarily and more especially the Imams ... Secondly these words refer to the kings and rulers -- those through the brightness of whose justice the horizons of the world are resplendent and luminous." (*Lawh-e Mubarak Khitab be Shaykh Muhammad Isfahani*, 66). The two authorities cannot be conceived sequentially, since there were kings and rulers in the days of the Imams, and no indication that Baha'u'llah considered them to be illegitimate.

The corollary of rightful authority is the duty of obedience:

64:12 Obey God, and obey the messenger, and if you turn back, nothing is incumbent on our messenger except clear preaching.

Similar words are repeated in several places, in the sense of a moral duty of obedience, enforced by an awareness of God's ultimate judgement:

5:95 Obey God, and obey the messenger, and beware. If you turn back, know that what is incumbent on our messenger is clear preaching.¹

58:14 ... stand up in the obligatory prayer, give tithes, and obey God and His messenger. God knows what you do.

64:16 Fear God, as much as you are able, and hear and obey, and give in charity for the sake of your souls ...²

The same duty of obedience is due to Jesus, who says: "... I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, so fear God and obey me" (3:50),³ as does Noah (26:108, 110; 71:3), who adds, "I do not ask anything from you by way of recompense for this..." and "I am only one who warns clearly." (26:109, 115). The prophet Hud says, "Fear God and obey me" and adds "I do not ask anything from you by way of recompense for this..." (26:126-7, and 131). Thamud says, "Fear God and obey me" and adds "I do not ask anything from you by way of recompense for this..." (26:144-5, and 150). Lot says, "Fear God and obey me" and adds "I do not ask anything from you by way of recompense for this..." (26:163). None of these prophets exerted any worldly leadership over their people. One would have to be singularly obtuse not to get the point here: Muhammad is saying over and over that his authority, and that of all the prophets, is a moral authority not a worldly one. However we should also consider one exception:

8:1 They ask you about the spoils of war. Say: the spoils belong to God and the messenger. ... Obey God and his messenger if you are believers.

¹ A similar verse at 24:54 has been discussed above.

² Similar verses in relation to Muhammad are found at 3:32, 3:132, 4:64, 8:20, 8:46, 24:51, 25:56 and 27:33, and in relation to Aaron at 20:90.

³ See also 43:63. Ibn Mas'ud's codex expanded on 3:50, reading: Obey God in what has come to you of it [the Law], through the verses, and obey me in what the sign calls you to." (Jeffrey, *Materials* 33).

The verse is from the early Medina period, following the battle of Badr and a battlefield dispute among the Muslims concerning the division of the spoils.¹ The authority of the prophet here is that already noted above (for instance in relation to 24:48): the authority to adjudicate between the believers in matters of dispute among them.

Freedom verses

Finally, we should note that the authority in religion that is granted to the prophets is one that requires a voluntary submission:

2:256 There is no compulsion in religion: truth has been clearly distinguished from error ...

10:99 If you Lord had willed it, everyone on earth would believe. Would you then compel the people to believe despite themselves?

11:30 I have an explanation from my Lord ... do we compel you to it when you are averse to it?

Just as transcendent religion implies a project that is in this world but not of it, ethical religion is necessarily free, or it is not ethical. The state, in contrast, exists to provide society with the service of coercion, thus containing the free-loader problem and making extended societies possible. The project of the state, and the project of ethical religion, function according to fundamentally different logics.



*He has set free the twin seas,
that they meet one another.
Between them is a barrier, and they pass it not.
Which of the bounties of your Lord would you deny?*

Quran 55:19

¹ Although the verse would seem to imply that all the spoils revert to the messenger, Muhammad actually ordered all those who had taken spoils away to return them to one pile, and then shared them out again (Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad* 307). The surah, revealed after this event not at the time, sets out the subsequent practice, that one fifth of the spoils would be at the disposal of Muhammad.

Theses on church and state

The purpose of the previous chapter has been primarily to clear the way for a clearer theory of church and state, and secondarily to provide the historical background to Baha'u'llah's thought. This chapter will sum up some lessons and general laws which we have encountered, and cast its net wider than the history of Islam alone. It is presented in the form of theses, which will be most useful if they are not nailed to the door of the church, but taken along for reference and revision.

1. The issue of church and state is universal (and always local)

In the first place, it is evident that the question of church and state is universal, not to be addressed in terms of Shiah or Islamic or Christian or Western essentialisms. The question has a partial similarity to the question of the relationship between the body and the human spirit. However it is more complex and local than the mind-spirit relationship. It is complex because when we speak of church and state we are referring to collective institutional embodiments of the religious and political projects of many individuals. It is local because the relationship between the state and individuals as political actors depends on the nature of the state: is it democratic, benevolent, tyrannical, ideological or pragmatic? How much religious pluralism is there in the society? The relationship between the religious institutions and their believers also depends on the nature of the 'church': is there a restricted right to read and understand the scripture, is there a priesthood holding the keys to salvation, are there lay organisations and communications, creating the equivalent of a civil society within the community of believers, and is the institutional structure of the 'church' itself monolithic or internally differentiated? Are there independent mystic orders, and is there an intellectual and philosophical development in religion comparable to the political theory and ideology of politics? Moreover, the actual development of the institutions of religious law, in terms of the law's social function, practicability, procedures and enforcement, is as important as the contents of the religious law.

2. Islamic, Christian and Jewish political theologies are a common tradition

Islamic societies have almost universally had distinct spheres of religious and political activity with a degree of autonomy. In Arjomand's words:

The widely held view that any Islamic polity is, in theory, a theocracy is ... misleading. Although an Islamic theocracy, like a Christian theocracy, as a legitimate concept can have normative or descriptive validity in specific instances, there is no inherent dogmatic connection between God and political authority in Islam. ... In contrast to pre-Islamic Persian cosmologies, the constitution of the polity is not endowed with sacrality

as a replica of the cosmos; and political relations per se are devoid of intrinsic soteriological significance.¹

While Islam is not an exceptional case in relation to church and state, it is notable that, with the partial exception of Qajar Shi'ism, the autonomy of the religious sphere in Islam centres not on the institutions of formal religion, but on the Book. This creates multiple interfaces between the political and religious orders, and it is at once harder for the religious order to adopt an effective prophetic role vis-a-vis the state, and harder for the state to control religious life, than in Christianity (whether western or orthodox).

We have seen that other-worldly salvation correlates everywhere with some degree of autonomy for religion from other concerns, because transcendence creates the secularity of the world, but also that messianism within a religion of other-worldly salvation collapses the distinction. The Qizilbash and the Babis, and other Iranian messianic movements, are not to be regarded as quintessentially Shiah, but as typically messianic. The doctrine of the Hidden Imam not only makes Shi'ism more other-worldly, but also renders it more prone to messianic movements. The present Islamic Republic represents an example of the revolutionary potential of messianism evolving out of mysticism, for Khomeini's theory resembles Bidabadi's theology, retaining the emphasis on the importance of the one perfect guide, but rejecting Bidabadi's restriction of this to spiritual and not temporal rule. Khomeini called the people to approach God through revolutionary political action, and assumed the title of Imam. By this he meant neither the Imam as prayer leader, nor explicitly the person of the Hidden Imam of eschatological expectation, but rather a man who exercises an imamate that is actual and continuous (*mustammarr*) and not suspended during the occultation.

In both Western Christianity and Islam, 'the world' and the worldly are contrasted to the divine, to religion and the afterlife. Both these religions and Judaism are hostile to divine kingship of the sort propagated by Sasanid kings and Roman emperors, but can reach an accommodation with the worldly powers if these do not claim anything more than earthly power. This accommodation may range between grudging non-opposition to civil government as a scourge decreed by God, through acceptance as a necessary evil until the end time, or prophetic denunciation of kings who were unjust or impious, to religious legitimation for government as part of God's work. The Book of Revelation presents an extreme rejection of earthly sovereignty as essentially corrupt and opposed to the Kingdom, Paul regards government as a necessary evil "for the punishment of evil doers," while the synoptic Gospels teach that Caesar also has legitimate

¹ *Shadow of God* 32.

claims on the faithful.¹ It is tempting to claim that the Islamic sources contain nothing comparable to the negative view of the Book of Revelation, so that the acceptance of the legitimacy of the state is *more* firmly grounded in Islamic societies than it is in Western Christian societies – the exact contrary of what has been claimed by both Islamic integrists and many orientalist writers. However this would not be an entirely fair conclusion, since the Quran also do not contain any acceptance of the state as explicit as Christ’s “Render unto Caesar.” It would be fairer to say that the difference between the Christian and Islamic scriptural resources is that the Quran has less to say about the state, in any sense.

Eastern Christianity presents a different picture. Some strands of early Christianity continued the Roman and Syrian tradition of the Emperor as the Image of God on earth, while of course switching the religious context from pagan to Christian (see e.g. Eusebius and Cyril of Alexandria). The book of Revelation, with its rejection of the state, was not fully accepted in the East for many centuries. By the third century there was a growing geographical polarisation, with monist views of society prevailing in the East, and apocalyptic dualism in the West.² I concur with Arjomand³ that the Eastern Christian view is in part a pre-Christian survival, yet the fact that it had its own scriptural basis and was incorporated in an enduring form of Christianity shows that the antipathy between religions of other-worldly salvation and divine kingship is a question of relative uncongeniality, not of incompatibility.

In Jewish political theology, too, one of the several strands of thought that run through the centuries begins with the biblical distinction between authority in “matters of the Lord” and “matters of the king” (2 Chron. 19:11), and the designation of the tribe of Levi, a landless and therefore powerless people, as the priests. Within the old Testament corpus, it is notable that the texts ascribed to the Priestly school, for whom God is utterly transcendent, do not give the priest any political or judicial function, while the King and his officials are charged with political, legal, economic and ethical matters. The pure transcendence of God, in the theology of the Priestly school, correlates with the strong differentiation of the religious sphere.⁴ The scriptural sources lead on to a Mishnaic statement placing the King above the law, but also barring him from the office of judge (Sanhedrin 2:3), and to the medieval tradition which also differentiated authority *within* the minority Jewish communities, into the sphere of the rabbis and that of the ‘good

¹ 1 Peter 2:14, Matt. 22:15-22, Mark 12:13-17, Luke 20:20-26.

² *Field Two Swords* xiii, xvii.

³ *Shadow of God* 87-8.

⁴ Walzer *et al.*, *Jewish Political Tradition* 177-9.

men of the town.’¹ Civil authority and law was accepted as legitimate and prevailing over Torah law, except in purely religious matters. In the early Babylonian period, this was expressed in the Aramaic maxim *dina de-malkhuta dina*, ‘the law of the (secular) kingdom is Law.’² The initial acceptance of the legitimacy of non-Jewish civil authority, during the Babylonian exile, provided a basis for the internal distinction, within the community of believers, between the spheres of the good men of the town and of the rabbis (and thus the idea that the religious logic prevails within a sphere and is not universal). Following the creation of the State of Israel, this has been used to justify the relative autonomy of the political sphere in a Jewish state. The interplay provides a nice example of the way ecclesiology and political theory reflect one another in the evolution of political theology.

The legitimate authorities of the non-Davidic kings, of the ‘judges’ during the period of judges, of gentile rulers, and of the good men of the town in relation to internal affairs, are justified primarily in functional terms. They deal with matters that cannot in principle be specified in the book, such as foreign affairs, crisis situations and military tactics, and also with a broad area of civil and fiscal matters, many of which could be covered by rules derived from the religious sphere, but were ceded in practice to civil authority. There were disputes about which matters were ceded to the state (divorce law being a critical case), and which cases were to be dealt with by the good men of the town and which by the rabbi.

Although Jewish political theology appears to me to be the most highly developed of the three traditions, I have not found in it any theologically reasoned justification for the existence of civil authority, except for the Davidic kings. The result is that there are two systems of law, justified in two different dimensions, the pragmatic and the theological, making the definition and powers of each problematical.

In this Jewish tradition, the autonomy of the political sphere is asserted without requiring any reference to either modernity or “render unto Caesar” – another proof, if any were needed, that modern Western, and Western Christian, developments are not essentially unique, just historically particular. It would be worth investigating how much European formulations of the two powers model owe to Jewish political theology, and how much to the New Testament passages. It is striking, for instance, that S.T. Coleridge, in his *Church and State* (1830),

¹ Walzer *et al.*, *Jewish Political Tradition*, passim. For the medieval formulation see especially the discussion of Nissim Gerondi (Spain, 1310-75?), pages 156-165, and Chapter 8.

² Discussed in Walzer *et al.*, *Jewish Political Tradition* 431-437.

draws his political theology from the Hebrew commonwealth and not from the Pauline letters.

In Jewish, Christian and Islamic history, strong religious antipathy to worldly power has most often been expressed as pious withdrawal from participation in politics. In Christian history, antipathy has in some cases led to physical withdrawal by the true believers as a community, to establish a new pious society or a monastic order apart from the world. This is rare if not unknown in Islamic history, although it has become a minor note in the 20th century. Antipathy may also be expressed by non-participation in politics with the aim of generating an alternative religio-political order from within the religious community, a new order that, within historical time, will return to conquer or replace worldly politics. McMullen's sociological study of the Bahai community of Atlanta in the 1990s shows that this is the predominant stance in that community:

... to lay the foundation for a global civilization based on a common religious worldview and ecclesiastical authority ... Baha'is must wait patiently for the disintegration of the old world order, while they themselves build the framework (the Baha'i Administrative Order) for the new.¹

I hasten to add that this is not at all the stance we find in the Bahai writings nor, increasingly, among the more educated believers and the senior functionaries in that Administrative Order.

A less marked aversion to the worldly can be found in the thought of Augustine, who made a sharp distinction between the City of God and the worldly city, and doubted whether there was any hope of implementing Christian truths in the latter.

Western Christianity, like Shi'ism, went through a sectarian period and a caeseropapist period, before the autonomy of the church was established under Gregory VII (d. 1085). In the following period the imperial theorists derived the authority of the emperor from God without intermediary (as in Baha'u'llah's writings), but Alanus, writing about 1201-1210, argued that the emperor obtained the temporal sword from the pope, who was therefore the one head of the Christian monarchy. His views were incorporated in the bull *Unam Sanctum* (1302).

The most important difference between Islam and Christianity is not a difference in scriptural resources, because Jesus said, "Render unto Caesar ...," but rather the fact that Christianity developed a structurally independent hierocracy during its sectarian period, and this was able to retain its autonomy after Christianity had become the state religion of the empire. Shi'ism in this

¹ McMullen, *The Baha'i* 112 see also 58, 61-62, 103.

respect resembles Christianity more than Sunnism. It is not surprising that the Bahai Faith, growing out of Shi'ism at the time of Iran's confrontation with modernity and the West, should generate a political theology that is close to modern Christian political theologies in the West, and further from Sunni political theology.

3. Shi'ism is not different

Shi'ism is not different, or at least not much different. From the time of the sixth Imam, and particularly following the development of the doctrine of the hidden Imam, twelver Shi'ism has had a stronger emphasis on otherworldly salvation than Sunni Islam. Because Shi'ism had many generations of development as a sect for which the state was an external reality, its sources (which include sayings and writings attributed to the Imams) have more to say about the state. On the other hand, its later theological tradition is less practical than Sunni political thinking of the classical age, tending to speculative idealisations about the future rule of the true imam rather than questions of law and legitimacy in the real world. Because of the belief in the hidden Imam, Shi'ism has also been somewhat more prone to messianism than Sunnism, or for that matter Judaism and Christianity.

Late Qajar Shi'ism had a religious doctrine of the two powers and the desirability of their separation and cooperation that was as clear as, and hardly differed from, Christian political theologies of the same period. Both entailed religious acceptance of autonomy of politics *in this world, until the end*. When we consider how Baha'u'llah extended this in the metaphysical and eschatological worlds, we will not have to suppose that he is adopting and extending western ideas on the topic (which were in any case not as univocal at the time as they appear in retrospect). He can just as well be seen as continuing the trajectory of some Shiah theologians before him.

4. The people count

Between church and state, there are the people, who are members of both. The church-state issue must be conceived as a triangular relationship. Popular religiosity counts, perhaps more than the theories of theologians. Because mass support rooted in popular religion is vital to the independence of the religious order, patterns of devotion are as important in the church-state issues as constitutional provisions or the handbooks on doctrine. The state cannot control religion merely by winning the submission of some religious leaders at court. It also matters what relationship the individual has to these two collectives: what degree of individualism has in fact been achieved, and to what extent do people's world-views support individualism in religion and in political philosophy?

Shi'ism succeeded in Iran not when Ismail adopted it as a plank in his religious policy, but when Shi'ism had forged sufficiently strong links with popular religious experience to be 'established' in the life of the nation. This has implications for Bahai ambitions for a 'Bahai society' and 'Bahai state,' and also in relation to the significance of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar, the Bahai House of Worship, as the central institution in the Bahai model of society. The achievement of Safavid Shi'ism, and of Majlisi in particular, cannot be repeated in the same way by any religion in a modern society, because religious and cultural pluralism is here to stay and will increase, because of mobility, individual choice, and the fact that successful modern states cannot have a religious policy. The project of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar is to create an ecumenical devotional sphere, not bound to a particular doctrinal system, and open to a variety of popular devotion:

In brief, the purpose of places of worship ... is simply that of unity, ... that is why His Holiness Baha'u'llah has commanded that a place be built for all the religionists of the world; that all religions and races and sects may gather together; that the Oneness of the human world may be proclaimed; ... Just as the external world is a place where various peoples of different hues and colors, of various faiths and denominations, meet; just as they are submerged in the same Sea of Favors; likewise all may meet under the dome of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar.¹

If this cannot be achieved, then the role of the Bahai Faith and, so far as we can see at present, of all other religions in a globalised and thus pluralist society, will be that of sectarian and individualized religions (in the plural), each being there for its own true believers. In that case, the present project, to compose a world-embracing political theology from the Bahai writings, will be pointless: sects do not need political theologies, they have millenarian hopes instead. In the modern world, the progression from a sectarian role to a religion informing society and providing religious services to all society – a 'church' in the Weberian sense – can be achieved not by winning state patronage but by developing devotional, aesthetic and intellectual forms that sustain and are sustained by the diversity of popular religious feeling in a pluralist society.

The people count in another sense too: the critical determinant of different attitudes to church and state today, in the Bahai community, but also in any other religious community, is not the doctrine and scripture of the community concerned but each individual's world view – or more precisely, his or her model of society, and the correspondence between this model and the actual shape of

¹ From notes of a talk given by Abdu'l-Baha 30 April 1912, published in *Star of the West*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 7.

postmodern society. Globalisation is a dynamic package in which individualisation is the underlying drive, and functional differentiation (including the separation of church and state), feminisation, global integration, pluralism and relativism are results. This is in effect a new world, entailing a new principle of individual identity, and the transition places great demands on individuals' capacity to adapt. Because the dynamics of globalisation affect so much of life, individuals tend to embrace or reject it emotionally and intellectually, as a package.

5. Establishment is not the issue

If misconceptions concerning church and state in Islam tend to be all-encompassing and based on a false essentialism, misconceptions about church and state in the west can often be reduced to diseases of language, arising from the vague usage of the terms 'separation' and 'establishment.' They often arise from seeing the church-state issue through the lenses of American history and founding myths such as the Pilgrim Fathers, the War of Independence and the wise men gathering to draw up the American Constitution and its amendments. The mythical versions of these stories, and of the French revolutionary period, have become part of the shared cultural heritage of modernity on both sides of the Atlantic, and it would serve no purpose to belittle them as cultural goods. But it is important to say that the negative role religion plays in these myths of modernity gives a distorted view of the way religion has actually related to the state in modernity. These questions too will have to be addressed, because Abdu'l-Baha was an evident admirer of the legal protection of freedoms in the United States, while Shoghi Effendi just as clearly looked forward to the Bahai Faith becoming an established religion. This makes the terms separation and establishment in American usage and Bahai usage, and the confusion that has surrounded them, crucial for understanding misunderstandings of Bahai teachings. Many of the most influential Bahai authors of the 20th century wrote from an American background, in which establishment is conflated with the non-separation of church and state, and draw on French literature in which *separation* means both separation and disestablishment. They can hardly be blamed for overlooking a distinction that is crucial to understanding what Shoghi Effendi means by establishment, and how it is compatible with the separation of church and state taught by Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha, and endorsed by Shoghi Effendi himself.

We can see that separation and establishment are two separate issues by considering the United States and England: both are modern states, sharing the same understanding of the separation of church and state at the level of principle, but the one has a constitutional bar on the establishment of religion, while the

other has a constitutionally established church. So a state may have an established religion while separating church and state. It may also be a pious state, and still recognise separation. States may endorse, support, ignore, neglect or oppose religion and particular religions, and the state and religious orders in a state can be formally separated or one and the same, or shades of gray between. The choices on these two dimensions give a two-by-two matrix of possibilities. In the Vatican states, the state was pious and not separate from the church – they were one order. This is an arrangement that Baha’u’llah condemned. In the Byzantine state, the state was formally and usually in practice ‘religious’ but the state and church, emperor and patriarch, were distinct. In the Soviet state, the state was impious and the official churches had no right to existence as a separate order. They were a tolerated and subservient arm of the government, so the Soviet Union did not recognise the separation of church and state. In the United States, the state apparatus is supposedly a-religious, and the state and religious orders are separated, yet religion plays a great role in public life.

The issue of religious establishment is therefore not one of essential principle, but of the variety of ways in which a modern and postmodern understanding of the separation of church and state can be embodied in specific constitutional orders, and then of what range of constitutional orders would be compatible with the Bahai teachings. With the question of establishment and the constitutional order bracketed out for now, we can consider just the separation of church and state, defined pragmatically in terms of the actual degree of autonomy of action available to the political and religious spheres, and also the justifications of this autonomy or lack of it in theories of politics and in political theologies.

Establishment and separation, in turn, must be differentiated from freedom of religious practice, and from how great a role religion plays in public life, or the degree to which it is restricted to private life. We will return to these separate issues in discussing Shoghi Effendi’s ‘World Order’ letters.

6. In the modern state, political participation is a religious duty

A democratic state depends on popular participation, and withholding participation from it amounts to sedition by non-violent action. This is why the solution required for a modern state cannot be based on religious devaluation of the political, but requires self-sufficient religious institutions, a positive theology of the state, and endorsement of political participation.

7. Religions do not supply society with common values, but with virtuous individuals

The usefulness of religions to the modern state lies not in providing common values and symbols, but in inculcating virtues. Modern societies are not based on

common values, but on our need for one another, and agreed procedures for taking decisions and resolving disputes. Actual virtuous behaviour on the part of the mass of the citizens, most of the time, is important, but it does not matter to the state whether this behaviour arises from a humanist, Buddhist or Bahai belief-system, and whether it arises from the cultural values of immigrant cultures or natives. Pluralism is not a problem.

The credibility of the religious institutions in calling individuals to ethical action and in inculcating altruistic virtues depends on their willingness to apply their ethical teachings to the rulers as well as the ruled, and the practical ability to do so. The media (including the pulpit or its equivalents) and constitutional arrangements are the two means by which they can call the rulers to an ethical accounting. Religion will use both, but the latter, implying some form of establishment, is less prone to mischief, for when religion speaks to the state through the media, the temptation to ‘play the religion card’ will be too much for some politicians.

8. Religious law is different in nature to civil law

Where religious law is not understood as different in nature to civil law, the two compete, as we can see in Iranian Shiah history. Religious law has a strong ethical concern and treats intention as essential, so it cannot easily be adapted to administering a state, while positive state law emphasises actions, not intentions or beliefs. A political theology needs to include an understanding of religious law that justifies the separate existence of civil law. It may begin by refuting the integrists’ argument that since God is the Law-Giver, any human pretensions to make law are blasphemous. Is God not the Giver, and we therefore should give; is God not the Just, so that we should be Just? Then if God is the Law-Giver, it follows that creating and upholding civil law is a religious duty, obligatory for all humans by virtue of being created in the image of God. The question is not, may it be done, but how it may be done well.

9. Good fences make good neighbours

Once the hierocracy in Qajar Iran had formed institutional structures independent of the state, the separation of the religious spheres could be based on a pragmatic division of labour in society rather than on pious rejection of involvement with the world.¹ In general, the lack of a strong institutional order in the religious sphere tempts the political sphere to colonise the religious, and tends to result in sycophant theologies, while strong religious institutions provide a ground for theologies that support and maintain the autonomy of the religious. Good fences

¹ Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 261.

make good neighbours: and it takes a good functioning neighbour on both sides of the fence to keep it that way.

10. What God has separated, let no modernist join together

The functional differentiation of society in successful contemporary societies entails not just the separation of institutions, but also the differentiation of the individual's roles as citizen, fellow-believer, scientist and economic agent. Although religion has great potential in mobilising the masses, any attempt to achieve political modernisation by appealing to this power sacrifices the most fundamental principle of modernisation: the separation of the religious and political spheres.



Now the new age is here and creation is reborn.

Humanity hath taken on new life.

The autumn hath gone by, and the reviving spring is here.

All things are now made new. ...

The people, therefore, must be set completely free from their old patterns of thought, that all their attention may be focussed upon these new principles, for these are the light of this time and the very spirit of this age. Unless these Teachings are effectively spread among the people, until the old ways, the old concepts, are gone and forgotten, this world of being will find no peace, nor will it reflect the perfections of the Heavenly Kingdom.

Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha 252-3





Likewise this difference and this variation, like the difference and variation of the parts and members of the human body, are the cause of the appearance of beauty and perfection. As these different parts and members are under the control of the dominant spirit, and the spirit permeates all the organs and members and rules all the arteries and veins, this difference and this variation strengthen love and harmony and this multiplicity is the greatest aid to unity.

Abdu'l-Baha, Tablet to the Hague 13



*Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.
And there are differences of administrations,
but the same Lord.
And there are diversities of operations,
but it is the same God which worketh all in all.*

1 Corinthians 12:4



Church and State in the Bahai Writings

This chapter will in essence present a long compilation of selected Bahai Scriptures to support a point that could be adequately shown from any one of them: that the Bahai writings explicitly recognize the differentiation of religion and politics as distinct spheres, the right of each to function without interference from the other, and the desirability of cooperation between them. We will deal with a selection of the principle texts from Baha'u'llah, followed by Abdu'l-Baha's *The Secret of Divine Civilization* and *A Sermon on the Art of Governance*, and some short extracts from Shoghi Effendi's writings.

The Writings of Baha'u'llah

The Babi uprisings had brought disaster on the Babi community. The suppression of the Bab in Iran and the execution of some leading Babis, including the Bab himself (1850), left the movement in need of leadership and a new direction. The need was answered by many claimants, who need not concern us here. Over time one leading disciple, Mirza Husayn 'Ali Núrí, known as Baha'u'llah, came to lead the great majority of the former Babi community from his successive exiles. These took him to the Ottoman provinces of Iraq (1853-63, known as the Baghdad period), Rumelia (1863-68, when he lived briefly in Istanbul and for a longer period in Edirne) and Palestine (1868-92, living first in the prison-city of Akka, and later in the surrounding area).

Baha'u'llah adopted the policy of restraining the community from most immediate political involvement. However his extensive teachings on the subject of representative democracy and the demands of good governance could not but be seen as critical of the absolutist monarchies of his time in both Ottoman lands and his native Persia.¹ He sought constructive interaction, not confrontation. As Cole says, "He desired, by recognizing the legitimacy of the secular state, to achieve the position of spiritual counsellor for it."² This represents a principled acceptance of the legitimacy of the state, rather than a tactical response to its overwhelming strength. Bayat has said that Baha'u'llah "embraced what no Muslim sect, no Muslim school of thought ever succeeded in or dared to try: the doctrinal acceptance of the de facto secularization of politics that had occurred

¹ For a treatment of the interactions between Baha'u'llah and political reformer movements such as the initiators of the Tanzimat reforms, the Young Ottomans, and the precursors of the Iranian constitutional movement, see Cole, *Modernity and the Millennium*, and 'Iranian Millenarianism and Democratic Thought.'

² Cole, 'Iranian Millenarianism and Democratic Thought,' 5.

in the Muslim world centuries earlier,” but does not indicate what doctrinal innovation is involved.¹ This chapter will attempt to do so.

Baha’u’llah was a prolific writer, and the amount of material that is relevant to his political views is daunting. An overview is simplified by limiting it to references to the church-state relationship *per se* and excluding those that address the forms of government (democracy, constitutional monarchy) and the ethics of its operations (justice, an option for the poor, freedom of speech and religion, peace, disarmament and international government).

The *Kitab-e Iqan*

The first important Bahai scriptural text on the church-state question is Baha’u’llah’s *Kitab-e Iqan* (*Kitáb-e Íqán*, the ‘Book of Certitude,’ usually known simply as ‘the Iqan’), a long treatise in two parts, composed in Baghdad in late 1860 or early 1861,² at a time when the Babi community was scattered, oppressed and demoralised: their Messiah (the Bab) had come but the millennium had not arrived. Baha’u’llah himself had been arrested, imprisoned in Tehran, and then exiled with his family. Its lasting importance as the primary doctrinal text of the Bahai Writings can be seen from the fact that it was the first book Baha’u’llah had lithographically published, in about 1881-2, and that he ordered a second printing about 10 years later.

In one well-known summary of the themes of the *Kitab-e Iqan*, Shoghi Effendi stresses its central position in Baha’i doctrine, without including anything like the separation of church and state, or what I have called the doctrine of the two sovereignties, in his list of its teachings.³ However elsewhere he states that another theme is that “the sovereignty of the Promised Qa’im was purely a spiritual one, and not a material or political one...”⁴

The *Iqan* has been the subject of a detailed study by Christopher Buck (*Symbol and Secret*).⁵ Buck concentrates on the techniques of Quranic

¹ Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent* 130.

² In his description in *God Passes By* cited below, Shoghi Effendi dates its composition as 1278 A.H. or 1862 A.D. In a letter published in *Unfolding Destiny*, 429, he dated it in “1278 A.H., i.e. 1861 A.D.,” citing internal evidence. Some manuscripts have the date 1280 A.H. within the text. Recent research by A. Rabbani (unpublished, reported by Buck in ‘An Introduction to the *Kitab-i Iqan*) has narrowed the date to just before 5 Rajab 1277 A.H. (17 January 1861). The 1280 A.H. date may indicate manuscript families descending from a corrected good copy made by Abdu’l-Baha about that time.

³ *God Passes By* 138-9.

⁴ *Unfolding Destiny* 425-6.

⁵ See also his digital paper ‘The *Kitab-i Iqan*: An Introduction’ with reproductions of
(continued...)

commentary that Baha'u'llah employs. In his view, the theme of the book is an endeavour “to prove that the Qur'an actually anticipates a future revelation (and thus another prophet after Muhammad). ... Once the obstacle of revelatory finality is swept aside, Baha'u'llah the exegete becomes Baha'u'llah the revealer.”¹ This is largely true: the book does address the Islamic doctrine of the finality of Muhammad's revelation, and Shiah expectations concerning the return of the Qa'im, particularly some of the eschatological traditions concerning apocalyptic signs and events. However another theme and another audience is also present: the *Iqan* speaks to the Babi community, and presents a new doctrine of the imamate. It is at once a prophetology, the subversion of eschatology (for the 'signs' have come, but the world goes on) and the foundation of a political theology. In his later 'Introduction to the *Iqan*,' Buck says that:

the *Kitab-i Iqan* focussed on spiritual sovereignty, on the moral and spiritual authority of the prophets of God, particularly on the authority of the Bab and, by implication, of Baha'u'llah himself. Later, Baha'u'llah sacralized the temporal authority of just governments and stressed the need for temporal authority to draw upon religion as an indispensable resource, from which moral authority could best be derived. Considering that religious virtue is potentially superior to purely civic virtue, Baha'u'llah's system of religious governance, symbolized as “the Crimson Ark” ... is designed to spiritualize humanity in ways that are simply beyond the power of the state. Religion can ideally exercise a sovereignty that derives its power from the spiritual King, the prophet of the age. This is one of the key themes of the *Kitab-i Iqan* ...

The doctrine of the two sovereignties Baha'u'llah produces in the *Kitab-e Iqan* is the decisive step in the transmutation of the Babis' theocratic sectarianism, shaped mainly by Shiah expectations, into a new religion defined by Baha'u'llah's own ideas and person.

The *Iqan* was composed at a time when Baha'u'llah had already laid the basis for his own messianic claim within the Babi community, and would shortly make that claim explicit and then public. It came in response to questions put to Baha'u'llah by a maternal uncle of the Bab, Haji Mirza Sayyid Muhammad, who had not become a Babi himself. He was undertaking a pilgrimage to the Shiah holy city of Karbila, near Baghdad. Baha'u'llah cites one of the questions that was asked as follows:

⁵(...continued)

early lithographs.

¹ Buck, *Symbol and Secret* xxiii.

Why is it that the sovereignty of the Qa'im, affirmed in the text of recorded traditions, and handed down by the shining stars of the Muhammadan Dispensation, hath not in the least been made manifest? Nay, the contrary hath come to pass. Have not His disciples and companions been afflicted of men? Are they not still the victims of the fierce opposition of their enemies? Are they not today leading the life of abased and impotent mortals?¹

We can guess that this is not simply a question that Shiah would be asking the Babis. The Babis themselves, a largely underground and persecuted movement whose millennial hopes had been dashed, must also have been seeking an understanding, a confirmation that the Bab was indeed the Qa'im although his Cause had to all appearances led to disaster and suffering, and to no improvement in the condition of Iran. Baha'u'llah had to show that the Bab did indeed display the sovereignty that is expected of the Qa'im and then to provide a justification for the continuing separate sovereignty of the state after the eschaton.

He does this first by addressing the question of figurative rather than literal readings of the signs of the Qa'im, using a variety of examples drawn from both the Islamic tradition and the 'Little Apocalypse' of Matthew chapters 24 and 25. Since it is only the question of sovereignty that concerns us here, one example of the exegetical method will suffice. Baha'u'llah writes:

... strive thou to comprehend ... the meaning of the "cleaving of the heaven" [Quran 82:1] – one of the signs that must needs herald the coming of the last Hour, the Day of Resurrection. ... By "heaven" is meant the heaven of divine Revelation, which is elevated with every Manifestation, and rent asunder with every subsequent one. By "cloven asunder" is meant that the former Dispensation is superseded and annulled. I swear by God! That this heaven being cloven asunder is, to the discerning, an act mightier than the cleaving of the skies! Ponder a while. That a divine Revelation which for years hath been securely established; beneath whose shadow all who have embraced it have been reared and nurtured; by the light of whose law generations of men have been disciplined ... what act is mightier than that such a Revelation should, by the power of God, be "cloven asunder" and be abolished at the appearance of one soul? Reflect, is this a mightier act than that which

¹ *Kitab-e Iqan* 106. Page references are to the English translation unless otherwise stated. This is the fourth of the questions asked. For a translation of the four questions see MacEoin. 'Questions of Sayyid Muhammad Shirazi.'

these abject and foolish men have imagined the “cleaving of the heaven” to mean?¹

Such examples are used to establish that a literal reading of eschatological signs is nonsensical, that literal readings have been the cause of the denial of Jesus and Muhammad in their times, and that symbolic interpretations are necessary to avoid the risk of again denying the Promised One. What is needed to read such terms correctly is neither the formal knowledge of the mujtahids nor the guidance of a Perfect Shiah, but rather freedom from presuppositions and quiet reflection.² Baha’u’llah then refers rather briefly to a Muslim neoplatonic cosmology, according to which the names and attributes of God are manifest in all creation, and particularly in human beings, and to the greatest perfection in the Manifestations of God. The concept of the emanation of the attributes of God, and their embodiment in creation, will be dealt with in a separate section. We need only note here the argument that the Bab, if he be a Manifestation of God, must indeed have evinced sovereignty:

From that which hath been said it becometh evident that all things, in their inmost reality, testify to the revelation of the names and attributes of God within them. Man, the noblest and most perfect of all created things, excelleth them all in the intensity of this revelation, and is a fuller expression of its glory. And of all men, the most accomplished, the most distinguished and the most excellent are the Manifestations of the Sun of Truth. ... These Tabernacles of holiness, these primal Mirrors which reflect the light of unfading glory, are but expressions of Him Who is the Invisible of the Invisibles. By the revelation of these gems of divine virtue all the names and attributes of God, such as knowledge and power, sovereignty and dominion, mercy and wisdom, glory, bounty and grace, are made manifest. These attributes of God are not and have never been vouchsafed specially unto certain Prophets, and withheld from others. ... these beauteous Countenances have, each and every one of them, been endowed with all the attributes of God, such as sovereignty, dominion, and the like, even though to outward seeming they be shorn of all earthly majesty.³

¹ *Kitab-e Iqan* 44-45.

² *Op. cit.* 68. The mujtahids are implicitly those of the Usuli school of Shi’ism. Buck (‘An Introduction’) has commented that the exegesis in the *Iqan* shows continuities with Akhbari and Shaykhi Shiah exegesis, in the structure of the *Iqan*, its use of symbolic interpretation, and its focus on the question of the imamate.

³ *Kitab-e Iqan* 102-104.

What Baha'u'llah achieves by this argument is first of all to generalize the question from the sovereignty and dominion of the Qa'im to the sovereignty of prophets in general, and second to exclude one argument that might be adopted as a coping mechanism to deal with the apparent failure of the Babi movement. It would have been possible to argue that the Bab was a preliminary figure and did not represent the eschatological promise in its fullness. The Babis would then have been able to continue as a typical millenarian sect, expecting that the sovereignty of the Qa'im would be manifest, in a visible and worldly form, in some near future. This is a pattern we see also in Christian history and in the Baha'i community: rather than accepting the messiah and then redefining their own millennial expectations in terms of his actual person and teachings, the first generations of followers retain their original expectations and consider their fulfilment to be merely delayed. The Bab prophesied the coming of a figure known as 'He whom God will make manifest,' and it would have been a natural development for the Babis to transfer unfulfilled apocalyptic expectations to this figure. Millenarianism would then be held in suspense rather than being reinterpreted and transcended. By the time he wrote the *Iqan*, Baha'u'llah had already decided to blow new life and hope into the Babi community, and he understood that he was called to be 'He whom God will make manifest.' Leaving aside the religious dimension of Baha'u'llah's decision, this was an act of considerable political courage, analogous to leading a people who had been soaked in petrol out of a gunpowder store, using a naked flame (Baha'u'llah's own messianic claim) to light the way. The Babi community itself, or rather the frustrated millenarian passions of its clerical wing, would present the greatest danger to him. We can get some idea of what might have been unleashed from a Babi history, the *Nuqtatu'l-Káf*¹ which was written in 1850 or 1851. Browne, who attributes the work to Mirza Jani Kashani, describes the sentiments expressed in this work as follows:

... there was nothing of caution, compromise or concealment about the honest Kashani merchant. The Babis of his time looked rather for an immediate triumph over all existing powers, culminating in the universal establishment of the True Faith and the Reign of God's Saints on Earth,

¹ No English translation is available, but the contents are summarized by E.G. Browne (ed. and trans.) *The New History (Tárikh-e Jadíd) of Mirza 'Ali Muhammed, The Bab*, and a Persian text (*Kitáb-e Nuqtatu'l-Káf*) has been edited by Brown and published by E.J. Brill at Leiden (1910). Browne's text has been shown to be substantially the same as an 1851 manuscript at Princeton, which may be the clean copy made from the author's notes (McCants and Milani, 'History and Provenance'), thus it gives an authentic picture of the beliefs of one very early Babi.

than for a Heaven of Glory, a far-distant Millennium, or “the Most Great Peace” on which Beha and his followers love to dilate. They did not make any profession of loyalty to, or love for, the reigning dynasty ... they hated the Muhammadan clergy ... with an intense and bitter hatred, and Mirza Jani anticipates with exultation a day whereon the Ka’im, or Messiah ... shall behead seventy thousand Mullas “like dogs”; but they entertained for the Kajar rulers an equal hatred ...¹

Browne is correct to underline the contrast between these sentiments, indicative at least of the audience to which the *Iqan* was addressed, and the later beliefs of the Bahai community, many of whose members were former Babis. The *Iqan* is an important part of the story of how these people were transformed, from bloodthirsty anticipation of the miraculous overthrow of the old order to constructive engagement with the state. We can note in passing that Browne, like other authors who have been noted, attributes the difference to pragmatic motives, or duplicity.

Algar comments that this expectation of future messianic events is a strange sentiment (for a Babi), since the Bab had claimed to be the Hidden Imam,² yet it seems quite understandable in terms of the dynamic of postponed fulfilment I have described.

Unless Baha’u’llah could show that the sovereignty of the Qa’im was a spiritual ascendancy, and had already been achieved, rather than an earthly supremacy to be achieved in the future, the Babis would have expected him to fulfill the prophecies literally, conquering the world and overturning its order, massacring the deniers, defeating unjust rulers and exercising earthly majesty. Moreover the Ottoman Sultan and government would have good reason to fear the same, and the prophet might well have been crushed between the apocalyptic fervour of an expectant community and a state fighting for its own survival. This is also one possible reading of the tragic dynamic of the Babi movement, for there seems to be no strong evidence that the Bab initiated the actions of the militants among the Babis that eventually led the Persian state to treat Babism as a threat, giving in to the urging of the mujtahids and ulama by executing the Bab.³ Thus it was essential that Baha’u’llah preclude a delayed eschatology, and reinterpret the eschatological language especially as it relates to sovereignty, before he announced himself to be the figure promised in the writings of the Bab, the Quran and the Gospels. Baha’u’llah sets out his aim in these words:

¹ *The New History*, xvi--xvii.

² Algar, *Religion and State*, 150 n. 93.

³ *Op. cit.* 143, 147.

The significance and essential purpose underlying these words is to reveal and demonstrate unto the pure in heart and the sanctified in spirit that they Who are the Luminaries of truth and the Mirrors reflecting the light of divine Unity, in whatever age and cycle they are sent down ... are invariably endowed with an all-compelling power, and invested with invincible sovereignty.¹

Having established the necessity of symbolic readings of eschatological signs, and generalized the question from the sovereignty of the Qa'im to the sovereignty of the prophets in general, Baha'u'llah turns in part two of the *Kitab-e Iqan* to the question of why the sovereignty expected of the Qa'im was not evident in the Bab:

Yea, the sovereignty attributed to the Qa'im and spoken of in the scriptures, is a reality, the truth of which none can doubt. This sovereignty, however, is not the sovereignty which the minds of men have falsely imagined.

... by sovereignty is meant the all-encompassing, all-pervading power which is inherently exercised by the Qa'im whether or not He appear to the world clothed in the majesty of earthly dominion. ... You will readily recognize that the terms sovereignty, wealth, life, death, judgment and resurrection, spoken of by the scriptures of old, are not what this generation hath conceived and vainly imagined. Nay, by sovereignty is meant that sovereignty which in every dispensation resideth within, and is exercised by, the person of the Manifestation, the Day-star of Truth. That sovereignty is the spiritual ascendancy which He exerciseth to the fullest degree over all that is in heaven and on earth, and which in due time revealeth itself to the world in direct proportion to its capacity and spiritual receptiveness, ...²

He gives the example of Muhammad's lack of worldly power during the time he was in Mecca, and contrasts it with the spiritual authority which was accorded to Muhammad in Baha'u'llah's own time:

... how many are the Sovereigns who bow the knee before His name! How numerous the nations and kingdoms who have sought the shelter of His shadow, who bear allegiance to His Faith, and pride themselves therein! ... Such is His earthly sovereignty, the evidences of which thou dost on every side behold. This sovereignty must needs be revealed and

¹ *Kitab-e Iqan* 95-7.

² *Op. cit.* 106-8.

established either in the lifetime of every Manifestation of God or after His ascension unto His true habitation in the realms above. ... That spiritual ascendancy, however, which is primarily intended, resideth within, and revolveth around Them from eternity even unto eternity. It can never for a moment be divorced from Them. Its dominion hath encompassed all that is in heaven and on earth.¹

The sovereignty of the prophets refers primarily to a spiritual ascendancy that is proper to the Manifestations of God whether or not they exercise temporal power. It is the power to attract devotion and to change hearts, to reform morals and call forth sacrifices, to create a new form of human community. Later in the *Iqan*, Baha'u'llah refers to the Babi community itself as one of the signs of the sovereignty of the Bab:

And among the evidences of the truth of His manifestation were the ascendancy, ... which He, the Revealer of being and Manifestation of the Adored, hath, unaided and alone, revealed throughout the world. No sooner had that eternal Beauty revealed Himself in Shiraz, in the year sixty, ... than the signs of the ascendancy, the might, the sovereignty, and power, emanating from that Essence of Essences and Sea of Seas, were manifest in every land. ... How many were those pure and kindly hearts which faithfully reflected the light of that eternal Sun, and how manifold the emanations of knowledge from that Ocean of divine wisdom which encompassed all beings! ... Such was the potency and transmuting influence which He exercised over them, that they ceased to cherish any desire but His will, and wedded their soul to his remembrance. Reflect: Who in this world is able to manifest such transcendent power ...²

As I said earlier, the *Iqan* is as much an address to the Babi community as an apologia for a Shiah questioner. When it was written, that community was broken. It had suffered heavy losses and been partially dispossessed. More important, it did not know any more what it was that it had suffered for. Where was the fulfilment of the promise? In a climate that begged for answers, and in the absence of effective leadership from its designated leader, Mirza Yahya (*Mirzá Yahyá*, known as *Azál*), dozens of claimants to leadership had arisen, splitting and confusing it even further. Baha'u'llah's answer is not to advance another claim (although that is implicit), but to direct the Babi community to itself, to "the sublime renunciation, the unwavering constancy of God's holy companions, who,

¹ *Kitab-e Iqan* 110-111.

² *Op. cit.* 234-5.

by the aid of God, are growing nobler and more glorious every day.” That which strikes fear in the hearts of their enemies, he says, is not their military might but their willingness to sacrifice themselves. The sovereignty that they have lost sight of resides within the community itself, in its martyrs and its heroism, in the transformation of hearts, in bring together peoples divided by historical hatred. And, he promises, the process has just begun: “Ere long, thine eyes will behold the standards of divine power unfurled throughout all regions, and the signs of His triumphant might and sovereignty manifest in every land.”¹

The sovereignty of spiritual ascendancy, deriving from the Manifestation but manifest in the community, is clearly differentiated from and superior to worldly dominion, but Baha’u’llah does not say that it over-rules or displaces temporal government:

Our purpose in setting forth these truths hath been to demonstrate the sovereignty of Him Who is the King of kings. Be fair: Is this sovereignty which, through the utterance of one Word, hath manifested such pervading influence, ascendancy, and awful majesty, is this sovereignty superior, or is the worldly dominion of these kings of the earth who, despite their solicitude for their subjects and their help of the poor, are assured only of an outward and fleeting allegiance, while in the hearts of men they inspire neither affection nor respect? Hath not that sovereignty, through the potency of one word, subdued, quickened, and revitalized the whole world? What! Can the lowly dust compare with Him Who is the Lord of Lords? What tongue dare utter the immensity of difference that lieth between them?²

One of the more seductive, and to the outsider, unattractive, aspects of millennialist movements, is the belief that the elect will rule the world, with the additional pleasure of seeing the ‘unrighteous’ suitably punished.³ Shiah eschatological expectations included a similar element: when the Mahdi returned and proved to be the hidden twelfth Imam (the Qa’im), the Shiah could expect some satisfaction from the confusion of the Sunni Muslims who had denied and murdered the Imams, persecuted the Shiah and despised them as heretics. Baha’u’llah now addresses this directly:

¹ *Kitab-e Iqan* 77 and 78.

² *Op. cit.* 123-4.

³ This theme is evident in Revelation 14:9-11 and 20:1-5, although it must be said to the credit of the early Christian churches that these less than elevated sentiments were among the arguments that were advanced against the inclusion of the book in the canon of the New Testament.

Were sovereignty to mean earthly sovereignty and worldly dominion, were it to imply the subjection and external allegiance of all the peoples and kindreds of the earth - whereby His loved ones should be exalted and be made to live in peace, and His enemies be abased and tormented - *such form of sovereignty would not be true of God Himself*, the Source of all dominion, Whose majesty and power all things testify. For, dost thou not witness how the generality of mankind is under the sway of His enemies? Have they not all turned away from the path of His good-pleasure? Have they not done that which He hath forbidden, and left undone, nay repudiated and opposed, those things which He hath commanded? Have not His friends ever been the victims of the tyranny of His foes? All these things are more obvious than even the splendour of the noon-tide sun.¹

The point of millennialist hopes is not just to see one's enemies finally humiliated. Millennialist movements are characterized by the conviction that the world has gone wrong, that injustice is flourishing, the worst of people prosper while the best are powerless, and also that this will change radically with God's apocalyptic intervention and a new order sent down from heaven. Baha'u'llah is saying that the ways of God do *not* change:² if God does not force either acceptance or obedience on humanity, then the Qa'im also cannot. There is therefore no fundamental break in history. The kingdom of God, so far as it is to be built at all, will have to be built little by little and heart by heart. It remains an eschatological reality, in one sense already present, in another sense always 'not yet.' The "generality of mankind" will continue to do what they should not and to leave undone those things they should do.³ The Kingdom of God remains, as a present reality in our hearts and as an eschatological hope: a hope that leads us along a path of progress, rather than a consolation encouraging the faithful to wait passively until, in a catastrophic upheaval, the earth is miraculously filled with the righteousness.

In this passage, Baha'u'llah is also saying that the distinction between earthly and spiritual sovereignty is proper to God's self: that the Kingdom of God created by the Qa'im must be true of God Himself, it must reflect the nature of dominion, majesty and power in the Kingdom in Heaven. We will return to the metaphysics of earthly sovereignty below.

¹ *Kitab-e Iqan* 125, emphasis added.

² Quran 17:77: "This was Our way when we sent messengers before you; no change will you find in Our ways."

³ Luke 11:42.

The idea that charismatic religious leadership entails a spiritual, not a worldly sovereignty, is not new to Baha'u'llah. One finds it in the writings of the mystic Qádí Sa'íd Qumí (d. 1691), who says that "temporal power would only be a supplementary divine grace, whose non-necessity is evident."¹ But this is easy to say if the imamate is reduced to the role of a personal spiritual guide operating from the unseen world, and not so easy when the imamate is embodied in a historical person. Moreover Qumí's stance is premised on the devaluation of the world and earthly sovereignty, implying political non-participation on the part of believers. This is only an option in an absolutist state that has subjects, rather than citizens, and requires only that they pay taxes and obey the laws. The new elements in Baha'u'llah's doctrine of two sovereignties are that it is based on a positive assessment of temporal sovereignty, and is thus adapted to a modern democratic state of active citizens, and that it continues after the historical manifestation of the Qa'im, so that the temporal sovereignty of the Qa'im is denied and the millennial threat is defused. Church-state resolutions without these elements, such as Kashfi's doctrine of the two pillars (see page 77), could be overturned by any upsurge in millennialist fervour, and the representatives of the religious order could decide that the earthly sovereignty of the Qa'im was not being properly exercised by the Shah and take it on themselves to make up the deficit, as they did in promoting the disastrous second Perso-Russian war of 1826. As we will see, in his later works Baha'u'llah consistently says that the sovereignty of kings and rulers derives from God, rather than from the Qa'im or Prophet, so these sources of instability are excluded in his system. A just king, in fact, is "nearer to God than anyone."² Moreover, for Baha'u'llah this system is established by revelation and inscribed in the scriptures, rather than being derived from reason as in Kashfi's theory.

Baha'u'llah continues in the *Iqan* with further examples of the sovereignty of spiritual ascendancy, relating to Imam Husayn, Imam Ja'far-as Sadiq and several examples from the life of Jesus. The first example refers to one of the dominant motifs of Shiah culture, the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, grandson of

¹ Cited in Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 173. The passage cited by Arjomand is similar to Mulla Sadra's position, which argues that temporal sovereignty is not essential to the Imamate, in support of the reality of the sovereignty of the Hidden Imam. Bayat, in *Mysticism and Dissent* (33) says that Qumí made a stronger claim, that "The Prophet and the Imams were 'servants of God' and not political rulers." If this is true, he is a Safavid precursor of the arguments of Abd-ur Raziq and of my own claim, above, that Muhammad did not establish a state or political system, or function as ruler.

² *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 92. If Crone and Hinds' sources are good (*God's Caliph*, chapters 2 and 3), this is a reversion to the earliest Islamic view.

Muhammad, at Karbala on the orders of the Umayyad Caliph Mu^cawiya (*Mu^cáwiya*). The commemoration of this event is one of the greatest and certainly the most emotional of the festivals in the Shiah calendar. The commemoration includes dramatic readings of the story by special readers whose object is to move the audience to tears, processions which often include self-flagellation, and ‘passion plays’ that may continue for days. Identification with Husayn’s suffering for the true (Shiah) faith has been a consolation for the Shiah, in their self-conception as an oppressed people, while a reinterpretation of the story by Ayatollah Khomeini which emphasized Husayn’s willingness to fight against illegitimate rule was a major factor in mobilizing mass support for the 1979 Iranian revolution.¹ Baha’u’llah writes:

Were the verse “And verily Our host shall conquer” to be literally interpreted, it is evident that it would in no wise be applicable to the chosen Ones of God and His hosts, inasmuch as Husayn, whose heroism was manifest as the sun, crushed and subjugated, quaffed at last the cup of martyrdom in Karbala ...

... the purpose of these verses is not what they have imagined. Nay, the terms “ascendancy,” “power,” and “authority” imply a totally different station and meaning. For instance, consider the pervading power of those drops of the blood of Husayn which besprinkled the earth. What ascendancy and influence hath the dust itself, through the sacredness and potency of that blood, exercised over the bodies and souls of men! So much so, that he who sought deliverance from his ills, was healed by touching the dust of that holy ground, and whosoever, wishing to protect his property, treasured with absolute faith and understanding, a little of that holy earth within his house, safeguarded all his possessions. These are the outward manifestations of its potency. ... Furthermore, call to mind the shameful circumstances that have attended the martyrdom of Husayn. ... And yet, behold how numerous, in this day, are those who from the uttermost corners of the earth don the garb of pilgrimage, seeking the site of his martyrdom, that there they may lay their heads upon the threshold of his shrine! Such is the ascendancy and power of God! Such is the glory of His dominion and majesty!²

It is essential to thoroughly understand how Baha’u’llah has defined terms such as authority, sovereignty, and dominion in relation to religion. Shoghi Effendi

¹ Hegland, ‘Two Images of Husain.’

² *Kitab-e Iqan* 126-9.

uses terms such as ‘supreme administrative institution’¹ when referring to the Universal House of Justice, terms that are prone to be misread as indicators of an ambition to world (and worldly) domination. Subsequent Bahai literature has tended to shorten such titles to ‘The Supreme Institution,’ which is even more likely to be misunderstood. The mere repetition of such titles, if it is not accompanied by reminders of the meaning of ‘supremacy’ in the light of the *Iqan*, and a clear understanding of the sphere within which that supremacy operates, could lead the Bahai administrative institutions themselves to misunderstand the relationship between themselves and the members of the Bahai community. Authority in religion is of a “totally different station” to the forms of authority that are proper and necessary in the exercise of “earthly dominion.” A Bahai administrative institution that conceives its purpose in relation to its community in terms of exercising ‘dominion’ has forgotten its proper goal, and will find itself working ‘against the grain’ of the community, even if the methods employed are consultative. Should this occur, a re-reading of part two of the *Iqan* may be a salutary medicine.

Baha’u’llah writes in the *Iqan* that “earthly sovereignty is of no worth, *nor will it ever be*, in the eyes of God and His chosen Ones.”² This is one of several references which show that he considered this not to be a new teaching, but to be part of the essential teaching of the ‘changeless Faith of God’ that is restated in each succeeding religion. From allusions already made, and explicitly in the later works of Baha’u’llah and Abdu’l-Baha that will be examined, it should be clear that the elevation of spiritual sovereignty does not mean that the art of governance is a sub-department of the project of religion. They operate in two different but intersecting dimensions. There is also no world-rejecting or world-fleeing element in Baha’u’llah’s thought. In a passage concerning the resurrection, Baha’u’llah quotes the Islamic tradition: “*He who is a true believer liveth both in this world and in the world to come*” (p. 120). We are not called to make a choice between citizenship in the Kingdom of God and citizenship of the world, but rather to fulfill both. This is reflected in the twin goals for which we were created. The first goal is expressed in the phrase in one of the daily obligatory prayers included in most Bahai prayer books, “I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee.” The second in the well-known verse “All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.”³

¹ *Messages to the Baha’i World 7*; see also *Messages to America* 94.

² *Kitab-e Iqan* 125.

³ *Gleanings* CIX, 215.

Baha'u'llah continues in the *Iqan* with two examples of the spiritual sovereignty of Jesus, citing words reportedly spoken by Jesus at his trial "Beholdest thou not the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and might?" In Baha'u'llah's reading, this is not an eschatological promise for the future, but a claim about his station and kingship at that time, despite his powerlessness.¹

This survey has concentrated on just one of the themes of the *Kitab-e Iqan*, and can hardly be said to have done the book justice. Other themes include the doctrine of progressive revelation and a sharp critique of the claims of the Usuli school of Shiah Islam regarding the right of the mujtahids to interpret the faith for the ordinary believers. The first is relevant to a theology of the state, particularly in a society composed of diverse religious communities, and the second to a theology of the Bahai community, since Baha'u'llah's rejection of the Usuli doctrine excludes any possibility of domination of the Bahai community by an institution of religious experts, as has happened in both Sunni and Shiah Islam. These themes will have to be passed over here, to close with Baha'u'llah's own conclusion:

These things We mention only that the people may not be dismayed because of certain traditions and utterances, which have not yet been literally fulfilled, that they may rather attribute their perplexity to their own lack of understanding, ...²

¹ The words that Baha'u'llah cites here differ from the Gospel versions of this event (Matthew 26:64, Mark 14:62, Luke 22:69) in several details, the most striking of which is that the Gospels agree that this is in the future tense, whereas the version Baha'u'llah cites is in the present. From the number of New Testament citations in the *Iqan* it seems very likely that Baha'u'llah had a complete Arabic translation of the New Testament available to him in Baghdad. One such translation was published in London in 1850: new copies of this might plausibly have reached Baghdad by 1851. It does not seem possible at present to ascertain whether the form of the citation is a deliberate re-telling of the story by Baha'u'llah or reflects the translation that Baha'u'llah used in Baghdad. All of the bibles among the books and papers of Abdu'l-Baha, and among other documents used by early Bahais in Haifa, date from after the family's departure from Baghdad (Personal communication, Universal House of Justice, 12 June 1996). The difference in tenses itself need not be significant, since Arabic commonly uses the present tense or a participle where English would use the future tense, and so does Aramaic, the language of the oral tradition underlying the Greek New Testament.

² *Kitab-e Iqan* 256.

The Tablets to the Kings

From 1863 to 1892, Baha'u'llah was in internal exile in Ottoman lands, first in Edirne and then in Akka and the surrounding area. In 1866 there was a decisive split in the Babi community, with one group acknowledging Baha'u'llah and another following his half-brother Mirza Yahya, known as Azal. The latter group, known as Azalis (*Azalis*), included many of those opposed to the state and particularly to the Qajar dynasty, which they blamed for the execution of the Bab. The militant political ambitions of the Azali faction seems to have been one of the roots of the conflict that split the community.¹ Azal had attempted to mount a military insurrection in Mazandaran in 1852 and had encouraged militancy and attempts to assassinate the Shah later in the same decade.² The definitive split between the two groups may also have removed from Baha'u'llah's retinue those who still harboured political ambitions. At any rate, Baha'u'llah's writings before this separation had been addressed mainly to his own followers and the Babi community, and he seems to have avoided contact with government officials and rulers, whereas from late 1867 we find some significant tablets and passages addressed to government and the topic of governance. Azalis continued to support and participate in opposition to Qajar rule until the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-6.³ The split consolidated Baha'u'llah's position as leader of the Bahai community, while the public distinction between Bahai identity and the Azalis meant that he could deny any relationship to revolutionary or theocratic ideas still being put forward in those groups. Following the split, from late 1867, Baha'u'llah began to write letters to kings and rulers, followed by systematic explanations of his own teachings intended for external audiences and publication. His contacts and correspondence with the designers of the Tanzimat reforms, and later with Young Ottoman reformers, also date from this period, and continued until his death. He seems to have been in personal contact with Iranian reformers even earlier.

The *Suriy-e Muluk* (*Súriy-e Mulúk*, Surah of the Kings) is a long tablet in Arabic, parts of which have been translated by Shoghi Effendi into English. *The Promised Day is Come* contains the opening passage, and *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah* contains a substantial part of the whole work, bringing together several of these shorter letters to kings and rulers. It is central to understanding Baha'u'llah's theology of the state. In the opening section, addressed to the Kings collectively, Baha'u'llah commands them to "Fling away

¹ Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal* 365, 414; Smith, *Babi and Baha'i Religions* 60.

² Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions* 60.

³ *Op. cit.* 98-99.

... the things ye possess, and take fast hold on the Handle of God.”¹ This submission to the will of God may well imply acceptance of the new revelation of Baha’u’llah, but this is not certain. In his second Tablet to Napoleon III (1869) he writes:

For what thou hast done, thy kingdom shall be thrown into confusion, and thine empire shall pass from thine hands, as a punishment for that which thou hast wrought. Then wilt thou know how thou hast plainly erred. Commotions shall seize all the people in that land, unless thou arisest to help this Cause, and followest *Him Who is the Spirit of God* in this, the Straight Path. Hath thy pomp made thee proud? By My Life! It shall not endure; nay, it shall soon pass away, unless thou holdest fast by this firm Cord.²

In the Bahai writings, ‘He who is the Spirit’ or ‘Spirit of God’ consistently refers to Jesus. While Baha’u’llah undoubtedly wished the rulers and peoples of the world to acknowledge his calling and follow his revelation, given his paradigm of the essential unity of the revealed religions he may have considered that the peace and progress of the world would be adequately served if the rulers at least followed their own religious traditions faithfully.

The call to “Fling away ... the things ye possess” clearly does not imply that the kings should abdicate, since Baha’u’llah goes on to command them to rule justly, to care for the poor, to form international agreements and moderate their armaments, expenditure and taxation.

Know ye that the poor are the trust of God in your midst. Watch that ye betray not His trust, ... Nowhere doth your true and abiding glory reside except in your firm adherence unto the precepts of God, your wholehearted observance of His laws, your resolution to see that they do not remain unenforced, and to pursue steadfastly the right course.³

Baha’u’llah’s acknowledgement of the legitimacy of their rule is unequivocal, but he uses it to set for them a high standard of behaviour, against which most of them are judged wanting:

God hath committed into your hands the reins of the government of the people, that ye may rule with justice over them, safeguard the rights of the down-trodden, and punish the wrong-doers. If ye neglect the duty

¹ Translated in Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come* 20.

² *Proclamation of Baha’u’llah* 20-21; *Summons*: Suriy-i-Haykal para. 138.

³ *Gleanings* CXVIII 251-253.

prescribed unto you by God in His Book, your names shall be numbered with those of the unjust in His sight.¹

It is significant that the rulers are said here to rule on behalf of God, rather than as deputies of the Qa'im. Since Baha'u'llah himself claimed to be that Qa'im, the latter position (which would be expected in the light of the Shiah background) would have been an implicit claim that these rulers were subordinate to Baha'u'llah. While the rulers are exhorted to observe 'the duty prescribed' in the Book, these are ethical duties relating to good government. There is no indication that Baha'u'llah intended by this that the rulers should enforce the Bahai shariah on their subjects. The 'law' referred to is simpler and older:

Lay not on any soul a load which ye would not wish to be laid upon you, and desire not for any one the things ye would not desire for yourselves.²

Another aspect of Baha'u'llah's model of human society appears in the same passage, where he continues:

Respect ye the divines and learned (*ulama*) amongst you, they whose conduct accords with their professions ... Know ye that they are the lamps of guidance unto them that are in the heavens and on the earth. They who disregard and neglect the divines and learned that live amongst them – these have truly changed the favor (*ni'ma*) with which God hath favored them.

Religion has a role in the private sphere, where it motivates altruistic behaviour and ensures that most of the citizens of the state are law-abiding most of the time, but this also implies that religious figures and institutions have a public importance that must be recognised. The public sphere cannot be artificially divorced from the private or from the lives of individuals, on which it is built and which it exists to support. The importance of those who are learned in the religious sciences, as advisors to the government, will emerge more clearly in Abdu'l-Baha's writings. For now it should be noted that their position in this passage is not less than that which the ulama were accorded in Sunni political theology, and that this contrasts strongly with the Azalis' attitude. Those who neglect the ulama are said to have "changed the favor with which God hath favored them." The 'favour' here may well be the act of revelation itself,³ in

¹ *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, CXVI, 247.

² Tablet to the Kings, translated in *Gleanings*, LXVI, 128. *Alvah bi muluk* (Tehran) 27.

³ For an earlier example of Baha'u'llah's use of the word in this sense, see the closing
(continued...)

which case those who neglect the ulama are being likened to those who alter or interpolate words in a revealed book. Bearing in mind the weight that such an act (known as *tahrif*) had in the Islamic world it is difficult to imagine what more emphatic words Baha'u'llah could have used.

While Baha'u'llah is clear in his denunciations of the mass of the ulama of his day, this does not arise from an anti-clerical, let alone irreligious, social theory. Like the kings, the ulama are condemned for failing to live up to their sacred responsibilities for the well-being of their fellow-men. Baha'u'llah's positive attitude to the ulama contrasts with the anti-clericalism of both religious and secular Iranian modernists of his time, such as Karim Khan Kirmani, Fathali Akhundzadeh (*Fathali Akhundzadeh*, 1812-1878) and Afghani.

Baha'u'llah urges Sultan Abdulaziz (*Abdu'l-Aziz*), who ruled through a cabinet government with appointed ministers, to select only ministers who are righteous and fear God. This points towards two themes that are more fully developed elsewhere: the role of religion in providing the ethical standards necessary to government, and the duty of the righteous (not just religious leaders) to be involved in public life and service.¹ In this tablet, Baha'u'llah also warns the Sultan "Take heed that thou resign not the reins of the affairs of thy state into the hands of others, and repose not thy confidence in ministers unworthy of thy trust, and be not of them that live in heedlessness."² This would seem to contrast strangely with his endorsement of democratic methods of government just a few years later, in the *Kitab-e Aqdas*. However the main subject here is 'untrustworthy ministers,' specifically those who pretend to religious faith without its reality. The secondary subject is that the Sultan should not give government control to ministers whom he appointed at his pleasure, and then let them do as they pleased. The supposed reforms of Ottoman government under the Tanzimat system were a recipe for bad government, since ministers were appointed on the Sultan's whim, and had a strong incentive to exploit their position to the maximum while it lasted. Given that the ministers were not responsible to a parliament or the people, close supervision by the Sultan represented the best

³(...continued)

words of his *Hidden Words*: "I bear witness, O friends! that the *favor (ni'ma)* is complete, the argument fulfilled, the proof manifest"

¹ In Bahai presentations of the Bahai teachings, the separation of church and state is often presented as 'non-involvement in politics,' and taken to mean that believers should *not* participate in political life, which would clearly make it difficult for the Sultan do as he was bid! An example of the later distortion of a talk given by Abdu'l-Baha praising the involvement of believers in politics is discussed below at page 224.

² *Gleanings* CXIV 232.

method both of limiting their injustice and of ensuring the Sultan had some insight into the abilities of those whom he appointed and dismissed.

While Baha'u'llah as prophet upbraids the rulers for their injustice and reminds them that mortal sovereignty is fleeting, he also says that as a citizen he has always been obedient to government and will remain so. But his good wishes have a barb of criticism in their tail:

Have I, O King, ever disobeyed thee? ... Not for one short moment did We rebel against thee, or against any of thy ministers. Never, God willing, shall We revolt against thee ... In the day time and in the night season ... We pray to God on thy behalf, *that He may graciously aid thee to be obedient unto Him* and to observe His commandment ... ¹

The italicised passage is at least a hint of criticism, since the duty to pray for the ruler was known in Shiah Islam: if the ruler is just, one prays that his reign may be prolonged (some adding, until the Qa'im comes), and if the ruler is unjust, the believer was to pray that he might be guided to the right path.

In a tablet in which Baha'u'llah speaks in terms of archetypes, with himself as all of the prophets, eternally persecuted, he accuses the Persian ambassador:

Ye perpetrate every day a fresh injustice, and treat Me as ye treated Me in times past, though *I never attempted to meddle with your affairs*. At no time have I opposed you, neither have I rebelled against your laws. ... Know for a certainty, however, that whatever your hands or the hands of the infidels have wrought will never, as they never did of old, change the Cause of God or alter His ways.

Give heed to My warning, ye people of Persia! If I be slain at your hands, God will assuredly raise up one who will fill the seat made vacant through My death, for such is God's method carried into effect of old, and *no change can ye find in God's method of dealing*.²

In the first italicized passage, the "I" who does not meddle in the affairs of the rulers is Baha'u'llah both as a historical person, and as the representative of all the prophets. The second italicized passage is a Quran citation (33:62): by using it Baha'u'llah is emphasizing that the prophets have always been accused of worldly designs, and have been opposed and persecuted as a result.

In one passage Baha'u'llah sets out what appears to be a charter for civil disobedience, declaring "If the laws and regulations to which ye cleave be of your

¹ Letter to Sultan Abdulaziz, *Gleanings*, CXIV 240.

² Letter to Persian Ambassador Hájí Mírzá Husayn Khán, *Gleanings*, CXIII 224.

own making, We will, in no wise, follow them.”¹ However it is not clear whether he is refusing to obey Ottoman law, or the arbitrary decisions of the Ottoman ministers who are addressed in this passage. Even if it is the former, the intention does not seem to be to deny the validity of civil law per se, or to claim a status beyond the law for himself as a prophet. Rather he asks that the law and regulations be based not on fiat but on reason, and applied consistently and not at the whim of the administrator:

bring forth, then, your proofs ... If your rules and principles be founded on justice, why is it, then, that ye follow those which accord with your corrupt inclinations and reject such as conflict with your desires?²

The appeal to reason to legitimate political acts is another important theme in Baha’u’llah’s political thought. It is related to his belief that in this messianic age, ‘reason’ has been poured out on all peoples so that the masses have the political maturity to govern themselves.

At the same time as he addressed the kings, Baha’u’llah was also preaching the recognition of the rights of the state to the Babi and Bahai communities. He writes to one of his own followers:

Know thou that We have annulled the rule of the sword, as an aid to Our Cause, and substituted for it the power born of the utterance of men. Thus have We *irrevocably decreed*, by virtue of Our grace. Say: O people! Sow not the seeds of discord among men, and refrain from contending with your neighbor, for your Lord hath committed the world and the cities thereof to the care of the kings of the earth, and made them the emblems of His own power, by virtue of the sovereignty He hath chosen to bestow upon them. He hath refused to reserve for Himself any share whatever of this world’s dominion. ... The things He hath reserved for Himself are the cities of men’s hearts, that He may cleanse them from all earthly defilements ... The world and its vanities, and its glory, and whatever delights it can offer, are all, in the sight of God, as worthless as ... dust and ashes. Would that the hearts of men could comprehend it! ... Cast them away unto such as may desire them, and fasten your eyes upon this most holy and effulgent Vision.³

And to another of his followers:

¹ *Gleanings* LXV 123. The immediate addressees are the ministers of the Ottoman Sultan.

² *Gleanings* LXV 123-24.

³ Lawh-i Nabil-i A^czam, in *Gleanings* CXXXIX 303-4.

The one true God, exalted be His glory, *hath ever regarded, and will continue to regard*, the hearts of men as His own, His exclusive possession. All else, whether pertaining to land or sea, whether riches or glory, He hath bequeathed unto the Kings and rulers of the earth. *From the beginning that hath no beginning* the ensign proclaiming the words “He doeth whatsoever He willeth” hath been unfurled in all its splendor before His Manifestation. What mankind needeth in this day is obedience unto them that are in authority, and a faithful adherence to the cord of wisdom. The instruments which are essential to the immediate protection, the security and assurance of the human race have been entrusted to the hands, and lie in the grasp, of the governors of human society. This is the wish of God and His decree....¹

In the Surah-ye Bayan, variously dated in the Edirne or Akka periods, Baha’u’llah writes:

Out of the whole world He hath chosen for Himself the hearts of men – hearts which the hosts of revelation and of utterance can subdue. Thus hath it been ordained by the Fingers of Baha, upon the Tablet of God’s *irrevocable decree*, by the behest of Him Who is the Supreme Ordainer, the All-Knowing.²

Such a forthright legitimation of the state is not unique, but it is certainly interesting, in light of recent Iranian history, to find it coming from an Iranian Shiah background. Moreover it does not describe an interim acceptance of temporal powers pending the eschaton: it comes from one claiming to be the Promised One, speaking to a community for which the end times are now. We can see that this is not simply hyperbole from his use of Quranic and New Testament passages to support his argument in *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*. The biblical passages he uses are too well-known to require a full citation: “render to Caesar ...” from the Gospels, and two verses from Paul “... the powers that be are ordained of God,” and “For he [the ruler] is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” The verse from the Quran that Baha’u’llah uses is also a well known one: “Obey God and obey the Apostle, and those among you invested with authority.” So Baha’u’llah believed that there are scriptural grounds for believing that the distinction between the authorities of religion and of human governance has always been part of the ancient Faith of God, as we can see in the two passages italicised above. In that case, we should

¹ The Lawh-e Ashraf, in *Gleanings*, CII 206-7.

² *Gleanings* CXXVIII 279.

classify the doctrine of the two sovereignties not as one of the new social teachings revealed for the Bahai era, but rather as an essential spiritual teaching that may be reformulated by future Manifestations of God but cannot be annulled. It is, as C.S. Lewis would say, part of the “deep magic,” a truth at the level of “God is Good,” “love conquers all,” or “do unto others.”

It is not difficult to see that this is so in Christian and Jewish theologies, where the elimination of the political is only an eschatological hope, but it goes against the received wisdom regarding Islamic political theology. This is why the chapter on ‘Religion and Politics in Islamic History’ sought to demonstrate, from Islamic sources that would have been available to Baha’u’llah such as the *Life of Muhammad* and from the Quran itself, that it is at least a plausible reading of Muhammad’s example, that Muhammad recognised this principle even in the absence of a state, and did not himself found a state or become its ruler.

In his 1868 letter addressed to Nasir ad-Din Shah of Iran, Baha’u’llah denies any ambition in the world, saying that it would be ridiculous for a powerless outcast to entertain such hopes:

Among the people are those who say “that youth desires only to perpetuate his name” and others say “he seeks the world (*dunya*) for himself,” although I have not found any secure place in my days, on which I might stand.¹

In another section in the Tablet to the Shah, Baha’u’llah says that “rendering assistance to God” (*nasrat*) does not mean “contending or disputing with any soul” but rather “that the cities of men’s hearts, ... should be subdued by the sword of utterance, of wisdom and of understanding.” The Bahais are to achieve victory (*nasrat*) only over the hearts of the people, for God “hath entrusted the kingdom of creation, its lands and its seas, into the hands of the kings, for they are, each according to his degree, the manifestations of His divine power. Should they enter beneath the shadow of the True One, they will be accounted of God, and if not, thy Lord, verily, knoweth and observeth all things.” The implication of the last sentence is that religion cannot provide a justification for seeking to depose a king – if his failings are religious, God is his judge.²

¹ *Kitab-e Mubin* 62-3. There is a translation in *Summons* paragraph 196, but I have used my own translation since *Summons* translates *dunya* as “the vanities of the world” which seems unduly interpretive.

² *Summons* sections 210-12, *Kitab-e Mubin* 68. Where Abdu’l-Baha cites this work in *A Traveller’s Narrative*, the conditional phrase is omitted, leaving only “... according to the degrees of their rank: *verily He is the Potent, the Sovereign.*” (Page 113 of Browne’s

Another text from the same period, Baha'u'llah's **letter to Pope Pius IX** (1869), gives an indication of the church-state relationship he favoured. Baha'u'llah advises the Pope:

Abandon thy kingdom unto the kings, ... Exhort the kings and say: 'Deal equitably with men. Beware lest ye transgress the bounds fixed in the Book.'¹

From the last injunction, it is clear that religious institutions are not intended to withdraw to an apolitical cloister, but to work in the body politic within the ethical sphere, with full respect for civil government, and without laying claim to the authority that God has delegated to the kings. Baha'u'llah continues:

Beware lest thou appropriate unto thyself the things of the world and the riches thereof. Leave them unto such as desire them, and cleave unto that which hath been enjoined upon thee by Him Who is the Lord of creation.

A new order is dawning, when the tares and wheat that have been growing together are to be separated:

Verily, the day of ingathering² is come, and all things have been separated from each other. He hath stored away that which He chose in the vessels of justice, and cast into fire that which befitteth it.

The *Kitab-e Aqdas*

The *Kitab-e Aqdas* (*Kitáb-e Aqdas*, the Most Great Book), belongs to the early Akka period. The conventional date of revelation is "around 1873"³ but there are indications that it was composed and compiled in a process lasting at least five years, with some sections composed soon after Baha'u'llah's arrival in Akka in 1868 or even earlier,⁴ while the process of adding to it some questions relating mainly to personal law, and Baha'u'llah's answers to them, continued for some time. Shoghi Effendi has described it as "the brightest emanation of the mind of Baha'u'llah ... the Mother Book of His Dispensation ..."⁵ "In this Charter of the future world civilization," Shoghi Effendi continues, "its Author – at once the

²(...continued)

edition, page 63 of the 1980 US Edition)

¹ Extract translated by Shoghi Effendi, in *Proclamation of Baha'u'llah* 85.

² Cf. Matthew 13:30.

³ The Universal House of Justice, Introduction to *The Kitab-e Aqdas* 8.

⁴ Eqbal, 'Redating the Beginnings of *Kitab-e Aqdas*'; McGlenn, (review of) 'The Style of the *Kitab-i Aqdas*' 94.

⁵ *God Passes By* 211.

Judge, the Lawgiver, the Unifier and Redeemer of mankind – announces to the kings of the earth the promulgation of the ‘Most Great Law;’ pronounces them to be His vassals; proclaims Himself the ‘King of Kings;’ disclaims any intention of laying hands on their kingdoms; reserves for Himself the right to ‘seize and possess the hearts of men...” These comments are not included here simply as an obligatory gesture of respect for Shoghi Effendi: we can see both that he recognises the significance of the political idiom in which Baha’u’llah speaks *and* that this does not imply any claim to a kingdom outside of “the hearts of men.” This is important because it has been said that Shoghi Effendi’s vision of the world order of Baha’u’llah does not recognise the principle of two sovereignties that we find in the Iqan, the Aqdas, and other writings of Baha’u’llah: Shoghi Effendi has been blamed for initiating the theocratic misreading of Bahai teachings that will be documented in the review of Bahai secondary literature. It should be said quite emphatically that this is not so: it is evident from his summaries of their themes, that Shoghi Effendi understood very well the implications for the political order of Baha’u’llah’s words in the Iqan and Aqdas.

In the *Kitab-e Aqdas* Baha’u’llah establishes the Bahai community as a community living under laws, and lays the foundations of the principal institutions of the Faith: the consultative ‘houses of justice’ at local and international levels, the Mashriqu’l-Adhkar or House of Worship, the 19-day Feast, the institution of the Learned, marriage, prayer and fasting, and many more. But the book contains more than the statutes of a religious community, it is the “Charter of the future world civilization,” and a civilization consists of more than religion alone. Baha’u’llah recognizes and honours the institution of human government, in the forms of monarchy and republican government, and enjoins all people to obey “those who wield authority.”

Because of its importance and the verses establishing specific institutions, the Aqdas can be considered as a central document in the constitutional law of the Bahai community. The other central texts are his *Kitab-e ‘Ahd* (*Kitáb-e ‘Ahd*, Book of the Covenant), Abdu’l-Baha’s *Will and Testament*, and the section ‘The Administrative Order in Shoghi Effendi’s *The Dispensation of Baha’u’llah*.¹ When Bahais say that their institutions are ‘divine,’ they do not (or should not) mean that God is incarnate in them, but rather that their foundations are laid in the explicit and authentic text of a revealed Book or an authoritative interpretation of such scripture, and particularly in these four books, and that their operating principles and details are worked out in accordance with scripture and under the guidance of Manifestation of God and his legates.

The provisions of the Aqdas, according to Shoghi Effendi, “remain inviolate

¹ Printed in *The World Order of Baha’u’llah* 143-157.

for no less than a thousand years,”¹ that being the minimum interval, according to Baha’u’llah, before another Manifestation of God will appear. No Bahai institution is given authority to alter any of its laws or principles. This is of the very essence of the concept of the Covenant, which itself is the bedrock that constitutes the Bahai community as a community. Those who have suggested that the Bahai recognition of the rights of temporal government and the duty of obedience to it is no more than the temporary tactical response of a powerless community have not taken this into account. Given the importance attached to this Book, no alteration to its principles is conceivable.

By convention, Aqdas verses are not referred to by page number but by a paragraph number, preceded by a K for the main text (*kitab*) or a Q for the Questions and Answers section. The same numbering is used in the 1995 Arabic and Persian edition. The section that concerns us here is K78 to K96, containing summons and warnings addressed to the kings of the earth (K78-84), and specifically to Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria (K85), Kaiser Wilhelm I of Germany (K86), to the Rulers of America and the Presidents of the Republics (K88) and to the peoples or countries of ‘Constantinople’ (i.e., Istanbul, K89), Germany (K90) and Persia (K91-94). The section closes with a general injunction to the people, and the blessing of the nations:

95: None must contend with those who wield authority over the people; leave unto them that which is theirs, and direct your attention to men’s hearts.

96: O Most Mighty Ocean! Sprinkle upon the nations that with which Thou hast been charged by Him Who is the Sovereign of Eternity, and adorn the temples of all the dwellers of the earth with the vesture of His laws through which all hearts will rejoice and all eyes be brightened.

The sections addressed to the kings and countries show considerable similarities to the letters to the Kings from the Edirne period. In the first paragraphs of this section, Baha’u’llah announces himself to the kings in apocalyptic terms and in prophetic denunciation, so that the reader has no doubt that this is the Qa’im speaking, but he combines this with a forthright renunciation of any claim to earthly sovereignty:

78: O kings of the earth! He Who is the sovereign Lord of all is come. The Kingdom is God’s, the omnipotent Protector, the Self-Subsisting. Worship none but God, and, with radiant hearts, lift up your faces unto your Lord, the Lord of all names. This is a Revelation to which whatever

¹ *God Passes By* 211.

ye possess can never be compared, could ye but know it.

79: We see you rejoicing in that which ye have amassed for others and shutting out yourselves from the worlds which naught except My guarded Tablet can reckon. The treasures ye have laid up have drawn you far away from your ultimate objective

80: This is the Day in which He Who held converse with God hath attained the light of the Ancient of Days from the heights of the Kingdom, the Voice of the Spirit of God is heard proclaiming: “Bestir yourselves, ye proud ones of the earth, and hasten ye unto Him.” ... “The promise is fulfilled....”

81: O kings of the earth! The Most Great Law hath been revealed in this Spot, this scene of transcendent splendour. Every hidden thing hath been brought to light by virtue of the Will of the Supreme Ordainer, He Who hath ushered in the Last Hour, through Whom the Moon hath been cleft, and every irrevocable decree expounded.

The proclamatory intent in these verses is obvious: Baha’u’llah is seriously addressing a *religious* summons, and not only ethical demands and political principles, to the rulers.

82: Ye are but vassals, O kings of the earth! He Who is the King of Kings hath appeared, arrayed in His most wondrous glory, and is summoning you unto Himself ... Arise, and serve Him Who is the Desire of all nations, Who hath created you through a word from Him, and *ordained you to be, for all time, the emblems of His sovereignty.*

83: By the righteousness of God! *It is not Our wish to lay hands on your kingdoms. Our mission is to seize and possess the hearts of men. Upon them the eyes of Baha are fastened. To this testifieth the Kingdom of Names, could ye but comprehend it.* Whoso followeth his Lord will renounce the world and all that is therein; how much greater, then, must be the detachment of Him Who holdeth so august a station! Forsake your palaces, and haste ye to gain admittance into His Kingdom. This, indeed, will profit you both in this world and in the next ...

These verses are, for our present purposes, the heart of the Aqdas. The reference to the Kingdom of Names in K83 may appear obscure, but should become clear when the models of organic unity and of the emanation of the names of God have been discussed below. For now it should be noted that Baha’u’llah refers to the

kings (K82) as the emblems of God's sovereignty, *for all time*. There is a relationship between the role of the kings, to manifest the sovereignty of God in the world, Baha'u'llah's willingness to renounce that function for himself, and the Kingdom of Names.

Since this function of the kings is "for all time," the phrase "forsake your palaces" in K83 clearly does not mean 'give up your thrones.' Moreover K84 praises "the king who will arise to aid My Cause in My kingdom," which clearly envisions kings exercising power into the future. It is also interesting for differentiating between 'My Cause' and 'My kingdom,' presumably representing the spiritual and temporal domains, respectively. All are commanded to aid such a king "to unlock the cities with the keys of My Name," (K84) that is, to use words and persuasion to extend the influence of Baha'u'llah's teachings. The implication is that force and pressure are not to be used.

In K89 and K90, Baha'u'llah predicts the downfall of 'Constantinople' (the disintegration of the Ottoman empire), and in the following paragraph (K90) the double defeat of Germany.

The theme of the King who aids the Bahai cause returns in the paragraphs that are addressed to Tehran (i.e., Iran):

91: ... [God] shall, if it be His Will, bless [Tehran's] throne with one who will rule with justice, who will gather together the flock of God which the wolves have scattered. Such a ruler will, with joy and gladness, turn his face towards, and extend his favours unto, the people of Baha. He indeed is accounted in the sight of God as a jewel among men. ...

It is difficult to know whether Baha'u'llah had a particular potential heir to the throne in mind here. Muhammad 'Ali Mirza, first son of the heir apparent Muzaffar ad-Din (*Muzaffar ad-Din*), was born in 1872, so this passage might simply reflect the news of that birth. His father had Shaykhi connections, which might have led the Babis to hope for a sovereign who would at least tolerate their existence. But Baha'u'llah may not have been intending any particular person of the time. The passage does indicate that Baha'u'llah foresaw a monarchy continuing in Iran. This is important because he also writes:

93: ... Erelong will the state of affairs within thee [i.e., Tehran] be changed, and the reins of power fall into the hands of the people. ...

At about the time of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905-6, Abdu'l-Baha wrote that "...Constitutional Government, according to the irrefutable text of the Religion of God, is the cause of the glory and prosperity of the nation and

the civilization and freedom of the people.”¹ While the *Kitab-e Aqdas* is not mentioned here, it seems likely that this is what Abdu’l-Baha means by ‘the irrefutable text,’ i.e., that Abdu’l-Baha considered this paragraph of the *Aqdas* as endorsing a democratic government with a constitutional monarchy, at least for Iran. In another tablet in that period he writes that:

arrangements are being made for a constitutional (*mashrutih*) government that is in accord with the divine Law, in conformity with the explicit command of the Most Holy Book. ... This became a cause for great happiness. The constitutional government is, according to the unequivocal divine Text, sanctioned (*mashru’ih*) by the revealed Law, and it is a cause of the might and prosperity of the State, to which allegiance is owed, and of the progress and liberty of the respected citizenry.²

As noted above, many of the principal Bahai institutions are established on the basis of verses in the *Kitab-e Aqdas*, sometimes explicitly in the text and sometimes on the basis of allusions that have been expanded on by Abdu’l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi to become the charter for a concrete institution. Abdu’l-Baha seems to interpret and apply this verse in an analogous way, so that constitutional government can also be called, in Bahai terminology, a ‘divine’ institution. Constitutional government is not necessarily democratic, but in K189 Baha’u’llah addresses the “members of parliaments throughout the world!” and commands them to “Select ... a single language for the use of all on earth, and adopt ... likewise a common script.” Thus parliamentary government is endorsed.

Paragraph 88 is one of the few mentions of republican forms of government in the writings of Baha’u’llah:

88: Hearken ye, O Rulers of America and the Presidents of the Republics therein, Adorn ye the temple of dominion with the ornament of justice and of the fear of God, and its head with the crown of the remembrance of your Lord, the Creator of the heavens. O concourse of rulers! ... Bind ye the broken with the hands of justice, and crush the oppressor who flourisheth with the rod of the commandments of your Lord, the Ordainer, the All-Wise.

¹ *Tablets of Abdu’l-Baha Abbas* 492.

² Translated by Juan Cole, ‘Letter [to Jinab-i Aqa Mirza Ahmad] on the establishment of a civil parliament.’ [Http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jrcole/abconst.htm](http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jrcole/abconst.htm). The source is a collection of Abdu’l-Baha’s letters of that period edited by ‘Ali Akbar Milani (Tehran, 1326/1908, 222-223).

Compared to the paragraphs and letters addressed to the kings, it is notable that the ‘presidents of the republics’ are not denounced for enriching themselves and failing to fulfill their duties. They are asked to combine dominion with justice, which may refer critically to the social inequalities and the disenfranchisement of many ethnic groups in North America at that time, and with the remembrance of God, referring perhaps to the growing secularity of American society. The last part of this paragraph, addressed to the ‘concourse of rulers,’ may be addressed to republican governments in particular or to governments of all kinds. The paragraph division in the 1992 English translation of the *Aqdas* is not present in original manuscripts, and it would be plausible to begin a new paragraph here. So it is not clear whether Baha’u’llah envisions American republics as having a special task in binding the broken with the hands of justice and crushing the oppressor, or whether this is a command addressed to the kings and rulers of the earth in general. In any case, they are to act in accordance with the commandments of God. This does not preclude the use of force, since they are to “crush the oppressor.” In the *Suriy-e Muluk* Baha’u’llah had written:

For is it not your clear duty to restrain the tyranny of the oppressor, and to deal equitably with your subjects, that your high sense of justice may be fully demonstrated to all mankind? *God hath committed into your hands the reins of the government of the people, that ye may rule with justice over them*, safeguard the rights of the down-trodden, and punish the wrong-doers.¹

He was later to write, in the *Lawh-e Maqsud* (*Lawh-e Maqsúd*, 1881), “Should any king take up arms against another, all should unitedly arise and prevent him.”² It would appear that the divine mandate given to the civil state relates not only to the ‘kingdom of names’ as we have seen above, but also to the actual function of exercising coercion in the world, both within national borders (criminal law) and between nations. The governments are “emblems of [God’s] sovereignty,” but are not merely emblematic: their essential functions require the real threat of coercion.

Baha’u’llah’s address to the ‘people of Constantinople’ refers presumably to the Ottoman empire as a whole. Baha’u’llah writes:

89: ... The throne of tyranny hath, verily, been established upon thee, and the flame of hatred hath been kindled within thy bosom, We behold in thee

¹ *Suriy-ye Muluk*, in *Summons*, paragraph 21; *Gleanings*, CXVI 247.

² *Tablets of Baha’u’llah* 164, *Gleanings*, CXVII 249

the foolish ruling over the wise, and darkness vaunting itself against the light. ...

We can see a similar view of Ottoman society in section 15 of Abdu'l-Baha's *Sermon on the Art of Governance* (page 389 below). The 'throne of tyranny' may refer to the theory of absolute monarchy on which the empire was based, but it could also reflect Baha'u'llah's own sense of injustice at his successive exiles within the Ottoman empire, from Baghdad to Istanbul, Edirne, and Akka in turn. The first of these exiles was ordered by the Ottomans at the instigations of the Persian authorities, and it would appear from Baha'u'llah's *Suriy-e Ra'is* (*Súriy-e Ra'ís*), *Lawh-e Ra'is* and *Lawh-e Fu'ad* (*Lawh-e Fu'ád*) that Baha'u'llah blamed ministers and officials such as Ali Pasha (*Álî Páshá*) and Fu'ad Pasha (*Fu'ád Páshá*), rather than Sultan Abdulaziz for these decisions. The "flame of hatred," may well refer to the massacre of Christians in Damascus, and of Maronites in Mount Lebanon, following the Tanzimat reforms. The unrest was brutally suppressed by Fu'ad Pasha.¹

Later in the *Aqdas*, Baha'u'llah addresses the people of the world in general and says:

160 Promote ye the development of the cities of God and His countries, and glorify Him therein in the joyous accents of His well-favoured ones. In truth, the hearts of men are edified through the power of the tongue, even as houses and cities are built up by the hand and other means.

This points to the dual anthropology which logically correlates to the doctrine of dual sovereignties: the individual is created both to know and worship God (in the words of the shorter daily obligatory prayer) and "to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization."² A final section addresses the Bahai ulama who, as we have already seen, have an honoured place in Baha'u'llah's vision of the good society, and whom Abdu'l-Baha will accord a definite, and tightly circumscribed, role in the constitutional relations between church and state (in the *Sermon on the Art of Governance* see pages 206 and 391 below). Baha'u'llah writes:

173 Happy are ye, O ye [assembly of] the learned ones in Baha (*mashar al-ulamá' fi al-Bahá'*). By the Lord! Ye are the billows of the Most Mighty Ocean, the stars of the firmament of Glory, the standards of

¹ As Makdisi notes, in 'After 1860,' the causes of violence in Damascus and Mount Lebanon differed. It would be too simple to attribute the violence entirely to Muslim resentment at the granting of legal equality to Christians, although this is how Fu'ad Pasha saw it (*op. cit.* 603).

² Baha'u'llah, *Lawh-e Kamal*, in *Gleanings* CIX 214.

triumph waving betwixt earth and heaven. Ye are the manifestations of steadfastness amidst men and the daysprings of Divine Utterance to all that dwell on earth. Well is it with him that turneth unto you, and woe betide the froward.

The Ishraqat and Bisharat

Towards the end of his life, Baha'u'llah wrote several longer tablets that summarise his teachings on a wide range of issues. There is a considerable amount of self-citation in these works, as Baha'u'llah selects and combines sections from earlier works to create a presentation for a particular addressee. Among these later works are the Tablet of Ishraqat (*Ishraqát*, Splendours) and the Tablet of Bisharat (*Bishárát*, Glad Tidings), both containing a long introduction followed by short numbered sections on a series of key teachings. The Ishraqat is a mixed Persian and Arabic text and has been tentatively dated August 1885, the Bisharat must also be in the last years of Baha'u'llah's life.

The first numbered section of the Ishraqat (the 'first Ishráq') refers to the role of religion in society:

They that are possessed of wealth and invested with authority and power must show the profoundest regard for religion. In truth, religion is a radiant light and an impregnable stronghold for the protection and welfare of the peoples of the world, for the fear of God impelleth man to hold fast to that which is good, and shun all evil.¹

The second Ishraq refers briefly to the principle of collective security as a means of guaranteeing world peace. It is addressed to "the sovereigns of the world" who are the manifestations of the power of God and the daysprings of His authority." The third section deals with reward and punishment, and the fourth with the fear of God (the first of these falling in the sphere of governments, and the second of religions). The fifth section says that "Governments should fully acquaint themselves with the conditions of those they govern, and confer upon them positions according to desert and merit." The importance of appointment by merit is a theme emphasised by other Iranian reform writers, as one of the key failings of the Iranian state.² The sixth Ishraq deals with the selection of a universal auxiliary language as a means of promoting unity among peoples, and the seventh with universal literacy education for both boys and girls.

¹ *Tablets of Baha'u'llah* 125, cf. *Majmu'ih az alwah-ye Jamal-e Aqdas-e Abha* 73.

² See for example Mirza Yusuf Khan Mustasharu'd-Dawlah Tabrizi, *Yak Kalima*, circa 1870, 24-27 (ms., translation forthcoming).

In the 1978 translation by Habib Taherzadeh “with the assistance of a committee” that is published by the Bahai World Centre, the eighth Ishraq says:

This passage, now written by the Pen of Glory, is accounted as part of the Most Holy Book: *The men of God’s House of Justice have been charged with the affairs of the people (‘amúr-e mellat)*. They, in truth, are the Trustees of God among His servants and the daysprings of authority in His countries.

O people of God! That which traineth the world is Justice, for it is upheld by two pillars, reward and punishment. These two pillars are the sources of life to the world. Inasmuch as for each day there is a new problem and for every problem an expedient solution, such affairs should be referred to the House of Justice that the members thereof may act according to the needs and requirements of the time. They that, for the sake of God, arise to serve His Cause, are the recipients of divine inspiration from the unseen Kingdom. It is incumbent upon all to be obedient unto them. *All matters of State (amúr-e siyásiyyah) should be referred to the House of Justice, but acts of worship (‘ibádát) must be observed according to that which God hath revealed in His Book.*¹

There is a previous translation by Ali Kuli Khan, made in 1906 or earlier,² in which the italicised passages read:

The affairs of the people are in charge of the men of the House of Justice of God ... Administrative affairs are all in charge of the House of Justice, and devotional acts must be observed according as they are revealed in the Book.

Ali Kuli Khan’s translation was included in the widely used compilation of Bahai scriptures, *Baha’i World Faith*, and was therefore the text used in the English-speaking Bahai communities until 1978, when *Tablets of Baha’u’llah* was published. Both, successively, are officially endorsed translations, and it must be supposed that the change was regarded as an improvement. For various reasons it appears to me that Ali Kuli Khan’s reading is preferable.

In the first place, there are contextual arguments. How are we to square Taherzadeh’s translation with the context of the Ishraqat itself, in which the

¹ *Tablets of Baha’u’llah* 128-9, cf. *Majmu‘ih az alwah-ye Jamal-e Aqdas-e Abha* 75.

² In Collins’ bibliography it is dated as 1908 (Collins 1.125) but the translation must be 1906 or earlier since it is included in the 1906 volume *‘Tablets of Baha’o’llah Revealed at Acca* (Collins 1.126). The eighth Ishraq is on pages 129-30 of that volume, and is unchanged in *Baha’i World Faith*.

“sovereigns of the world” are described as “manifestations of the power of God and the daysprings of His authority.” How could Baha’u’llah place the affairs of the people in the hands of the House of Justice, while making governments responsible for the appointment of officials and charging them to “fully acquaint themselves with the conditions of those they govern?” How could it be squared with the wider context of Baha’u’llah’s writings, which from the early *Kitab-e Iqan* until *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*¹ (written in the summer of 1891) teach that God has granted temporal power to temporal rulers, and reserves human hearts for Himself? To support Taherzadeh’s translation we would have to suppose that in the midst of a career, and in the midst of a Tablet, Baha’u’llah changed one of his fundamental beliefs, and then quickly changed back again. In the ninth Ishraq Baha’u’llah again refers to “the sovereigns and rulers on earth” as “the manifestations of the power of God.”

In the second place, we have some specific translation issues. The first critical phrase is *‘amúr-e mellat*. The translation ‘affairs of the people’ is good, if we do not jump to conclusion about the identity of ‘the people.’ The word *mellat* means people, but with two connotations: it is used in the Quran and in Ottoman law to refer to specific religious communities, and it is used to contrast the people to the government. In modern Arabic and Persian usage, it is also used for the nation-state, and the affairs of a state are naturally those of a government, but the Middle East of Baha’u’llah’s time did not have any nation-states. The word has shifted its meaning in the same way as a ‘nation’ in English has shifted from meaning ‘a people’ to ‘a state’ in the course of the 20th century. Ahmad Kasravi, in his history of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran, notes that the word *mellat* was first used to refer to the citizens of Iran (rather than the Shiah or the Muslims) at the time the leading clergy took refuge in the shrine of ‘Abdu’l-Karim.² In this passage in the *Ishraqat*, the affairs of ‘the people’ (singular) are put in the hands of the members of the House of Justice who are “daysprings of authority in His countries” (*Biládihu*, a plural: it can also mean regions). The ‘people’ are therefore found in more than one country, and I think it reasonable to read ‘God’s countries’ as a synonym for the whole of creation. A reader of the time would surely have concluded that ‘the people’ are the Bahais as a worldwide religious community, whose affairs are in the hands of the House of Justice and, by implication, *not* in the hands of the ulama, as in the case of the Muslim *mellat*, or of the patriarchs and priests, as in the case of the Greek orthodox *mellat*, and also not in the hands of any individual: the leadership of the religious community, for this ‘people’ is to be collective. Baha’u’llah is also rejecting anarchism in

¹ See e.g., pages 91-2.

² Page 74.

religion: some authorised leadership and direction is required.

The 1978 translation then says “O people of God,” which is unduly general, for the original says *yá hezb-e Allah*, ‘O party of God.’ It refers specifically to the Bahais as a community, and is commonly used in this sense in the Bahai writings. The authority of the Houses of Justice that follows – to determine rewards and punishments in accordance with the needs of the time – is an authority within the sphere of the *mellat*, within the *hezb-e Allah*, it is authority over the religious affairs of the Bahai community alone.

The 1978 translation continues: “All matters of State (*‘amúr-e siyásiyyah*) should be referred to the House of Justice, but acts of worship (*‘ibádát*) must be observed according to that which God hath revealed in His Book.” The crux of the matter is whether *amúr-e siyásiyyah* means ‘administrative matters’ as Ali Kuli Khan says, or ‘matters of State’ or something like that. There is no reference to a ‘state’ in the original, and the House of Justice at this time existed only at the local level and was envisioned at an international level,¹ so the 1978 translation as it stands is anachronistic and entirely untenable. However an argument could be made that *siyásiyyah* here means civil politics at any level, as it does in some places in Abdu’l-Baha’s *Sermon on the Art of Governance* (but not in the title) and elsewhere in the Bahai writings. Moreover ‘administrative matters’ seems too broad: it does not reflect either the specific context here, which refers to reward and punishment, nor the normal connotations that *siyásiyyah* has from its etymology and use.

Siyásiyyah can mean leadership and civil governance, but it also refers to sentencing and sanctions. In the latter case it refers specifically to those punishments that are designed to be appropriate to the place and time, in contrast to stipulated punishments that are specified in the Islamic Shariah and may not be changed by the judge or the ruler, such as amputation for theft, stoning for adultery, death for highway robbery, and so on. In English usage, specifying rewards and punishments would normally be regarded as a legislative, rather than administrative, activity: *siyásiyyah* is not simply keeping records and collecting funds, but shaping laws to achieve a desired virtuous order. The Arabic word derives from a root referring to the training of horses or camels. The most appropriate short translation appears to me to be ‘matters of policy,’ although this too does not carry the desired connotation of setting punishments, which the reader must infer from the context.

In this sentence of the eighth Ishraq, matters of *siyásiyyah* are contrasted to

¹ It was Abdu’l-Baha who concluded that national level Houses of Justice would be required, and so created the possibility for the Baha’is to confuse them with national governments. In Baha’u’llah’s time there was no such possibility.

matters of *‘ibádát*, acts of worship. Acts of worship constitute one of the two main categories of Islamic law. They are matters that primarily concern the individual’s relations with God, although congregational prayer, for instance, incidentally involves a relationship between the believer and the prayer leader. The other main category of Islamic law is *mu‘ámalát*, transactions or social relations. The authority of the House of Justice in matters of policy is thus limited on two sides: it refers to the affairs of the religious community only, and it does not extend to making rulings about acts of worship. This contrasts with the situation in Islam, in which a mufti or mujtahid may issue a fatwa on the legitimacy of a business transaction in one breath, and in the next decide whether a prayer said in a wine shop is acceptable to God. It also contrasts with the situation in Christian churches – even Protestant ones – in which ‘the church’ is at once the body that organises the affairs of faith community, the community at worship, and the body that determines doctrine. In other words the contrast between *siyásiyyah* and *‘ibádát* here points us towards a unique quality of the Bahai community: the Houses of Justice and Houses of Worship are distinct institutions, neither infringing on the sphere of the other, and neither with any authority in matters of doctrine, which is a third sphere. But that is another story.

The 13th numbered section in the Tablet of Bisharat, which is identical to the text of the eighth Ishraq, provides confirmation that we can read these words as a contrast to the practices of other religions. Baha’u’llah summarises the theme of the Bisharat, at the end, as the abolition of the ordinances of previous religions such as “holy war, destruction of books, the ban on association and companionship with other peoples or on reading certain books.”¹ To this list we could add the abolition of restrictions on clothing and the cut of the beard (abolished in the seventh Bisharat), the abolition of priestly celibacy and confession (eighth and ninth Bisharat), and, in the thirteenth Bisharat and the identical eighth Ishraq, the removal of control over the affairs of the religious community, from the hands of priests and ulama to bodies elected by the believers themselves (for matters of policy and punishment) and to the individual conscience and the individual’s own reading of the sacred texts (in relation to acts of worship).

If yet more confirmation were needed, we have what looks like a self-interpretation of the eighth Ishraq and thirteenth Bisharat in the *Lawh-e Dunya* (*Lawh-e Dunyá*). Like *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, this was written in the summer of 1891, and so represents almost Baha’u’llah’s last word on the topic. The date also places it within the context of protests against the tobacco concession, in which (as we will see in the foreword to the translation of *A*

¹ *Tablets of Baha’u’llah* 28, cf. *Majmu‘ih az alwah-ye Jamal-e Aqdas-e Abha* 15.

Sermon on the Art of Governance 372ff), the relationship between religious leaders and politics was a central issue. In the *Lawh-e Dunya* Baha'u'llah says:

According to the fundamental laws which We have formerly revealed in the *Kitab-e Aqdas* and other Tablets, all affairs are committed to the care of just kings and presidents *and* of the Trustees of the House of Justice.

The 'other tablets' referred to must include the thirteenth *Bisharat* and eighth *Ishraqat*, from the similarity of the wording, and it presumably refers particularly to the latter since the text of the eighth *Ishraq* says that it is "is accounted as part of the Most Holy Book" which would mean that it forms part of the "fundamental laws" (*'usúl-e ahkám*) referred to in the *Lawh-e Dunya*. This self-interpretation tells us that Baha'u'llah understood the passages in his writings that give authority to the House of Justice and those that give it to the Kings and rulers as complementary, and also that his understanding of the authority given to the House of Justice did not seem to him contradictory to praising the British form of government, with its monarchy, elected parliament, and established church. For him the eighth *Ishraq*, which puts authority in the hands of the House of Justice, and the *Aqdas*, which says that political authority in Tehran will fall into the hands of the people, are two aspects of a principle that applies in religion as in politics – that popular self-management through elected and consultative organs is preferable to absolute individual authority, whether of kings, priests or ulama.

Another passage that speaks of authority *per se*, without differentiating between its civil and religious aspects, is in the second of the *Words of Paradise*:

The Pen of the Most High exhorteth, at this moment, the manifestations of authority and the sources of power, namely the kings, the sovereigns, the presidents, the rulers, the divines and the wise, and enjoineth them to uphold the cause of religion, and to cleave unto it.¹

In the *Lawh-e Dunya* (and also in the 9th *Ishraq*), Baha'u'llah goes on to speak of the relationship between religion and government, saying that laws rest on penalties (the state relies on coercion) whereas religion gives us the inner motivation to do good and avoid evil.

From all of this I conclude that the authority in matters of policy and punishment given to the House of Justice in the eighth *Ishraq* is an authority within the religious sphere, which is exercised through exhortation and by using rewards and sanctions relating to status in the religious community, and is not the authority of governments, who may use physical and monetary rewards and

¹ In *Tablets of Baha'u'llah* 63.

punishments to get their way. In other words, ‘matters of policy and punishment’ are divided up into two spheres, just as Baha’u’llah divides the concept of sovereignty in the Kitab-e Iqan into worldly sovereignty and spiritual sovereignty.

Given that those who prepared the 1978 translation of the Ishraqat had Ali Kuli Khan’s translation before them, one has to wonder why they would have chosen a translation in the 8th Ishraqat that is inconsistent with the remainder of that tablet, with Baha’u’llah’s explanation in the Lawh-e Dunya, and with Bahai teachings in general. One possible answer lies in a paragraph of Abdu’l-Baha’s *Will and Testament*, which Shoghi Effendi translated:

O ye beloved of the Lord! It is incumbent upon you to be submissive to all monarchs that are just and to show your fidelity to every righteous king. Serve ye the sovereigns of the world with utmost truthfulness and loyalty. Show obedience unto them and be their well-wishers. Without their leave and permission do not meddle with political affairs (*‘umúr-e siyásí*), for disloyalty to the just sovereign is disloyalty to God Himself.¹

It could be that because Shoghi Effendi translated *‘umúr-e siyásí* as ‘political affairs’ here, the committee translating the Ishraqat and Bisharat felt obliged to give the phrase a similar meaning, if not exactly the same wording. In the *Will and Testament*, however, ‘political affairs’ are firmly under the control of civil rulers, whereas using the same translation in the new translation of Ishraqat and Bisharat puts political affairs in the hands of the Bahai House of Justice! Consistency in translation here produces inconsistency in teachings. Abdu’l-Baha’s use of *siyásí* in the *Will and Testament* (and frequently in the *Sermon on the Art of Governance*) is more modern than Baha’u’llah’s usage in the Ishraqat, as the word shifts its meaning to reflect the development of an autonomous political sphere in the formerly patrimonial lands of the Middle East.

Having dealt with the translation issues arising from the eighth ishraq, we can continue the uncompleted survey of topics in the Ishraqat by noting that the ninth ishraq, the last numbered section, returns to the role of religion in society:

Religion bestoweth upon man the most precious of all gifts, offereth the cup of prosperity, imparteth eternal life, and showereth imperishable benefits upon mankind. It behoveth the chiefs and rulers of the world, and in particular the Trustees of God’s House of Justice, to endeavour to the utmost of their power to safeguard its position, promote its interests and exalt its station in the eyes of the world. In like manner it is incumbent upon them to enquire into the conditions of their subjects and to acquaint

¹ *Will and Testament* 15; in the bilingual edition, 25 and Persian 16.

themselves with the affairs and activities of the divers communities¹ in their dominions. We call upon the manifestations of the power of God – the sovereigns and rulers on earth – to bestir themselves and do all in their power that haply they may banish discord from this world and illumine it with the light of concord.

Civil rulers have a general duty to promote the interests of religion, while the “Trustees of God’s House of Justice” have a special duty. The concern of the ‘chiefs’ is not confined to one religious community, they should be aware of the actions and affairs (*ʿa-mál wa umúr*) of every religious community. Baha’u’llah’s understanding of the role of religion in society takes religious pluralism as a self-evident context.

The *Ishraqat* concludes with a section that directly addresses a question that had been asked concerning the legitimacy of interest on loans. Baha’u’llah explains that the Bab’s laws were made subject to the approval of ‘Him whom God will make manifest’ (the Manifestation of God whose advent the Bab expected), and that Baha’u’llah therefore had the right to endorse, change or abrogate them. He says that interest is a necessary part of commerce, and the religious ban (in Islam) had led to the corruption of religion, since the Islamic jurists had created clever constructions to turn a transaction involving interest into two transactions each constituting a legitimate trade. Therefore interest is made legitimate, in moderation.

Baha’u’llah then says again that “the conduct of these affairs hath been entrusted to the men of the House of Justice that they may enforce them according to the exigencies of the time and the dictates of wisdom.” If this relates specifically to the question of interest, it does not present any difficulty for our thesis, since the issue of interest in Islamic theology (and for that matter pre-modern Jewish and Christian theologies) is one of religious permissibility, not of civil law. Is income earned from interest religiously pure, is it a sin to borrow or lend for interest? Islamic countries have always had systems for borrowing and lending for interest, either through legal constructions to evade the ban, or by assigning this social role to Jews, Christians and other minorities. Interest has never been an issue of the state and civil law, but of the soul and the last judgement. It is logical therefore that, beyond the general principle that it is religiously legitimate, details such as what is meant by ‘moderation’ in a particular setting are left to the Houses of Justice.

¹ *Har hizb*, another example of *hizb* being used to denote a religious community.

The *Kitab-e ʿAhd*

Abdu'l-Baha, in his *Risalih-ye Siyasiyyah* (*Sermon on the Art of Government*), argues that religious leaders should not interfere in politics, and addresses this prohibition not just to the Islamic ulama but also to Christians and Bahais, using Quranic texts and Islamic traditions, New Testament citations and, for the Bahais, two passages from Baha'u'llah's *Kitab-e ʿAhd* (*Kitáb-e ʿAhd*, Book of the Covenant) and the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*. So for these two works by Baha'u'llah, we have an authoritative and informed interpretation by Abdu'l-Baha that tells us how he understood his father's intentions.

The *Kitáb-e ʿAhd* is a short Persian work from 1891 that Baha'u'llah, in his last illness, gave to Abdu'l-Baha to be opened after his death. Its most important subject is undoubtedly the appointment of Abdu'l-Baha as the head of the family and of the Faith, but that is by no means its only topic. Part of Shoghi Effendi's summary of its contents says that it:

... directs the faithful to pray for the welfare of the kings of the earth, "the manifestations of the power, and the daysprings of the might and riches, of God"; invests them with the rulership of the earth; singles out as His special domain the hearts of men; forbids categorically strife and contention; commands His followers to aid those rulers who are "adorned with the ornament of equity and justice."¹

The section Abdu'l-Baha selects as a proof text is this:

O ye the loved ones and the trustees of God! Kings are the manifestations of the power, and the daysprings of the might and riches, of God. Pray ye on their behalf. He hath invested them with the rulership of the earth and hath singled out the hearts of men as His Own domain.

Conflict and contention (*nizáʿ wa jidál*) are categorically forbidden in His Book. This is a decree of God in this Most Great Revelation. *It is divinely preserved from annulment* and is invested by Him with the splendour of His confirmation. Verily He is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. It is incumbent upon everyone to aid those daysprings of authority and sources of command who are adorned with the ornament of equity and justice.²

The relevance of the first paragraph to Abdu'l-Baha's main theme is obvious, but it is not immediately clear why, if he understood the passage concerning conflict

¹ *God Passes By* 239.

² In *Tablets of Baha'u'llah* 220-221, cf. *Majmuʿih az alwah-ye Jamal-e Aqdas-e Abha* 135-6 (para. 5-7)

and contention as a new topic concerning social behaviour, he would have included it at all. But the paragraph break that is in the translation is not there in either the original or Abdu'l-Baha's citation of it.¹ It seems likely therefore that Abdu'l-Baha understood these words as referring to contention between the 'trustees of God' and the worldly rulers, or to any possible resistance on the part of the 'loved ones' (the Bahais) to the previous decree, that temporal power is given to temporal rulers, while religion is an affair of the hearts. If that is so, then it is the separation of church and state that is "divinely preserved from annulment," and the following reference to just kings is a continuation of the same topic. If we read the reference to conflict and contention as a separate topic, as the paragraph break implies, the structure would be unusually broken: it is an unlikely but not impossible reading.

The *Lawh-e Dunya*: religion and state in partnership

One sentence in the *Lawh-e Dunya* has already been introduced above because of its relevance to the translation of the eighth Ishraq. We can now give it in its context:

O people of God (*hizb-e Allah*)! Give ear unto that which, if heeded, will ensure the freedom, well-being, tranquillity, exaltation and advancement of all men. Certain laws (*qanún*) and principles (*‘usúl*) are necessary and indispensable for Persia. However, it is fitting that these measures should be adopted in conformity with the considered views of His Majesty – may God aid him through His grace – and of the learned divines (*ulama*) and of the high-ranking rulers (*umará*: princes, nobility). Subject to their approval a place should be fixed where they would meet. There they should hold fast to the cord of consultation and adopt and enforce that which is conducive to the security, prosperity, wealth and tranquillity of the people. For were any measure other than this to be adopted, it could not but result in chaos and commotion.²

Here Baha'u'llah proposes a specific role for the Shiah ulama and senior government officers in a body that appears to be both a constitutional convention which would formulate fundamental principles of government (*usúl*) and a legislature which would approve a new codified system of law (*qanún*). This is remarkable if it is remembered that he and his community had suffered much from the Shiah ulama of Iran, and stood to gain nothing from their involvement in the constitutional reforms. In the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* he says "The

¹ Pages 11-12 of the Tehran edition of the Risalih-ye Siyasiyyah.

² *Tablets of Baha'u'llah* 92, *Majmu‘ih az alwah-ye Jamal-e Aqdas-e Abha* 52 (para. 29).

divines must needs unite with His Majesty, the Shah, and cleave unto that which will insure the protection, the security, the welfare and prosperity of men” and “It is incumbent upon the divines (ulama) to unite with His Majesty, the Shah ... and to cleave day and night unto that which will exalt the station of both the government and the nation.”¹

This positive stance in relation to the constitutional modernisation of Iran continued under Abdu'l-Baha's leadership until it became clear that some Shiah ulama in the constitutional movement who were more anti-monarchists than pro-reformists would insist that Bahais should not be enfranchised, and in other ways succeeded in enforcing their agenda on the constitutional movement. At that point Abdu'l-Baha ordered the Bahais to withdraw, and adopted a policy of neutrality that continued until the end of the constitutional period. But this was not the case in Baha'u'llah's time: he supports the constitutional process if it is peaceful and consultative, and tells the Bahais (the 'party of God') to accept the involvement of the ulama.

He continues in the Lawh-e Dunya to apply the same model of separated but cooperating church and state institutions to the relation between Bahai institutions and the state:

According to the fundamental laws which We have formerly revealed in the *Kitab-e Aqdas* and other Tablets, all affairs are committed to the care of just kings and presidents and of the Trustees (*umaná*) of the House of Justice (*Bayt-e 'adl*).

The term 'House of Justice' (usually in Persian, *'adalat-kháneh*) was used in Iranian constitutionalist literature to refer to a parliament,² but given the reference to the *Kitab-e Aqdas*, the 'House of Justice' here must refer to the elected Bahai institution that is authorised in that work to administer the affairs of each local Bahai community.³ The Bahai Houses of Justice are not clergy, nor are they ulama (learned in religious sciences), their function is administrative, and they

¹ Page 137, see also 91. In the Bahai World Centre's Persian electronic text, 101 and 67.

² See for example Sayyid Muhammad Tabátábá'í, cited in Hairi, *Shi'ism and constitutionalism* 85; Browne, *Persian Revolution* 114; Kasravi, *History of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 67, 69ff, 110; Algar, *Religion and State* 247. Kasravi defines the Adalat-Khane as a judicial institution, however the rescript refers to the formation of a 'canon' (*qanún*) of Islamic law, a term that was applied to the whole apparatus of constitutional government and not just to the judiciary (see eg Mustashár al-Dawla, *Yek kalema*). Moreover at page 110 (and in Browne *op. cit.* 114), it appears that the Adalat-khane would have representation from various social 'estates,' as in the French *parlement*, so it must refer to a legislature.

³ *Kitab-i Aqdas*, paragraph 30.

have an elected lay membership. Nevertheless they are to fill the same role in relation to the state that he advocated for the clergy in Iran. He continues:

The system of government which the British people have adopted in London appeareth to be good, for it is adorned with the light of both kingship and of the consultation of the people.

In the light of the consultative role of religion in government that was mentioned in the previous paragraphs, it is reasonable to suppose that it is not only English constitutional monarchy which Baha'u'llah admires, but also the constitutional position of the church in England. The Church of England is within the state, broadly defined, but is not in the government. It is a public institution, in a position to be consulted and to criticise but not to rule or to coerce belief. As it happens, the United Kingdom can also serve as an analogy of the relationship between religious and political orders, for it is called a 'united' kingdom because it consists of two separate kingdoms, England and Scotland, having different laws but united under one crown. If we substitute the political and religious orders for "Scotland," and "England," and God for the sovereign over them both, we have a good model of the Bahai teachings regarding the church-state relationship: church and state are two allied kingdoms under the sovereignty of God.

This constitutional settlement – of separated but co-operating religious and state orders – is referred to again by Baha'u'llah in the *Lawh-e Maqsud*:

Our hope is that the world's religious leaders and the rulers thereof will unitedly arise for the reformation of this age ... Let them ... take counsel together and, through anxious and full deliberation, administer to a diseased and sorely-afflicted world the remedy it requireth.¹

The *Lawh-e Maqsud* is addressed to the religious leaders of the world, and thus to all the religions of the world. Once again we see that Baha'u'llah takes religious pluralism as self-evident. And if Baha'u'llah favours the same sort of constitutional settlement involving both the state and religion in diverse national cases – and even where the 'church' concerned is a hostile Shiah establishment – it cannot be merely a response to the practical political possibilities in Iran of the time. His message here is an integral part of his vision for society.

This section of the *Lawh-e Dunya* concludes:

In formulating the principles and laws a part hath been devoted to penalties (*qisás*, or *lex talonis*) which form an effective instrument for the security and protection of men. However, dread of the penalties maketh

¹ *Gleanings*, CX 215-6.

people desist only outwardly from committing vile and contemptible deeds, while that which guardeth and restraineth man both outwardly and inwardly hath been and still is the fear of God.¹

The last paragraph from the Lawh-e Dunya cited above points to one consideration that is valid for all societies: no state based entirely on coercion can be a good state, but the state itself lacks the instruments to elicit altruism. Good governance therefore depends on social organs, including religious organisations, which foster altruism and ethical behaviour in society. The work of these organisations in turn cannot be effective unless they are seen to be in a position to call governing institutions to observe the same high ethical standards.

The public roles of religion, as one of the providers of virtuous, altruistic and law-abiding citizens to the state, as a source of wisdom the state can draw on, and in providing an ethical critique of the state, have already been mentioned. Another aspect of this cooperative relationship is mentioned in the Lawh-e Hikmat:

The beginning of Wisdom and the origin thereof is to acknowledge whatsoever God hath clearly set forth, for through its potency the foundation of statesmanship, which is a shield for the preservation of the body of mankind, hath been firmly established. Ponder a while that ye may perceive what My most exalted Pen hath proclaimed in this wondrous Tablet.²

Religion (and not any specific religion) provides a legitimation for civil governance as such. In contrast to naive anarchism, the marxist delusion that the state may wither away, integrists' principled rejection of the state and the far more widespread cheap sideline cynicism about politics and politicians, religions since the Bhagavad-Gita have been reminding us that our religious duty to care for our fellows requires the instrument of the state, and what is required to perform a religious duty is itself a religious duty.

This interdependent relationship implies that the state should support religion in general, but we have seen in the Lawh-e Ishraqat that Baha'u'llah does not suggest that the state support any particular confession, including his own:

¹ The consecutive passages cited are from *Tablets of Baha'u'llah* 92-3, cf. *Majmu'ih az alwah-ye Jamal-e Aqdas-e Abha* 52-3 (paras 29-32). Ali Kuli Khan's translation is in *Tablets of Baha'o'llah revealed in Acca* 32-34.

² *Tablets of Baha'u'llah* 151.

It behoveth the chiefs and rulers of the world ... to endeavour to the utmost of their power to safeguard its [religion's] position, promote its interests and exalt its station in the eyes of the world.¹

Whether this involves state financial support for religious institutions (and for faith-based schools) is not clear from Baha'u'llah's writings, but a position can be deduced from the fact that only believers may contribute financially to the central institution of the Bahai community,² the Mashriq'ul-Adhkar or House of Worship, whereas money from diverse sources including taxes may be used for the institutions for educational, medical and charitable purposes that function as dependencies of the House of Worship. Likewise, only believers may contribute to the Bahai funds administered by the houses of justice and used for the general expenses of the religious community. Since the state is not a person, it cannot be a believer, and it is therefore religiously unacceptable for the state to support the house of worship or house of justice, but there is no *religious* objection from the Bahais to state support for Bahai educational institutions, or health and social welfare programmes.

A note of caution is in place here. It is clear that Baha'u'llah believed that the involvement of religious institutions and religious experts in civil society and as advisors to government, and especially in promoting virtues and idealism in individuals, was essential to good governance and the health of the society itself. He urges governments to support religion. This looks like establishment, a term that is in fact used by Shoghi Effendi (see page 234 below) to refer to the position of the Bahai Faith in a Bahai state at some future date.³ But this is not a claim based on the truth or superiority of one confession: Baha'u'llah writes of the social function of religion in general, and in the concrete case of contemporary Iran argued that the Shiah clergy should be enlisted in an advisory capacity with the Shah and political leaders to devise a joint approach to Iran's problems. His position here is similar to that of S.T. Coleridge: every state should have an established religion, whatever that may be. In a pluralist society, establishment need not be exclusive. The United Kingdom, for instance could invite confessions other than the Church of England to provide members to sit alongside the Bishops in the House of Lords, not because they represent a certain portion of the population (the Lords is not meant to be a representative institution) but because

¹ Lawh-e Ishraqat, in *Tablets of Baha'u'llah* 130.

² At least, this restriction applies to donations given through a House of Justice, to a House of Worship instituted by the House of Justice as its companion institution. This is not the only form of a House of Worship, which may also be founded by private initiative or in other ways.

³ Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* 14.

their religious traditions represent a source of wisdom that can contribute to the process of government. The French state at one time had a concordat governing its relationships with the Roman Catholic church, and at the same time had three separate agreements with the Calvinists, Lutherans and Jews. Baha'u'llah's son Abdu'l-Baha (see below) even said that Baha'u'llah had advocated the formation of an inter-religious consultative body comprising representatives of world religious systems.¹ The point to be emphasised here is that establishment and freedom of conscience are in principle separate issues. The state may make constitutional arrangements such that it systematically draws on the wisdom and ethical motivation of religion without preferring one confession, adopting its doctrines or disadvantaging those of other confessions or of none. The minimum definition of the establishment of religion(s) is simply that the relationship between state and religion is set out in constitutional rather than merely parliamentary legislation, so that it is beyond the purview of any one government. Constitutions may be changed, but the process takes time and requires broad consensus. This has the virtue of removing religion from the electoral process, for no politician or party can plausibly offer to support or suppress any religious grouping, in order to gain votes. In countries that have an established religious order, such as the United Kingdom and Denmark, religion plays a less prominent role in partisan politics than it does in the United States, where disestablishment does not prevent the President and Senators being photographed at 'prayer breakfasts' with popular evangelists, and blatantly pandering to religious populism on 'life' issues.

Another section of the Lawh-e Dunya that requires comment says:

It is incumbent upon the ministers of the House of Justice (*vuzará-ye bayt-e ʿadl*) to promote the Lesser Peace so that the people of the earth may be relieved from the burden of exorbitant expenditures. This matter is imperative and absolutely essential, inasmuch as hostilities and conflict lie at the root of affliction and calamity.²

The question here is whether the House of Justice is the Bahai house of justice, or a parliament. Bahai houses of justice do not at present have 'ministers,' but it could be that this verse is precisely the mandate for that development. *Vuzará* might also be no more than a synonym for members, as the members of the Privy

¹ See the notes of a speech delivered by Abdu'l-Baha, in *Star of the West* Vol. 3 No. 11 page 15. I have not been able to confirm this in Baha'u'llah's writings, and the source is less than reliable, since the *Star of the West* notes in this case were edited by Howard MacNutt, whose interpolations of other texts are discussed below.

² *Tablets of Baha'u'llah* 89, *Majmu'ih az alwah-ye Jamal-e Aqdas-e Abha* 50 (para 19).

Council would be called *vuzará*.¹ As an honorific, it might even indicate that the House of Justice concerned is the Universal House of Justice rather than a local institution. A second argument is that Baha'u'llah gives responsibility for the establishment of the lesser peace, which requires both intergovernmental agreement and the threat of force against a government breaching the agreement, to civil governments,² so the reference is more likely to be to parliaments. Another reference to international peace which again mentions the benefits of reducing expenditure is found in the Tablet of the Kings, and is addressed to them:

Lay not aside the fear of God, O kings of the earth, and beware that ye transgress not the bounds which the Almighty hath fixed. ... Tread ye the path of justice, for this, verily, is the straight path. Compose your differences, and reduce your armaments, that the burden of your expenditures may be lightened, ... Heal the dissensions that divide you, and ye will no longer be in need of any armaments except what the protection of your cities and territories demandeth.³

The issue is not crucial to our thesis, even if it must be concluded that the reference is to the Bahai House of Justice. We have already seen in the discussion of the ninth Ishraqat (page 187 above) that “the Trustees of God’s House of Justice” have a special duty to promote the station of religion, while the “chiefs and rulers of the world” have a general duty.⁴ There is no reason why the Lesser Peace should not also be a matter of concern for both the civil governments and the Bahai Houses of Justice, for the relationship between religion and state is not one of rigorously defined spheres of action, but a complementary relationship based on different modes of operation. Since the instruments of security are in the hands of governments,⁵ ‘collective security’ without government involvement would be no more than pious hopes. But, as experience in the late 20th century has shown, effective collective security also requires understanding and support among the populations of at least the major powers, who must spend money and lives to repel an aggressor state or to overthrow a regime that oppresses its own population. The European deepening project also shows the importance and difficulty of enlisting public opinion in support of international governance.

¹ Steingass, Persian-English dictionary, 1892.

² *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 30; Tablet to Queen Victoria in *Gleanings* CXIX; Lawh-e Maqsud, in *Gleanings* CXVII.

³ *Suriy-ye Muluk*, in *Gleanings* CXVIII.

⁴ *Tablets of Baha'u'llah* 130, *Majmu'ih az alwah-ye Jamal-e Aqdas-e Abha* 76 (para 63).

⁵ *Lawh man sa'ada ila 'llah* (on human government), in *Gleanings* CII.

Given their world-embracing message, it is natural that the Bahais should have a special interest in promoting the ‘lesser peace’ – which may mean not only a system of collective security but also other institutions of international governance, and the material well-being and security of the world. The selection and promotion of a universal auxiliary language is another task that Baha’u’llah assigns to both the Bahai House of Justice and the Parliaments of the world, in different tablets.

Although the passage cited would not be fatal for the thesis of this book, if it does refer to the Bahai House of Justice, it is interesting to try to find out what Baha’u’llah is referring to. We have seen it is closely parallel to a passage in the Tablet to the Kings, which is unambiguously addressed to civil government. There are some clues in the context. In the previous paragraph in the *Lawh-e Dunya* Baha’u’llah writes:

... in the Prison of Akka, We revealed in the Crimson Book that which is conducive to the advancement of mankind and to the reconstruction of the world. The utterances set forth therein ... include the following which constitute the fundamental principles for the administration of the affairs of men ...¹

He then presents five numbered points: that the ministers of the House of Justice should promote the Lesser Peace, that languages must be reduced to one common language to be taught in all the schools of the world, that the people must adhere tenaciously to that which will promote fellowship, kindness and unity, that everyone should provide funds for the training and education of children, “to be spent for this purpose with the knowledge of the Trustees of the House of Justice,” and that “special regard must be paid to agriculture.” If it were possible, from these listed contents, to identify a particular work which is referred to here as ‘the crimson book,’ we could see what is said there about the Lesser Peace, and who is responsible for it. Unfortunately that does not seem possible. Although the ‘Crimson Book’ referred to in the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*² may well be the *Kitab-e ‘Ahd*, there seems to be no concrete work of the early Akka period (while Baha’u’llah was living in the ‘prison’) whose content corresponds to the five points Baha’u’llah lists here. Unless one can be found, we must suppose that the reference here is to a heavenly book containing the revelation (which is how the term is used in the *Kitab-e ‘Ahd* itself).³ In other Akka period tablets,

¹ *Tablets of Baha’u’llah* 89, *Majmu‘ih az alwah-ye Jamal-e Aqdas-e Abha* 50 (para 18).

² Page 32. The identification is made by Shoghi Effendi in *God Passes By* 238.

³ *Tablets of Baha’u’llah* 220, *Majmu‘ih az alwah-ye Jamal-e Aqdas-e Abha* 135 (§ 3).

responsibility for the Lesser Peace is given to the kings and rulers.¹ Therefore the ‘Ministers of the House of Justice’ in the Lawh-e Dunya are most probably those involved in national or international civil governance, or specifically in the international tribunal that Baha’u’llah intends to settle inter-nation disputes, rather than members of the Bahai Houses of Justice – “and God knows best.”

Another theme that we have already seen in these tablets is the role of the ulama (Islamic or Bahai) in society. They have an important function and an honoured station, but are not said to have any authority in the affairs of the religious community or in political affairs:

O people of God! Righteous men of learning (ulama) who dedicate themselves to the guidance of others and are freed and well guarded from the promptings of a base and covetous nature are ... stars of the heaven of true knowledge. It is essential to treat them with deference. They are indeed fountains of soft-flowing water, stars that shine resplendent, fruits of the blessed Tree, exponents of celestial power, and oceans of heavenly wisdom. Happy is he that followeth them. Verily such a soul is numbered ... among those with whom it shall be well.²

Conclusions

Baha’u’llah’s denial of any claim to temporal government, in the *Kitab-e Iqan*, the letters to the Kings, and the *Kitab-e Aqdas*, is repeated in his later writings, often in similar words that it would be repetitious to cite here.³ As we will see in the chapter on church and state in the secondary literature, many writers, including both Bahais and anti-Bahai polemicists, have claimed that the Bahais ultimately aim to establish a world theocratic government in which their own administrative institutions would replace national governments and provide an international government. This is the reverse of what Baha’u’llah taught. It would appear that the idea that a messianic movement could support the indefinite continuation of the state in the Kingdom of God was too far outside expectations to be entirely believed either within the Bahai community or outside it. This reaction is not peculiar to the Christian millenarian milieu of many of the early American Bahais. Baha’ullah writes, in the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (89-90):

¹ *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 30; the Tablet to Queen Victoria, in *Gleanings* CXIX.

² *Tablets of Baha’u’llah* 96-7, *Majmu‘ih az alwah-ye Jamal-e Aqdas-e Abha* 55 (para 42).

³ See, for example, a letter to Nabil-e A‘zam, in *Gleanings*, CXXXIX; Lawh-e Dhabih, in *Gleanings*, CXV, 241-2; *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 137; and the Lawh-e Maqsd, in *Tablets of Baha’u’llah* 161-178.

Every nation must have a high regard for the position of its sovereign, must be submissive unto him, must carry out his behests, and hold fast his authority. The sovereigns of the earth have been and are the manifestations of the power, the grandeur and the majesty of God. *This Wronged One hath at no time dealt deceitfully with anyone.* Every one is well aware of this, and beareth witness unto it. Regard for the rank of sovereigns is divinely ordained,

We have already, in the Tablet to the Shah (page 171 above), that Baha'u'llah refers to people who claim that he seeks fame or power, and another example is given below. Such denials suppose a situation in which many people in the Islamic world were saying much the same things as later western anti-Bahai polemicists. Cole cites the views of two of Baha'u'llah's contemporaries, Ali Pasha the Ottoman foreign minister and Ebüzziya Tevfik, a Young Ottoman reformer. The former apparently believed that Baha'u'llah refused to recognise the separation of religious and temporal authority, while the latter thought that the Bahais were obedient to the Ottoman government but were aiming at a revolution in Iran.¹ There seems to be an almost plaintive tone as Baha'u'llah writes again, probably towards the end of his life:

Most imagine that this Servant hath the intention of establishing a full-blown government on earth – even though, in all the tablets, He hath forbidden the servants to accept such a rank. ... Kings are the manifestations of divine power, and our intent is only that they should be just. If they keep their gaze upon justice, they are reckoned as of God.²

Such suppositions may in part have been prompted by malicious polemic from the ulama, who needed to enlist the support of the state to oppose the Babis and Bahais, and therefore had reason to present the Bahai teachings as a threat to the state, even if they were not themselves friends of the Shah and Sultan. But we do not have to suppose that these early views were entirely due to malicious accusations. As we have seen, in the history of Islam and particularly of Shiah Islam, views concerning the legitimacy of the state in the absence of the Qa'im or Mahdi have varied widely, but no school or scholar of which I am aware, whether Shiah or Sunni, suggested that the world and its powers, states and rulers could continue to function alongside the Mahdi, after the coming of the Promised One. Baha'u'llah claimed to be that Promised One, the Messiah whose advent

¹ 'Iranian Millenarianism' 5 and 10.

² Undated passage translated in Cole, *Modernity* 35.

was expected to mark the end of the (temporal) world. It is hardly surprising if his contemporaries drew the natural conclusion that he claimed temporal authority. We know of at least one instance, slightly later, in which that fear was deliberately encouraged. Hájí Mírzá Haydar-^cAli reports that the enemies of Abdu'l-Baha wrote to the Ottoman court claiming that he had proclaimed Himself to be the Return of Christ and, as such, claimed sovereignty over all the nations of the world and regarded all rulers as his vassals.¹ Abdu'l-Baha answers this accusation in the first part of his *Will and Testament*.

In summary, the separation of church and state, as distinct but interdependent organs within the body politic, is one of the key themes running through Baha'u'llah's life work. He takes a single position, from his first major doctrinal work, the *Kitab-e Iqan* to his Will and Testament, the *Kitab-e Ahd*. He writes and speaks of it often and in the clearest terms, but was not believed in his own time and has, with few exceptions, been misrepresented since.

Other key themes for a Bahai political theology that we have seen are:

That the sovereignty of the prophets and holy ones is not an earthly sovereignty, but is real and enduring. All of the Manifestations of God embody all of the attributes of God, one of which is Sovereignty. Thus the coming of the Messiah (or Qa'im) is not different to the advent of any other Prophet. It will not involve the subjugation of the peoples of the earth.

Those verses of scripture that appear to speak of the coming of the Messiah as an earth-shattering outward event are to be understood as symbolic representations of a revolution in the spiritual history of humanity.

The sovereignty of kings and rulers derives from God, rather than from the Qa'im or Manifestation of God.

Because they are the 'shadow of God,' rulers must be just, conscientious, and pious: rulers are criticised for tyranny, for appointed bad governors, and for allowing worldly wealth to distract them from their true purpose.

God does not desire to seize their sovereignty and will never desire that: they are emblems of God's sovereignty 'for all time.' Thus history continues, and this religious teaching will not, for instance, to be changed by the next Messiah. The resulting dual order relates to the 'Kingdom of Names,' in a way that remains to be explained.

There is an ethic of good governance, including a preferential option for the poor, and a duty to punish wrong-doers and enforce justice. The military and police are legitimate tools for fulfilling this duty. Peace is highly desired, but Baha'u'llah is a realist rather than a pacifist.

¹ Faizi, *Stories from the Delight of Hearts* 156.

There is an ethic of good citizenship, involving obedience to law, and approval for parliamentary democracy and especially for constitutional monarchy. Reforms are needed, but should be achieved with broad consultation and support, not by sedition or revolution.

Those learned in religious science have a vital pastoral role in providing guidance for the people, but also a prophetic role in ‘exhorting the kings.’ Shiah ulama should be consulted in relation to the reforms necessary for Iran. Religion is a powerful force for good in society. It is to be propagated by words and example, and not by the sword. Religion is assumed to be pluralist.

The affairs of the Bahai community, however, are not in the hands of the Bahai ulama, but are to be referred to the elected Houses of Justice.

Leaders of religion and the temporal rulers should consult together. Civil governments should preserve the high station of religion.

There is an ethic of global social progress, which requires education, reduced military expenditures, and the spread of fellowship between peoples, as well as practical measures such as the selection of a universal auxiliary language.

The Writings of Abdu’l-Baha

Baha’u’llah appointed his eldest son, Abdu’l-Baha (1844-1921), to lead the community, to resolve disputes and to be the interpreter of his teachings. Abdu’l-Baha’s writings are voluminous, including large numbers of letters regarding constitutional developments in Iran and voluminous notes in Persian, French, English and other languages taken from speeches and sermons in which he explained the Bahai teachings. Only a small part of the work that is required to translate and arrange the letters and reported talks for a thematic study has been done, so these have been left out of consideration for now. Two book-length works of Abdu’l-Baha, *The Secret of Divine Civilization* and *A Sermon on the Art of Governance* are available, and would appear to be the best sources for the general principles of Abdu’l-Baha’s thought.

The Secret(s) of Divine Civilization: reason, education, reform and religion

The Secret of Divine Civilization (Risálih-ye Madaniyyah) was written in 1875, at a time when there was some hope that Nasir ad-Din Shah would willingly introduce government reforms.¹ Since it was written when Baha’u’llah was still alive, we may assume that he approved its text. It was printed in Bombay in 1882 and distributed anonymously “to demonstrate that [the author’s] one purpose is

¹ *Secret of Divine Civilization* 10.

to promote the general welfare.”¹ This would be in contrast to several reform authors who had, or aspired to have, government offices. One such was the diplomat Mirza Yusif Khan Mustashár al-Dawlah Tabrizí, whose *Yek Kalimah* (*One Word*, 1870) proposed that the key to the good governance and progress of European countries could be found in 19 legal principles he found in the French constitution. Iran could progress by introducing justice and *qanún*, a codified law and legal system, implemented on rationalised principles. Abdu’l-Baha would have agreed with much of that work, and with those who said that a written constitution was the key, or that democracy was the key, but his own view of the needs of civilization is broader.

The Secret of Divine Civilization is certainly a key text in a Bahai political theology, for it directly answers the question ‘what is the good society?’ Since this treatment of church and state is intended to be part of a wider political theology, an outline of the book’s character and contents seems mandatory, although only a few sections are directly relevant to the issue of church and state.² The book begins with praise for the power of reason and wisdom, and a resolve to “lay hold of all those instrumentalities that promote the peace and well-being and happiness ... of the entire human race” so that the “holy land of Persia become in every sense the focal centre of human perfections.”³ The glories of Iran’s pre-Islamic past are cited as evidence of the potential of the land and its people, without any hint that the arrival of Islam caused a decline (as some more recent nativist authors have claimed). Today, Europe and ‘sections of America’ are “renowned for law and order, government and commerce, art and industry, science, philosophy and education. Yet in ancient times these were the most savage of the world’s peoples,” and the medieval period in Europe is rightly called the ‘Dark Ages.’ “The basis of Europe’s progress and civilization” he says, “was actually laid in the fifteenth century of the Christian era.”⁴ Now, when the Shah has resolved “to establish a just government and to secure the progress of all his subjects,” this has been opposed:

Some say that these are newfangled methods and foreign isms (*afkár-e jadídeh-ye mamálik baídeh*, new ideas from distant countries), quite

¹ Page 6.

² A more extensive analysis of the structure and main themes of the book, and an outline of the Iranian reform movement up to the 1870s, can be found in Saiedi, ‘Introduction.’ This somewhat overstates the originality of Abdu’l-Baha’s position, since the author is not familiar with Mirza Yusif Khan’s *Yek Kalimah*.

³ Pages 4-5. Extraordinarily, the praise for reason precedes praise for Muhammad in the introductory verses.

⁴ Page 10.

unrelated to the present needs and the time-honored customs of Persia. Others have rallied the helpless masses, who know nothing of religion ... and tell them that these modern methods are the practices of heathen peoples (*qavánín-e balád-e kufriyah*, the codes of law of non-Islamic countries), and are contrary to the venerated canons of true faith, and they add the saying, “He who imitates a people is one of them.”¹

What follows is an extended argument justifying the adoption of European methods of governance, since reason, religion and the demands of social life are universals. “Other nations were once as we are now. Did not these new systems and procedures, ... contribute to the advancement of those countries?” “Every aspect of these prerequisites to progress have in other countries been time and again put to the test, and their benefits demonstrated ...”² The reforms concern “the temporal and material apparatus of civilization” and not issues of religious doctrine. Examples from the Islamic traditions show that it is legitimate to borrow such devices from non-Muslim peoples. One daring example is a long list of elements from pre-Islamic customs and personal status laws that have become part of Islamic law.³ Likewise ‘Islamic’ philosophy and medicine began with Greek borrowings, and ‘heathen’ logic has been incorporated in Islamic theology.

Abdu’l-Baha presents a list of proposed reforms, and then says:

Should anyone object that the above-mentioned reforms have never yet been fully effected, ... know that these deficiencies have resulted from the total absence of a unified public opinion (*ittihád-e árá’-ye ‘umúmiyyah*), and the lack of zeal and resolve and devotion in the country’s leaders. It is obvious that not until the [mass of the] people are educated, not until public opinion is rightly focussed, not until government officials, even minor ones, are free from even the least remnant of corruption, can the country be properly administered.⁴

This appreciation of the importance of public opinion, and therefore of the education of the masses, distinguishes Abdu’l-Baha from other Islamic reform writers of the time, with the exception of Muhammad Abduh (who knew Abdu’l-

¹ *Secret of Divine Civilization* 12; *Risalih-ye Madaniyyah* 16. I have cited Marzieh Gail’s translation, which generally gives a good sense of the meaning but does not indicate specific references to Islamic law and theology. Additions to her translation are indicated in brackets. A more technical translation would be desirable.

² Pages 13 and 14.

³ Pages 25-8.

⁴ *Secret of Divine Civilization* 16; *Risalih-ye Madaniyyah* 20.

Baha personally and admired him). The people need to support changes that will affect them, and the rationalisation of administration that he intends requires a large bureaucracy drawn from the people, whose members must be imbued with an ethic of public service and honesty. Both of these points have been proven repeatedly in the painful, often tragic, history of modernisation in the Middle East. In their absence, democracy is not a panacea:

... in certain foreign countries ... following ... the establishment of parliaments those bodies actually distressed and confused the people and their well-meant reforms produced maleficent results. While the setting up of parliaments, the organizing of assemblies of consultation, constitutes the very foundation and bedrock of government, there are several essential requirements.¹

These requirements relate to the knowledge and virtue of the members of parliament, but this is clearly in addition to the primary requirement for good governance, which is the education (in the broadest sense) of the masses:

When, for example, the people are genuinely religious and are literate and well-schooled, and a difficulty presents itself, they can apply to the local authorities; if they do not meet with justice and secure their rights ... they can then take their case to higher courts At present, however, because of their inadequate schooling, most of the population lack even the vocabulary to explain what they want.²

At the same time, good governance depends on the leadership of certain classes of individuals: the prophets and holy ones in the first instance, followed by just kings who benefit their subjects, honest and able ministers and representatives, and men of learning who study “such sciences as are profitable to mankind” and educate their students. Finally there are “sagacious leaders among the people and influential personalities throughout the country, who constitute the pillars of state. Their rank and station and success depend on their being the well-wishers of the people.”³

... it would be preferable if the election of nonpermanent members of consultative assemblies in the Shah’s territories should be dependent on the will and choice of the people. For elected representatives will on this

¹ *Secret of Divine Civilization* 17; *Risalih-ye Madaniyyah* 22.

² *Op. cit.* 18 / 24.

³ *Op. cit.* 22 / 28.

account be somewhat inclined to exercise justice, lest their reputation suffer and they fall into disfavor with the public.¹

For each of the classes that were mentioned, the ideal is that they serve the public good disinterestedly, without seeking to enrich themselves. Yet “wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy.”²

In a passage that is reminiscent of the hymn of praise for the righteous ulama in the *Sermon on the Art of Governance* (see page 393ff), Abdu'l-Baha returns to the class of the learned, and praises those whose behaviour reflects their professions. He provides a commentary on an Islamic tradition which says that the learned one must “guard himself [or, ‘his soul’], defend his faith, oppose his passions and obey the commandments of his Lord. It is then the duty of the people to pattern themselves after him.”³ The commentary on these four characteristics of the truly learned takes up the bulk of the book, bringing in aspects of modernity that the traditional ulama certainly did not consider to be important.

The last phrase of the tradition, however, is not explained, and this is a delicate point. We have already seen that Baha'u'llah, in the *Lawh-e Dunya*, promises that those who follow “righteous men of learning” will be “numbered ... among those with whom it shall be well” (See page 197 above). Here Abdu'l-Baha says that the people have a duty to pattern themselves (*yuqallidu*) after the truly learned. This can scarcely be distinguished from the principles underlying the doctrine of emulation or imitation (*taqlid*) in Safavid (and later) Shi'ism, which is that the layman may be answerable to God for the essentials of faith and practice, but cannot be expected – by man or God – to know all the details, and may therefore seek out a specialist and follow his opinion on difficult points. The word Abdu'l-Baha uses here is a verbal form of the same word, *taqlid*. Yet in many other places Baha'u'llah (and Abdu'l-Baha, primarily in reported talks) condemns the practice of imitation:

The essence of all that We have revealed for thee is Justice, is for man to free himself from idle fancy and imitation (*taqlid*), discern with the eye of oneness His glorious handiwork, and look into all things with a searching eye.⁴

¹ *Risalih-ye Madaniyyah* 30-31. I have not followed Gail's translation (page 24) because *mamálik-e mahrúсах* does not mean sovereign states.

² *Secret of Divine Civilization* 24; *Risalih-ye Madaniyyah* 31.

³ *Op. cit.* 34 / 41.

⁴ Baha'u'llah, ‘Asl Kull al-Khayr’ in *Tablets of Baha'u'llah* 156, *Majmu'ih-ye Alvah-e*
(continued...)

Abdu'l-Baha's strategy is not to attack the principle by name, but to subvert it: the people should pattern themselves on the learned, but the field of 'learning' is defined so broadly that the Muslim ulama no longer qualify as sources of imitation – indeed, no individual could qualify. The common-sense basis for the doctrine remains, for no-one can be a specialist in all fields, so all of us must at times follow the opinions of people who are recognised as more knowledgeable, whether in religious or secular sciences. The function of the intellectual class must therefore be exercised collectively:

... it is essential to establish a body of scholars the various groups of whose membership would each be expert in one of the aforementioned branches of knowledge. This body should with the greatest energy and vigor deliberate as to all present and future requirements, and bring about equilibrium and order.¹

To return to the four qualifications of the learned: “guarding oneself,” he says, entails protecting one's soul by acquiring spiritual perfections. These perfections include not only a deep knowledge of the religious sciences, including “the sacred Scriptures of other faiths” but also “the laws and principles, the customs, conditions and manners characterizing the statecraft of other nations,” “the useful branches of learning” and what we would call political economy and history.² But this does not mean that the learned, having acquired the knowledge of statecraft, should take over government. In Marzieh Gail's translation. Abdu'l-Baha says,

The state is, moreover, based upon two potent forces, the legislative and the executive. The focal center of the executive power is the government, while that of the legislative is the learned – and if this latter great support and pillar should prove defective, how is it conceivable that the state should stand?³

This is misleading, without some clarifications. What Abdu'l-Baha says is that “the sphere of training (*siyási*) requires two supreme righteous forces (*do qoveh*).” These ‘two forces’ are the subject of his *Sermon on the Art of Governance*, which says, in brief, that humanity requires guidance and training (*siyási*) to develop, and God provides this through ‘two forces,’ one of which acts

⁴(...continued)

Mubarakih 94.

¹ *Secret of Divine Civilization* 37; *Risalih-ye Madaniyyah* 44.

² *Op. cit.* 34-6 / 41-44.

³ *Op. cit* 37 / 44.

through kings and the apparatus of government, the other through prophets, scriptures and the religious order. There is no mention of the ‘state’ in this passage. The similarity to the argument and terminology in the *Sermon on the Art of Governance* is unmistakable, and one can only suppose that Gail had not read that book before producing her translation. Abdu’l-Baha then names the two forces: *tashri‘iyyah* and *tanfi‘dhiyyah*. The first is the explanation and specification of the *shari‘ah*, the religious path. If we translate *shari‘ah* into Christian terms, it covers both religious law and the life of discipleship. The second is the executive or implementing power. The term is used to refer to the apparatus of government, which implements the kings’ will and, supposedly, that part of the *shari‘ah* relevant to government. It does *not* refer to the executive arm as one of the three pillars of civil government, along with the judiciary and legislature.¹ The same two terms are used in a passage in the *Sermon on the Art of Governance*:

If you refer to history, you would find countless examples of this [negative] sort, all based on the involvement of religious leaders in political matters. These souls are the fountainhead of the interpretation of God’s commandments (*tashri‘*), not of implementation (*tanfi‘dh*). That is, when the government requests an explanation concerning the requirements of the Law of God and the realities of the divine ordinances ... they must explain what has been deduced of the commands of God, and what is in accordance with the law of God. Apart from this, what awareness do they have of questions of leadership and social development, the administration and control of weighty matters, the welfare and prosperity of the kingdom, *the improvement of procedures and codes of law*, or foreign affairs and domestic policy?²

Clearly, *tashri‘* and *tanfi‘dh* point to the relationship between religious and political institutions – the question of church and state – and specifically not to any role for religious leaders in making or modifying legislation for the state. The leaders of religions are certainly experts in the religious laws of their communities (except in the case of the Baha’i lay leadership), but they do not have expertise in the relevant type of law, which must therefore be civil law.

Thus I paraphrase Abdu’l-Baha in *the Secret of Divine Civilization* as saying:

¹ However the western terminology of three ‘powers’ in civil government is used by Shoghi Effendi, in describing the shape of civil government in accordance with the Bahai teachings: see *The World Order of Baha’u’llah* 203.

² Section 15 (see Appendix 1); *Resalih-ye Siyasiyyah* Tehran edition 30.

God guides and trains the human race not directly, but through the medium of two agencies, the religious order and the political order. The centre¹ of the political agency is government, while the knowledgeable person (*dányán*, not *alim*) who is prudent provides the point of reference (*marj'a*) of the religious agency. If this greatest pillar and solid foundation is not comprehensive and perfect, how is prosperity and security for the people (*mellat*) conceivable?

Abdu'l-Baha then proposes a collective religious leadership for Iran, which would do away with the inconsistencies that result when each *mujtahid* is king in his own court, interpreting the law as he sees fit. This in effect is the reform that had already been achieved in Ottoman lands, with the difference that the rationalisation of the Islamic courts in the Ottoman empire placed all the *Qadis* (judges) under the leadership of the Grand Mufti. Abdu'l-Baha says that the fact that the religious law is open to arbitrary interpretations (in contrast to the King's law) has meant that religious law has not played a decisive role.² This analysis would apply to most Islamic countries in most eras: the ruler himself ensures that his laws are carried out, but the lack of a 'church' in Islam has meant that religious laws are applied piecemeal as it suits the ruler, and inconsistently. The rationalisation of the law, by publishing a code of legal procedure is said to be the most important instrument for securing progress in Iran.

All of this falls under the heading of the perfection of knowledge, which the ulama should obtain. The remaining perfections can be summarised as humility and an activist ethic of community service in working for the education and progress of the masses.³

The second qualification of the truly learned is that he should be "the defender of his faith." Once again this is broadened far beyond the scope of the Shiah ulama of the time: "the whole population should be protected ... every effort should be exerted ... to raise up the Word of God, increase the number of

¹ *Markaz*. We will encounter the term 'centre' / *markaz* again in the *Sermon on the Art of Governance*, where religion and politics each have their ordained centres, and it occurs often in Abdu'l-Baha's reported talks, for example in *Khitabat* 570, where sciences and technologies are described "as the most noble centre in the human world." Each centre seems to correspond to what I have called organs: the institutional order proper to each of the human projects, such as science, religion, politics, arts, agriculture and commerce. Abdu'l-Baha seems to be visualising the multi-centred non-hierarchical post-modern society as a city made up of quarters, each centring on a square and specialising in a function that provides for one of the needs of social life.

² *Secret of Divine Civilization* 37-8; *Risalih-ye Madaniyyah* 45.

³ *Op. cit.* 39-40 / 47-8.

believers, promote the Faith of God and exalt it and make it victorious over other religions.”¹ Luther is given as an example of the potential effects of activism and religious reform. Religion is to be propagated only through words and example, and not by the sword. Fanaticism and denigrating other religions only drives people away.² The faithful must associate with people of other religions, and with foreigners, rather than avoiding them. These enlightened ideas are contrasted with a sarcastic parody of the state and customs of Iran,³ which is amusing but not to the point here.

The third qualification of the truly learned is that he “opposes his passion.” This is an opening for a biting critique of European nations:

All the peoples of Europe, notwithstanding their vaunted civilization, sink and drown in this terrifying sea of passion and desire, and this is why all the phenomena of their culture come to nothing. ... the basic objective, in laying down powerful laws and setting up great principles and institutions dealing with every aspect of civilization, is human happiness; and human happiness consists only in drawing closer to the Threshold of Almighty God, and in securing the peace and well-being of every individual member, high and low alike, of the human race; and the supreme agencies for accomplishing these two objectives are the excellent qualities with which humanity has been endowed.

A superficial culture, unsupported by a cultivated morality, is as “a confused medley of dreams,” results which would win the good pleasure of God and secure the peace and well-being of man, could never be fully achieved in a merely external civilization.

The peoples of Europe have not advanced to the higher planes of moral civilization, as their opinions and behavior clearly demonstrate. Notice, for example, how the supreme desire of European governments and peoples today is to conquer and crush one another ... There is the well-known case of the ruler who is fostering peace and tranquillity and at the same time devoting more energy than the warmongers to the accumulation of weapons and the building up of a larger army, on the grounds that peace and harmony can only be brought about by force. Peace is the pretext, and night and day they are all straining every nerve to pile up more weapons of war, and to pay for this their wretched people

¹ *Secret of Divine Civilization* 41; *Risalih-ye Madaniyyah* 48. The word Gail translates as victorious is *isti'lá*, which has the connotation of raising Islam higher than other religions, rather than displacing them.

² *Op. cit.* 53 / 52.

³ *Op. cit.* 56-8 / 65-8.

must sacrifice most of whatever they are able to earn by their sweat and toil. How many thousands have given up their work in useful industries and are laboring day and night to produce new and deadlier weapons which would spill out the blood of the race more copiously than before.

Each day they invent a new bomb or explosive, and then the governments must abandon their obsolete arms and begin producing the new ... [which are] more efficient in annihilating humankind. The staggering cost of it all must be borne by the hapless masses.

Be just: can this nominal civilization, unsupported by a genuine civilization of character, bring about the peace and well-being of the people or win the good pleasure of God? Does it not, rather, connote the destruction of man's estate and pull down the pillars of happiness and peace?¹

Here again, Abdu'l-Baha distinguishes himself from an earlier generation of Middle Eastern writers about Europe, who were so enamoured of the technical progress they had seen in European countries that they did not see what must come of the industrialisation of war and the rise of collectivist ideologies. Social institutions exist to serve the happiness of the *individual*, rather than the individual finding purpose and fulfilment in the glory of the nation (or the socialist revolution, however international). Abdu'l-Baha holds up the examples of the Franco-Prussian war, the civil unrest of the Paris Commune, the German *kulturkampf*. "Europe," he concludes, "is morally uncivilized." The solution is not to reject rationalised government, but to extend it to the international level:

True civilization will unfurl its banner ... whenever a certain number of its distinguished and high-minded sovereigns ... [shall arise] ... to establish the Cause of Universal Peace. They must make the Cause of Peace the object of general consultation, and seek by every means in their power to establish a Union of the nations of the world. They must conclude a binding treaty and establish a covenant, the provisions of which shall be sound, inviolable and definite. They must proclaim it to all the world and obtain for it the sanction of all the human race. ... In this all-embracing Pact the limits and frontiers of each and every nation (*har daulatī*) should be clearly fixed, the principles underlying the relations of governments towards one another definitely laid down, and all international agreements and obligations ascertained. In like manner, the size of the armaments of every government should be strictly limited, for if the preparations for war and the military forces of any nation should be

¹ *Secret of Divine Civilization* 60-63; *Risalih-ye Madaniyyah* 70-74.

allowed to increase, they will arouse the suspicion of others. The fundamental principle underlying this solemn Pact should be so fixed that if any government (*daulati*) later violate any one of its provisions, all the governments on earth should arise to reduce it to utter submission, nay the human race as a whole should resolve, with every power at its disposal, to destroy that government. Should this greatest of all remedies be applied to the sick body of the world, it will assuredly recover from its ills and will remain eternally safe and secure.¹

It is evident that Abdu'l-Baha sees a crucial and continuing role for governments and states in the future of the 'true civilization.' It is also evident that he sees that popular support will be required.

The fourth qualification of the truly learned is that he should be "obedient to the commandments of his Lord." This provides an occasion for Abdu'l-Baha to proclaim the constructive role of religion in society, "Religion is the light of the world, and the progress, achievement, and happiness of man result from obedience to the laws set down in the holy Books" (note the plural). This is despite observations, such as Voltaire's, that religion is often harmful. Religion is not to be blamed for its misuse in the hands of the clergy, for "a lighted lamp in the hands of an ignorant child ... will set both the bearer and the house on fire." Human progress depends on fellowship and unity, and true religion is the perfect means for engendering fellowship and union.² The history of religions shows that they have been the means of creating and re-creating human communities, and this is proof enough of the power of religion. Yet each religion is effective for only a few centuries. Nevertheless, European civilization prospered long after its religion had become moribund, because the Europeans borrowed from the Muslims. "The major part of the civilization of Europe is derived from Islam."³ This argument is one used by other Islamic modernists: the implication is not only that "the religions of God are the true source of the spiritual and material perfections of man"⁴ – even of the atheistic Europeans – but also that the Muslim countries, when they adopt western methods of government, are simply taking back what was theirs in the first place. But he also defends borrowing from non-Islamic sources, pointing out that Muhammad learned from the Persians, and that the animals can be taken as models of certain virtues.⁵ Contemporary European progress, he says, is attributable to the separation of church and state, for the

¹ *Secret of Divine Civilization* 64-5; *Risalih-ye Madaniyyah* 75-7.

² *Op. cit.* 71 / 84; 73 / 87.

³ *Op. cit.* 89 / 106.

⁴ *Op. cit.* 94 / 112.

⁵ *Op. cit.* 27, 30 / 34, 37

entanglement of religious leaders with political matters corrupts religion, leaving the people with no refuge from the combined political-religious elite, and ultimately destroying civilization itself:

The noted historians of Europe ... unanimously record that during the ten centuries constituting the Middle Ages Europe was in every respect and to an extreme degree, barbaric and dark. The principal cause of this was that the monks, referred to by European peoples as spiritual and religious leaders, had given up the abiding glory that comes from obedience to the sacred commandments and heavenly teachings of the Gospel, and had joined forces with the presumptuous and tyrannical rulers of the temporal governments of those times. They had turned their eyes away from everlasting glory, and were devoting all their efforts to the furtherance of their mutual worldly interests and passing and perishable advantages. Ultimately things reached a point where the masses were hopeless prisoners in the hands of these two groups, and all this brought down in ruins the whole structure of the religion, culture, welfare and civilization of the peoples of Europe.¹

Abdu'l-Baha concludes by returning to the themes of the opening pages: Iran is in need of a re-awakening, the borrowing of European ideas is permissible, and education in particular must be reformed to concentrate on studies that are suited to the needs of the times. The religions inculcate the social virtues, so there can be “hope for no real relief or deliverance without this one great remedy.”² Reform cannot be achieved only by the king and ruling cadre: “the determination and unstinted efforts of the people” are also required,³ and this demands mass education, initially through the press, and then by establishing schools throughout the country.

The Sermon on the Art of Governance

The *Sermon on the Art of Governance* (published in 1893) was probably written during the Iranian tobacco protest of 1890-92. It uses examples from Iranian and Ottoman political history to demonstrate that the separation of church and state and freedom of conscience are prerequisites for good government, while the interference of religion in government has always brought disaster.⁴ Since no

¹ *Secret of Divine Civilization* 86-7; *Risalih-ye Madaniyyah* 102-3.

² *Op. cit.* 99 / 117.

³ *Op. cit.* 108 / 128.

⁴ The Sermon is almost contemporaneous with the Azali leader, Subh-i Azal's, *Treatise* (continued...)

translation has been published, I have included a translation of the entire text and placed it in Appendix 1, along with some historical and explanatory notes. Therefore we need deal with it only briefly here.

In this work, Abdu'l-Baha relates the separation of church and state to two fundamental forces or metaphysical principles (*dú qúvveh*), the first being:

... the power of governance that is related to the physical world, a power that guarantees happiness in the external aspects of human existence. It safeguards human life, property and honour, and the exalted quality and refined virtues of the social life of this illustrious race. Just monarchs, accomplished representatives, wise ministers, and intrepid military leaders constitute the executive centre in this power of governance, the axis of the wheel of these divine favours.¹

The second “is sacred and spiritual power: the heavenly Books that have been sent down, the Prophets of God, and spiritual souls and devout religious leaders.” Religious leaders, including ‘divine prophets,’ do not enter the political sphere because:

... matters of politics and government, of the kingdom and of subjects have a specified source and a respected place to which they refer, while guidance, religion, insight, education, and the promotion of the morals and virtues of humanity have a sacred centre and designated spring. These souls have nothing to do with political affairs, nor do they seek any involvement.

⁴(...continued)

on *Kingship* (1895). Whereas Abdu'l-Baha includes the prophets among the religious leaders who constitute only one part of the two-fold order, Azal takes it as self-evident that the prophets are also worldly rulers. Whereas Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha treat elected and hereditary rulers in the same way, as manifestations of the sovereignty of God, Azal accords this station only to kings and explicitly not to elected leaders (because the people could equally well choose an image and make it an idol, but it would not become a real God). Yet he does not claim that kings are chosen by God, and he prefers a republican form of government, which appears inconsistent. If the king is oppressive, the faithful are required both to advise and guide him, and to avoid him, which is again inconsistent. It is permissible to depose a king, but not to kill him. The Azali position could be characterised as mildly revolutionary, preferring popular agitation and (implicitly) mass disobedience above violent action, and somewhat ambivalent regarding monarchy itself.

¹ Section 5. The words translated as executive centre in this passage are *markaz-e rateq o fateq*, the centre of opening and closing, not *tanfidh*.

Now, in this most great cycle, when the world has reached the age of discretion and maturity, this matter has been made indisputable in the book of God ... The indisputable command is this:

*O ye the loved ones and the trustees of God! Kings are the manifestations of the power, and the daysprings of the might and riches, of God. Pray ye on their behalf. He hath invested them with the rulership of the earth and hath singled out the hearts of men as His Own domain. Conflict and contention are categorically forbidden in His Book. This is a decree of God in this Most Great Revelation. It is divinely preserved from annulment ...*¹

Religious leaders, he says, can only advise:

These souls are the fountainhead of the interpretation of God's commandments (*tashri'*), not of implementation (*tanfidh*).²

Tashri' is explicitly defined as explaining the *shari'a*, and not, as in Gail's translation of the *Secret of Divine Civilization*, serving as the legislature within the government structure.

While religious leaders and institutions are restrained from usurping the leadership proper to political institutions, individual believers are required to support the state and therefore to participate in the political process, within legitimate channels. Since the autocratic governments of Baha'u'llah's day hardly allowed room for legal political activity, this point does not emerge adequately in the passages cited above. It is however implicit in Baha'u'llah's letter to Sultan Abdulaziz (see page 167 above), for if the ruler is urged to appoint officials whose fear of God will ensure their trustworthiness, it follows that genuine support for governments entails a duty for the faithful to serve in public capacities.

When Abdu'l-Baha was in Paris in 1911 he spoke on this topic, emphasising the importance of involving men and women of religion in the affairs of government, and praising the trustworthiness of Bahais serving in the Persian government. Abdu'l-Baha is implicitly criticising the French constitutional settlement of the early years of the twentieth century, in which practising Roman Catholics were excluded from cabinet and senior posts in key ministries. This critique, in an influential book by one of his hosts in Paris, Hippolyte Dreyfus,

¹ Section 6.

² Section 15, which has already been cited more fully above (page 206). The Persian text of this section is at page 30 of the Tehran edition.

becomes a rejection of the separation of church and state *per se* (this is discussed with the secondary literature in French, at page 323 below.)

The implications for citizens in democratic countries were later elucidated by Abdu'l-Baha:

... as the government of America is a republican form of government, it is necessary that all the citizens shall take part in the elections of officers and take part in the affairs of the republic.¹

In a talk given in the United States, he is reported to have said:

The injunction to Bahais has been this: they must not engage in matters of politics which lead to corruption. They must have nothing to do with corruption or sedition but should interest themselves in clean politics. In Persia, at the present time, the Bahais have no part in the movements which have terminated in corruption; but on the other hand a Bahai may be a politician of the right type; even ministers in Persia are Bahais. We have Governor-Generals who are Bahais and there are many other Bahais who take part in politics, but not in corruption. It is evident they must have nothing to do with seditious movements. For example, if the Americans should arise with the intention of reinstating despotism, the Bahais should take no part in it.²

Confusion between the principle that religious leaders and institutions should not interfere in politics, on the one hand, and the duty of every individual to participate as a citizen of both heavenly and temporal cities, on the other hand, has contributed to the poor treatment of the church-state question in the secondary literature, both Bahai and academic. It is evident that Abdu'l-Baha's approach is neither politically quietist, nor theocratic: it is based on respect for politics as such, which implies that church and state are separate, but not opposed.

In section 18 of the *Sermon on the Art of Governance*, there is a poetic description of the harmony that is to exist between the political and religious institutions, each of which should be "the aid and assistant of the other, like milk and honey:"

The religious law is like the spirit of life,
the government is the locus of the force of deliverance.
The religious law is the shining sun,

¹ Letter to Thornton Chase, *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Baha Abbas* 342-43, quoted more extensively at page 221 below.

² *Star of the West*, Vol. 4, p. 122. The talk is dated July 23rd 1912. It appears that no Persian notes were taken, so the accuracy of the report cannot be confirmed.

and government is the clouds of April.
 These two bright stars are like twin lights in the heavens of the contingent world,
 they have cast their rays upon the people of the world.
 One has illuminated the world of the soul,
 the other caused the earth to flower

Themes and entire sections from the *Sermon* can often be recognised in the reports of talks on political topics that Abdu'l-Baha gave during his travels. The report by Mirza Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani of Abdu'l-Baha's words to him in May 1894 is of particular interest, since Abu'l-Fadl heard the words without the intervention of an interpreter, because the date is quite close to the composition of the *Sermon*, and because it is a quite extensive summary of themes in the last part of the *Sermon*, and presents some points more clearly than in the *Sermon*. It is too long to reproduce here, and has been translated and published.¹

The Will and Testament of Abdu'l-Baha

The first part of the *Will and Testament* was written when Abdu'l-Baha was waiting for the outcome of a committee of investigation that had been sent from Istanbul to investigate charges that Abdu'l-Baha was establishing some sort of political entity around Mount Carmel. He writes:

One of their many calumnies was that this servant had raised aloft a banner in this city, had summoned the people together under it, had established a new sovereignty for himself, had erected upon Mount Carmel a mighty stronghold, had rallied around him all the peoples of the land and made them obedient to him, had caused disruption in the Faith of Islam, had covenanted with the following of Christ and, God forbid, had purposed to cause the gravest breach in the mighty power of the Crown. May the Lord protect us from such atrocious falsehoods!

According to the direct and sacred command of God ... We must obey and be the well-wishers of the governments of the land, regard disloyalty unto a just king as disloyalty to God Himself and wishing evil to the government a transgression of the Cause of God. With these final and decisive words, how can it be that these imprisoned ones should indulge in such vain fancies; incarcerated, how could they show forth such disloyalty!²

¹ Gulpaygani, *Letters and Essays* 88-91.

² Pages 7-8; in the bilingual edition pages 13-14, and Persian 7-8.

The Will goes on to appoint Shoghi Effendi as the “guardian of the Cause,” and promises both the Guardian and the House of Justice (*bayt al-‘adl*) guidance:

Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God; whoso rebelleth against him and against them hath rebelled against God ...¹

The Will also provides for the continuation of both institutions – a fascinating topic that deserves a separate book. Then he explains that the purpose of the Bahai revelation is:

that contention and conflict amidst peoples, kindreds, nations and governments may disappear, that all the dwellers on earth may become one people and one race, that the world may become even as one home. Should differences arise, they shall be amicably and conclusively settled by the Supreme Tribunal (*mahakame-ye umúmi*), that shall include members from all the governments and peoples (*duval wa milal*) of the world.²

The tribunal is clearly a political body, whose job is to deliver final judgement on differences that arise between nations. As such it should be discussed not here, but in a volume devoted to the Bahai teachings on society and the civil order (the ‘state’ part of church and state). But it is important for my present thesis to demonstrate beyond any doubt at all that it is not the same body as the Universal House of Justice, as so much of the Bahai secondary literature has claimed.

First, we see that Abdu’l-Baha, in this one document, refers to the House of Justice, using the term *bayt al-‘adl*, and gives it authority over the believers, and also refers to the Tribunal, using the term *mahakame-ye umúmi*. The Tribunal, unlike the House of Justice, includes members who represent individual governments and peoples. The method for electing it is set out by Abdu’l-Baha in a letter written to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace, meeting in the Hague following the first World War:

For example, the question of universal peace, about which Baha’u’llah says that the Supreme Tribunal must be established: although the League of Nations has been brought into existence, yet it is incapable of establishing universal peace. But the Supreme Tribunal which Baha’u’llah has described will fulfil this sacred task with the utmost might and power. And His plan is this: that the national assemblies of each country and nation – that is to say parliaments – should elect two or

¹ Page 11; bilingual 19 / 11.

² Page 13; bilingual 22 / 13.

three persons who are the choicest men of that nation, and are well informed concerning international laws and the relations between governments ... The number of these representatives should be in proportion to the number of inhabitants of that country. The election of these souls who are chosen by the national assembly, that is, the parliament, must be confirmed by the upper house, the congress and the cabinet and also by the president or monarch so these persons may be the elected ones of all the nation and the government. From among these people the members of the Supreme Tribunal will be elected, and all mankind will thus have a share therein, for every one of these delegates is fully representative of his nation. When the Supreme Tribunal gives a ruling on any international question ... there will no longer be any pretext for the plaintiff or ground of objection for the defendant. In case any of the governments or nations, in the execution of the irrefutable decision of the Supreme Tribunal, be negligent or dilatory, the rest of the nations will rise up against it, because all the governments and nations of the world are the supporters of this Supreme Tribunal.¹

The Universal House of Justice, in contrast, is a religious body, responsible for leading the Bahai world in worldly matters (that is, not in doctrinal questions, which were the sphere of the Guardian). Naturally it is elected only by Bahais, because its decisions only concern Bahais, and only Bahais are required to obey it. The electoral method is again set out by the Abdu'l-Baha, in the *Will and Testament* itself:

And now, concerning the House of Justice which God hath ordained as the source of all good and freed from all error, it must be elected by universal suffrage, that is, by the believers. ... By this House is meant the Universal House of Justice, that is, in all countries a secondary House of Justice must be instituted, and these secondary Houses of Justice must elect the members of the Universal one. Unto this body all things must be referred. It enacteth all ordinances and regulations that are not to be found in the explicit Holy Text. By this body all the difficult problems are to be resolved and the Guardian of the Cause of God is its sacred head and the distinguished member for life of that body.²

... By this House is meant that Universal House of Justice which is to be elected from all countries, that is from those parts in the East and West

¹ *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha* 305-7.

² Page 14; in the bilingual edition 23 and Persian 14-15.

where the loved ones are to be found, after the manner of the customary elections in Western countries such as those of England.¹

and in another letter:

At whatever time all the beloved of God in each country appoint their delegates, and these in turn elect their representatives, and these representatives elect a body, that body shall be regarded as the Supreme Baytu'l-^cAdl (Universal House of Justice)."²

There can be no doubt then, that the membership, electorate, electoral method, principles of operation and purpose of the supreme tribunal are completely different to those of the Universal House of Justice. To claim that Abdu'l-Baha really meant to refer to the same body when writing these very different things is to accuse him of a muddle and confusion beyond the normal scope of human failings. The confusion in fact lies with those authors who have attempted to make the Universal House of Justice into a tribunal that would adjudicate on the political fates of nations. In his *Sermon on the Art of Governance*, Abdu'l-Baha ridicules the very idea that religious leaders should adjudicate on domestic political affairs, let alone on foreign affairs:

Gracious God! Shall a people who are not able to manage their own little nests, or to instruct their own households, who are unaware of domestic and foreign affairs, shall these interfere in the weighty affairs of the kingdom and its subjects, and raise opposition in the complexities of political matters?

Having mentioned the institutions of the Guardianship and House of Justice, and of government and the international tribunal, Abdu'l-Baha says:

This House of Justice enacteth the laws and the government enforceth them. The legislative body must reinforce the executive, the executive must aid and assist the legislative body so that through the close union and harmony of these two forces, the foundation of fairness and justice may become firm and strong . . ."³

The terms 'legislative' and 'executive' have already been discussed (page 205 above): they refer to the tasks of the religious and political order, not to the separation of powers within the political order (which is also endorsed in Bahai

¹ Page 20; bilingual 30 / 19

² Cited in Shoghi Effendi, *Baha'i Administration*, 84.

³ *Will and Testament* 14-15; bilingual 24 / 15.

political theology). It is important to note that the Universal House of Justice is not given any executive power even to enforce its own laws. Literally, he says: ‘This House of Justice should be the source of the explanation and specification of religious law (*tashrī‘iyyah*) and the government should be the power that implements the interpretation of religious law (*qoveh-ye tanfidh-e tashrī‘iyyah*). To give a trivial example: certain Bahai Holy Days are at present governed by the solar calendar in the West, but should in fact be governed by the Islamic lunar calendar. The House of Justice is entitled to decide to order a change, and the date of the Holy Days would then change for all Bahais, as a matter of religious law, but the House of Justice is not able to decree that these days should be public holidays, because the executive power belongs to the government.

The theme here resembles the hymn to harmony cited in relation to the *Sermon on the Art of Governance* (page 214 above). The two institutional orders of religion and of politics are presented as two kinds of necessary and worthy human endeavour, two aspects of human potential that are to be developed. In another letter, he explains:

O concourse of the Kingdom of Abha! Two calls to success and prosperity are being raised ... The one is the call of civilization, of the progress of the material world. This pertains to the world of phenomena, it promotes the principles of material achievement, and is the trainer for the physical accomplishments of mankind. It comprises the laws, regulations, arts and sciences through which the world of humanity has developed, which are the outcome of lofty ideals and the result of sound minds, and have been achieved through the efforts of the wise and cultured, among the noble founders and their successors. The propagator and active power (*náfidh*) of this call is just government.

The other is the soul-stirring call of God and the sacred spiritual teachings, which are safeguards of the everlasting glory, the eternal happiness and illumination of the world of humanity, and cause attributes of mercy to be revealed in the human world and the life beyond. This second call is founded upon the instructions and exhortations of the Lord and the admonitions and altruistic emotions belonging to the realm of morality which, like a brilliant light, brighten and illumine the lamp of the realities of mankind. Its active power (*náfidh*) is the Word of God.

However, until material achievements, physical accomplishments and human virtues are reinforced by spiritual perfections, luminous qualities and characteristics of mercy, no fruit or result shall issue therefrom, nor

will the happiness of the world of humanity, which is the ultimate aim, be attained.¹

The *Will and Testament* goes on to repeat the instruction to obey the government and not to meddle in politics in any illegal way, and says that “disloyalty to the just sovereign is disloyalty to God Himself.”² The last is important also for our understanding of the authorities of the Guardian and the House of Justice, because as we have seen, Abdu’l-Baha also equated obedience to the Guardian and Universal House of Justice to obedience to God: this does not mean the Guardian or the Government are God, but that obedience to both is *equally* a religious duty.

Some other writings of Abdu’l-Baha

This principle of the ‘two calls’ (both of which we must answer) is reflected in some of Abdu’l-Baha’s more topical letters addressing issues that arose particularly in the United States, because of misunderstandings of the Bahai Faith among the Bahais there, and in Iran, because of the revolutionary situation and the activities of the Azalis. In one such letter, Abdu’l-Baha instructed the Bahais to cease using the name “House of Justice” for their elected religious institutions:

The signature of that meeting should be the Spiritual Gathering (House of Spirituality) and the wisdom therein is that hereafter the government should not infer from the term “House of Justice” that a court is signified, that it is connected with political affairs, or that at any time it will interfere with governmental affairs. Hereafter, enemies will be many. They would use this subject as a cause for disturbing the mind of the government and confusing the thoughts of the public. The intention was to make known that by the term Spiritual Gathering (House of Spirituality), that Gathering has not the least connection with material matters, and that its whole aim and consultation is confined to matters connected with spiritual affairs. This was also instructed (performed) in all Persia.³

This makes it quite clear that the principles regarding leaders of religion that he set out in the *Sermon on the Art of Governance* also apply to the Bahai elected

¹ *Ma’ida-ye Asmani* V:109-110, my translation, adapted from *Selections from the Writings of Abdu’l-Baha* 282-4.

² The paragraph was cited on page 186 above.

³ Abdu’l-Baha, *Tablets of Abdu’l-Baha Abbas* vol. 1, page 5, also printed with minor editorial changes in *Baha’i World Faith* 405.

bodies: they do not form any part of the government, whether executive, judicial or legislative, and are not to interfere in any way with government matters.

He says that the Bahai teachings for society could be presented, and the relationship between Baha'u'llah and the Qajar and Ottoman government could be discussed, but he is anxious that the Bahais in America should be a religious community and not a political party:

It is very acceptable for you to present to them the excellent praises which the Blessed Perfection hath made in behalf of these two governments, the exhortations which He hath delivered for obedience to them and the prayers He hath written for the confirmation and protection of His Imperial Majesty the Shah. Likewise, the advices and recommendations that this servant [Abdul-Baha] hath written in Tablets to Persia and America; also the irrefutable command that the Blessed Perfection hath given in Tablets that the believers must obey the kings with the utmost sincerity and fidelity, and He hath forbidden them to interfere at all with political problems. He hath even prohibited the believers from discussing political affairs.¹

The last phrase clearly meant '[discussing political affairs *in their communities*]' but caused some misunderstanding, with some Bahais understanding that they were not to undertake the normal political duties of citizenship in a democracy. In another letter, he wrote:

If any person wishes to speak of government affairs, or to interfere with the order of Governors, the others must not combine with him because the Cause of God is withdrawn entirely from political affairs; the political realm pertains only to the Rulers of those matters: it has nothing to do with the souls who are exerting their utmost energy to harmonizing affairs, helping character and inciting (the people) to strive for perfections. Therefore no soul is allowed to interfere with (political) matters, but only in that which is commanded.²

The purpose here is a strong statement of the principle of the separation of church and state, but the form is certainly prone to misunderstanding. Abdu'l-Baha later clarified the issue:

O thou servant of Baha'! Thou hast asked regarding the political affairs. In the United States it is necessary that the citizens shall take part in

¹ *Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha Abbas*, vol. 3, pages 497-8.

² *Baha'i World Faith*, 407. This source is unauthenticated.

elections. This is a necessary matter and no excuse from it is possible. My object in telling the believers that they should not interfere in the affairs of government is this: That they should not make any trouble and that they should not move against the opinion of the government, but obedience to the laws and the administration of the commonwealth is necessary. Now, as the government of America is a republican form of government, it is necessary that all the citizens shall take part in the elections of officers and take part in the affairs of the republic.¹

However with the fading of his earlier hopes for a peaceful transition to constitutional monarchy in Iran, which were evident in *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, and as the conservative clergy achieved sufficient leverage to ensure that the new Iranian constitution would allow them a veto right on legislation, would not treat the members of all religious communities as citizens equally, and would exclude the Bahais from full citizenship, Abdu'l-Baha instructed the believers in Iran to adopt a strictly non-political stance, not just as institutions and communities but also as individuals. This is a response to the dangers and hopelessness of that particular situation:

Regarding the question of the establishment of the National Assembly: This National Assembly [the Iranian parliament] will not bring any rapid results. Now some of the agitators are harboring evil intentions and do not let agreement and union be realized between the nations and the

¹ *Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha Abbas* volume 2, pages 342-3. Similar instructions, to vote and join movements beneficial to mankind, were given orally to Helen Goodall and Ella Cooper in 1908 (*Daily Lessons* 65). A letter written on behalf of the Guardian in 1933 says "The Guardian fully recognizes the authenticity and controlling influence of this instruction from Abdu'l-Baha upon the question. He, however, feels under the responsibility of stating that the attitude taken by the Master implies certain reservations. He, therefore, lays it upon the individual conscience to see that in following the Master's instructions no Baha'i vote for an officer nor Baha'i participation in the affairs of the Republic should involve acceptance by that individual of a program or policy that contravenes any vital principle, spiritual or social, of the Faith." (NSA statement in *The Bahai World* volume 6, 1934-6 (publ. 1937), 197-8). The letter bears a postscript from Shoghi Effendi saying "no vote cast, nor office undertaken, by a Baha'i should necessarily constitute acceptance, by the voter or office-holder, of the entire program of any political party. No Baha'i can be regarded as either a Republican or Democrat as such." While voting is, in principle, part of the appropriate response to democratic governments and the sovereignty that they embody, abhorrence for partisan methods and misunderstandings regarding Bahai political teachings mean that many Bahais in democracies are politically inactive.

government. They are instigating the hopeless ones at every moment and sending them to the British Legation, while on the other hand they ask private assistance and protection from the government so that they may procure wealth. Each and all of the clergy are thinking in this line. However, we have nothing to do with these proceedings and counter-proceedings. We are commanded to quicken the souls, to train the characters, to illumine the realm of man, to guide all the inhabitants of the earth, to create concord and unity among all men and to lead the world of humanity to the Fountain of the Everlasting Glory. The reformation of one empire is not our aim; nay, rather we invoke from God that all the regions of the world be reformed and cultivated; the republic of men become the manifestors of the bounty of the most glorious Lord; the East and the West be brought nearer together ... ¹

Thus, in the writings of both Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha, the general principle is that the political and religious orders should be distinct but not hermetically separated, yet in a revolutionary situation in which Azalis were already actively involved, Abdu'l-Baha found it necessary to require complete withdrawal (as did Shoghi Effendi later, during the McCarthy years). Nevertheless, the principle remains: religious and political activities are aspects of our dual citizenship in our nations and in the Kingdom of Heaven. The political and religious orders are organs of one body, whose distinct natures are required so that they can work together. Naturally we must contribute to both. The world and its political institutions are not to be abolished in the Kingdom of God, but rather baptized with the spirit and thus strengthened.

One other text should be cited, because it is particularly relevant to my thesis that Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha can be understood as prophets of postmodernism. In this case we have Abdu'l-Baha's spoken words, rather than a written text, but the words can be considered as authentic Bahai scriptures because they were recorded in Persian and published, and it was Abdu'l-Baha's normal practice to correct and approve such notes before allowing them to be circulated. After answering various questions about politics and economics from his audience, Abdu'l-Baha said:

Tonight you have spoken of politics, but we are not accustomed to speak about politics. ... Politics is a coercive matter (*amr-e ijbárí*), but eternal happiness cannot be found in a coercive matter. Coercion with happiness is impossible. What is meant by happiness? It means that the people should live according to both the most perfect virtues of the world of

¹ *Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha Abbas* volume 3, 489-91.

humanity, and the power of the divine kingdom. This is one discourse (*hikáyat*) and that is another discourse.¹

Suspect the text 1: *Paris Talks*

A talk given by Abdu'l-Baha in Paris, on the theme of the important contribution that religion and religious believers could make by their involvement in public life, requires some additional comments. In the version of this talk printed in *Paris Talks*, Abdu'l-Baha first says how important it is “that Ministers of State should be enlightened by religion,” since they will then anticipate or fear divine rewards and retribution, and will be more inclined to avoid oppression and injustice. This is an argument for the role of religion in public life *through the values of individuals* – not for an institutional role. Then he says, according to *Paris Talks*:

With political questions the clergy, however, have nothing to do! Religious matters should not be confused with politics *in the present state of the world* (for their interests are not identical).

Religion concerns matters of the heart, of the spirit, and of morals. Politics are occupied with the material things of life. Religious teachers should not invade the realm of politics; they should concern themselves with the spiritual education of the people; they should ever give good counsel to men, trying to serve God and human kind; they should endeavour to awaken spiritual aspiration, and strive to enlarge the understanding and knowledge of humanity, to improve morals, and to increase the love for justice. This is in accordance with the Teaching of Baha'u'llah. In the Gospel also it is written, “Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s, and unto God the things which are God’s.”

In Persia there are some amongst the important Ministers of State who are religious, who are exemplary, who worship God, and who fear to disobey His Laws, who judge justly and rule their people with Equity.² Other Governors there are in this land who have no fear of God before

¹ *Khitabat-e Abdu'l-Baha* 429-30 (roman). A fair translation by Zia Bagdadi was published in *Star of the West* Vol. 7, No. 9, August 20 1916 from page 77, this extract at page 84.

² For example, one of the Afnans (the family of the Bab) who became a Bahai was governor of an area by the Sea of Oman, and later had some role in the cabinet. His service met the approval of Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha, and the latter wrote a eulogy and prayer in his honour which is published in *Makatib-e Abdu'l-Baha* 3:238-43 (<http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/MA3/ma3-238.html>). I am grateful to Ahang Rabbani for pointing out the reference.

their eyes, who think not of the consequences of their actions, working for their own desires ...¹

In the Persian notes for this talk, Abdu'l-Baha says:

My intention, with these words, is not that religion (*dín*) has any business in politics (*siyásat*). Religion has no jurisdiction or involvement in political matters, for religion is related to spirits and to ecstasy, while politics relates to the body. Therefore the leaders of religions (*ru'sá'-ye adyán*) should not be involved in political matters, but should busy themselves with rectifying the morals of the community (*mellat*). They admonish, and excite the desire and appetite for piety. They sustain the morals of the community. They give spiritual understanding to the souls. They teach the [religious] sciences, but they have no involvement with political matters, for all time (*abadan*). Baha'u'llah has commanded this. In the Gospels it is said, "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

But the intention was this: in Iran the righteous Bahai officials pay the closest attention to justice because they fear the wrath of God, and hope for the mercy of God. However there are others who have no scruples at all ...²

From the *Paris Talks* version, one might think that Abdu'l-Baha was referring only to the ulama and Christian clergy, and since the Bahai Faith does not (in the western understanding) have clergy, his words might not appear to apply to the Bahai institutions. But the Persian does not mention clergy, it concerns "the leaders of religions." Where Abdu'l-Baha says that this principle applies for all time, the *Paris Talks* version inserts "in the present state of the world." In short, the text has been distorted to allow room for a theocratic political theology, although the intention of this aside in Abdu'l-Baha's talk is to say that leaders of religion should *never* be involved in political affairs, even though believers ought to serve in public posts.

It is not possible to say where this distortion has come from, since the text in *Paris Talks* is not, as is often the case, simply an editorial adaption of the English notes of this talk. In this case the English notes were much briefer:

At the same time religious interests should not be brought into politics.
Religions should treat of morals; politics of material circumstances.

¹ *Paris Talks* 158-9.

² *Khitabat-e Abdu'l-Baha* 182. The Persian notes, English notes, and the edited *Paris Talks* version are set out side by side in Appendix 3.

Those in authority should occupy themselves with the lives of men, They should teach ideas of service, good morals and develop the habit of Justice. “Render unto Cesar the things that are Cesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s.” In Persia there are among the most important ministers of state religious men who fear divine punishment; the others, however, do not think of the consequences of their acts.¹

Paris Talks correctly adds the description of the functions of religious leaders, and the reference to the teachings of Baha’u’llah, which is not in the *Star of the West* notes. Therefore the editor of *Paris Talks* must have had access to another set of notes in either French or Persian, which could be the source of the phrase “in the present state of the world.” Until we know more of the history behind *Paris Talks* it must be treated with caution. One thing we do know: the statement on page 5 of *Paris Talks*, claiming that notes were taken from the English translation by four English believers, is not true.²

Suspect the text 2: *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*

Some words attributed to Abdu’l-Baha, and published in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* and the more widely-used compilation *Baha’i World Faith* should be considered. Although they have no scriptural authority, they might help to explain the extraordinary popular beliefs among Bahais that we will see in the review of Bahai secondary literature. According to the *Promulgation* version, Abdu’l-Baha says:

He has ordained and established the House of Justice, which is endowed with a political as well as a religious function, *the consummate union and blending of church and state...* A universal, or international, house of Justice shall also be organized. Its rulings shall be in accordance with the commands and teachings of Baha’u’llah, and that which the Universal House of Justice ordains shall be obeyed by all mankind. This international House of Justice shall be appointed and organized from the

¹ *Star of the West* Vol. 3, No. 2, page 7.

² Thomas Linard has found two letters concerning the text in the French National Bahai Archives, both dated 1962, in which a Dr. Barafroukhteh states that Laura Dreyfus-Barney told him that the talks were translated into French, not English, and that Lady Bloomfield and her daughters did not take notes. Notes were taken by a professional stenographer in French and these were translated. Although Lady Bloomfield asked the Dreyfuses to correct the Bloomfield’s English notes, they did not find time to do so, and the names of Hippolyte and Laura Dreyfus-Barney, which appeared on the proofs, were removed.

Houses of Justice of the whole world, and all the world shall come under its administration.¹

This passage comes from stenographic notes made by Esther Foster from an extempore translation of a talk by Abdu'l-Baha, for which no Persian notes are available. As such it would have the lowest possible status in the Bahai canon, even if the text were genuine. In Bahai theology, truly canonical status is reserved for those works for which there is an original approved by the author. In a 1930 letter, Shoghi Effendi's secretary wrote:

The early translations are far from being accurate, no matter who the translator may be. Shoghi Effendi firmly believes that only Tablets with the Master's signature and in the original tongue should be recognised. Any translations or copies of them fail from having real authority.²

If this is true of translations of tablets, where the translator has at least had an authentic written copy from which to work, it is doubly true of *ad hoc* translations of Abdu'l-Baha's talks. In these situations, the interpreter has worked without preparation, and a note-taker has done his or her best to record the simultaneous translation. Such records are no different in principle to table talks, where Abdu'l-Baha would speak to pilgrims, an interpreter would do his best to convey his meaning, and the pilgrims would take notes. In another letter of the same period the Guardian's secretary writes:

... whereas he welcomes the work on the Tablets ... he does not wish anything done on notes taken or personal accounts of visits. The reason for this is the fear that a set of conflicting accounts of the same topic may crop up in various parts of the world from friends who have drawn largely from their memory, or have based their understanding of the Master's opinion or words, upon the imperfect, not to say faulty, renderings of the interpreters of those days. Such accounts are not only impossible to verify but may lead to much perplexity and constitute a set of traditions that may not prove healthy ...³

As regards the reports of talks, the Guardian's secretary wrote in 1947 that:

Nothing can be considered scripture for which we do not have an original text. A verbatim record in Persian of His talks would of course be more

¹ *Promulgation* 455, *Baha'i World Faith* 247-8.

² *Unfolding Destiny* 90.

³ *Op. cit.* 98.

reliable than one in English because He was not always accurately interpreted ...”¹

Abdu’l-Baha himself, referring to these talks, speaks of “errors and deviations committed by previous interpreters.”² In *The World Order of Baha’u’llah* pages 4 to 5, Shoghi Effendi deplors the “unfortunate distortions” and “the confusion that has obscured the understandings of the believers” because of their reliance on words delivered through interpreters. This applies to talks reported in *Star of the West*, *Paris Talks* and *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, except in the rare case where Persian notes have been consulted to produce a new translation. Shoghi Effendi details three kinds of difficulties: the interpreter’s inability to understand what Abdu’l-Baha is saying, his inability to express what he has understood in English, and the fact that the interpreters sometimes mistranslated the questions that were put to Abdu’l-Baha, so that he was not always replying to the question that had in fact been asked.

The term ‘House of Justice’ gives an example of the difficulties facing an interpreter. The Persian term *‘adalat-khánah*, or house of justice, was used by Iranian reformers to refer to a representative form of government for Iran.³ The term that is used in the Bahai writings to refer to elected and consultative bodies within the Bahai administrative order is the Arabic equivalent (*bayt al-‘adl*). Since the normal English translations are identical, it would take an exceptionally agile interpreter to make the distinction clear.

Quite apart from the various levels of canonical status, there are issues of textual corruption to consider. The texts of some talks, as printed in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, differ substantially from earlier versions published in *Star of the West* magazine.⁴ Before using any of the talks cited in *Promulgation* it is necessary to reconstruct the history of that particular text from the earlier English versions and from the Persian notes where these are available. In this case, the talk reported in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* is not included in the published record in Persian, *Khitabat-e Abdu’l-Baha*, and is not

¹ *Unfolding Destiny* 208.

² *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, page xx.

³ See page 190, note 2 above.

⁴ And in at least one case there are significant and unexplained differences between the 1922 and 1982 editions of *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* (compare the list of prophets on page 356 of the 1982 edition with the earlier version in Vol. 2, page 340 of the 1922 edition). However this is not the case in the paragraph cited here, which is identical in Vol. 2, page 451 of the 1922 edition, except for some typographical corrections.

even reported to have taken place in Mahmud-e Zarqani's diary.¹ Other Persian sources may yet come to light, but in the meantime this account as a whole cannot be considered as a reliable record of Abdu'l-Baha's words.

One English source that might have provided collaboration is Howard Colby Ives' *Portals to Freedom*, since Ives was probably present at the meeting concerned.² However he deliberately refrains from giving an eye-witness account of that meeting³ or of any of the meetings in New York that December, basing himself instead on what he calls the 'official record'⁴ presented in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*. It appears that he thought that independent eyewitness accounts could lead to confusion, which also implies that his own memories differ from the 'official record.'

As for the phrase "consummate blending of church and state," as Jennifer McNair pointed out on Talisman9 on 7 January 2001, these words are an editorial insertion into the English notes of the talk published in *Star of the West*.⁵ The original reads:

The eleventh teaching is the organization called, The House of Justice, which is endowed with a political as well as a religious aspect. It embodies both aspects, and it is protected by the Preserving Power of Baha'o'llah Himself.

The editor of *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, Howard MacNutt, revises this to read:

He has ordained and established the House of Justice, which is endowed with a political as well as a religious function, *the consummate union and blending of church and state*. This institution is under the protecting power of Baha'u'llah Himself.

Thus the key phrase is a deliberate corruption of the text. The original continues:

A Universal or World House of Justice shall be organized. *That which it orders shall be the Truth in explaining the Commands of Baha'o'llah*, and that which the House of Justice ordains concerning the Commands of Baha'o'llah shall be obeyed by all.

¹ *Kitab-e badayi'u'l-athar (Mahmud's Diary)*.

² *Portals to Freedom* 167.

³ *Op. cit.* 185.

⁴ *Op. cit.* 134.

⁵ See "Certain New Teachings of the Baha'i Revelation Not Found in the Religious Books of the Past." *Star of the West*. Vol. 4, No. 15 (December 12, 1913) 255.

Which MacNutt revises to read:

A universal, or international, House of Justice shall also be organized. Its rulings shall be in accordance with the commands and teachings of Baha'u'llah, and that which the Universal House of Justice ordains shall be obeyed by all mankind.

By removing the phrase “*in explaining the Commands of Baha'o'llah,*” MacNutt makes it appear that the Universal House of Justice has an unlimited authority, whereas the original says only that it is the authority in elucidating Bahai laws.

There is a great deal of work to be done in collecting, translating and collating the tablets of Abdu'l-Baha so that they can be used to form a systematic picture of Abdu'l-Baha's thought. A text-critical scholarship must be developed. An even larger task is to eradicate the influence of weak or corrupted texts that have spread through the Bahai secondary literature and catechism (“training institute”) materials and through what is taught in summer schools. An evaluation of the extent to which the Bahai secondary literature has relied on weak texts is sobering. We will have to question and revise a considerable part of what has been taken at a popular level in the Bahai community to be “the Bahai teachings.”

The Writings of Shoghi Effendi

Twin processes

Abdu'l-Baha appointed his grandson Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957) as ‘Guardian,’ intending that a line of hereditary guardians should function alongside the elected Houses of Justice, the one dealing with doctrine and the other with law and administration. To anticipate a theme that will have to be taken up in another work, an ecclesiology based on the organic relations between distinct organs *within* the religious community parallels a political theology based on an organic model of society as functionally differentiated into different human projects.

We have already seen, in his summaries of the contents of the *Kitab-e Aqdas* and *Kitab-e 'Ahd*, that Shoghi Effendi recognized that the ‘kingdom’ of religion is a kingdom of “the hearts of men” and that Baha'u'llah “invests [the Kings] with the rulership of the earth” (see page 188 above). He claims that the Babis did not intend to establish a worldly sovereignty, and that church and state will be separated in Iran in the future (pages 3 and 81 above). We can also note that many of the passages from Baha'u'llah's writings that I have cited were selected, translated, and published by Shoghi Effendi. It is certain, then, that he agreed with what was said in them, and recognised the salience of the principle and the need to emphasise it to the Bahais of the west. At first glance however there are few parallels in his own writings to the emphatic statements concerning the two

sovereignties, in Baha'u'llah's writings, and the two powers, in Abdu'l-Baha's writings.

Shoghi Effendi systematised and clarified what his predecessors had said about the need for institutions of world governance, but his descriptions of those institutions do not mention any religious bodies. He also expanded on what they had said regarding the Houses of Justice and other Bahai religious institutions, and developed them in practice. He stated definitely that the Bahais must never "allow the machinery of their administration to supersede the government of their respective countries,"¹ vigorously emphasising the duty of obedience of government, and saw "...in the slow and hidden process of secularization [in Iran] ... symptoms that augur well for a future that is sure to witness the formal and complete separation of Church and State."² What he says, separately, about the institutions of world government, and the Bahai houses of justice shows that he could not have conceived of them merging. We have already seen (page 216) that when Abdu'l-Baha wrote to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace at The Hague in 1919 he said that the international *tribunal* should be elected by national delegates in proportion to the size of the population, that the delegates should elect the tribunal from their own number, all being experts in international law and approved by their respective national governments. This body is the highest judicial body of a world commonwealth of nations. The members of the *legislature* of the commonwealth of nations, according to Shoghi Effendi should be directly "elected by the people in their respective countries and ... confirmed by their respective governments."³ However Baha'u'llah says, in respect to the gathering that is to establish (and presumably maintain) world peace, that it would be "preferable and more fitting that the highly-honored kings themselves should attend such an assembly."⁴ This looks rather like a two-chamber structure, with one chamber elected directly by the people and the other consisting of heads of state government representatives.

Regarding the election of the National Assemblies and the Universal House of Justice, Shoghi Effendi writes:

Regarding the method to be adopted for the election of the National Spiritual Assemblies In one of [Abdu'l-Baha's] earliest Tablets ... addressed to a friend in Persia, the following is expressly recorded: "At whatever time all the beloved of God in each country appoint their

¹ *The World Order of Baha'u'llah* 66.

² *Baha'i Administration* 147.

³ *The World Order of Baha'u'llah* 41.

⁴ *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 31.

delegates, and these in turn elect their representatives, and these representatives elect a body, that body shall be regarded as the Supreme Baytu'l-^cAdl (Universal House of Justice).” These words clearly indicate that a three-stage election has been provided by ‘Abdu’l-Baha for the formation of the International House of Justice, and as it is explicitly provided in His *Will and Testament* that the “Secondary House of Justice (i.e., National Assemblies) must elect the members of the Universal One,” it is obvious that the members of the National Spiritual Assemblies will have to be indirectly elected by the body of the believers in their respective provinces.¹

If Shoghi Effendi had imagined these institutions as being the same, or merging, he would surely have addressed the fact that the electoral methods and memberships of the three bodies are different. Thus there can be no doubt that the principle of separation underlies Shoghi Effendi’s thinking throughout. But where is it stated and expounded?

I think we can find it clad in different robes, in the form of twin historical processes. The language of neoplatonic metaphysics that Baha’u’llah and Abdu’l-Baha employ supposes that the ‘kingdom of names’ and metaphysical ‘powers’ are realities underlying the world. In Shoghi Effendi’s thinking this takes a turn that we might be tempted to call Hegelian, if Shoghi Effendi had not condemned Hegelian thought so thoroughly. In a long letter addressed to the North American Bahais in June 1947, and published in *The Citadel of Faith*,² he speaks of a number of processes occurring within the Bahai community, and the goals that will have to be achieved. The American believers, he says, have a great part to play. How could it be otherwise, when:

... the great republic of the West, government and people alike, is itself unwittingly and irresistibly advancing towards the goal destined for it by both Baha’u’llah and Abdu’l-Baha? Indeed if we ... appraise correctly the significances of contemporaneous events that are impelling forward both the American Baha’i Community and the nation of which it forms a part on the road leading them to their ultimate destiny, we cannot fail to perceive the workings of two simultaneous processes ... each clearly defined, each distinctly separate, yet closely related and destined to culminate, in the fullness of time, in a single glorious consummation.

One of these processes is associated with the mission of the American Baha’i Community, the other with the destiny of the American nation.

¹ *Baha’i Administration* 84.

² Pages 4-38.

The one serves directly the interests of the Administrative Order of the Faith of Baha'u'llah, the other promotes indirectly the institutions that are to be associated with the establishment of His World Order.¹

The institutions of 'Baha'u'llah's World Order' are the *civil* institutions of international governance, described by Shoghi Effendi in *The Unfoldment of World Civilization* (see below), not the religious institutions of the Bahai community. The allusion no doubt includes the role that the United States played in the establishment of the United Nations, but the beginnings of a world financial order in the Bretton Woods agreement was also important. "The first process," he says, entails both external expansion and the erection of the institutions of the Bahai Administrative Order. "It will be consummated through the emergence of the Baha'i World Commonwealth in the Golden Age of the Baha'i Dispensation." As an aside, we can note that the Bahai Commonwealth, capitalised in Shoghi Effendi's writings, is distinct from the commonwealth of nations: 'Commonwealth' seems to be a translation for the Islamic concept of *umma*, which is the body of believers in solidarity with one another, analogous to Gibbon's use of the term "Christian commonwealth" to refer to the Christian community before the age of Constantine, whereas the 'commonwealth of nations' is a political structure based on a treaty between states.

The second process is the development of a new political order, which "dates back to the outbreak of the first World War," "received its initial impetus through the formulation of President Wilson's Fourteen Points," "suffered its first setback" when the American Senate failed to endorse the League of Nations, and developed, through the second World War, until:

It assumed a definite outline through the birth of the United Nations at the San Francisco Conference. ... It must ... lead, through a series of victories and reverses, to the political unification of the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, to the emergence of a world government and the establishment of the Lesser Peace, as foretold by Baha'u'llah and foreshadowed by the Prophet Isaiah. It must, in the end, culminate in the unfurling of the banner of the Most Great Peace, in the Golden Age of the Dispensation of Baha'u'llah.²

If we look at Shoghi Effendi's works with an awareness that, for him, the separation of church and state was not so much a principle of constitutional law

¹ *The Citadel of Faith* 31-2; see also *The Advent of Divine Justice* 85.

² *The Citadel of Faith* 32-33.

as a description of the fundamental dynamics of history, the link between his thinking and that of Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha is clearer.

The Unfoldment of World Civilization

In *The Unfoldment of World Civilization*, a general letter written by Shoghi Effendi in 1936, there is a passage that is so important for a Bahai political theology that its contents must at least be surveyed, although the references to church and state are only implicit. The letter is published in *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*.¹ It explains the implications of Baha'u'llah's words "Soon will the present day Order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead"² in terms of the second of the two processes mentioned above, the development of a global political order, which is "a stage of maturity in the process of human government."³ The negative signs of growing maturity include the collapse of absolute monarchies, the declining status of the Islamic ulama, the abolition of the Ottoman caliphate and the disestablishment of Islam in Turkey, the disestablishment of churches in various countries," the de-Christianization of the masses" and "signs of moral downfall." These are indicative of the progressive decay of the old order, political and religious. Among the positive signs are the League of Nations, proposals for a United States of Europe, and the acceptance in principle of the system of collective security that Baha'u'llah advocated. Moreover, "for the first time in history, a movement of public opinion has manifested itself in support of the verdict [regarding collective security] which the leaders and representatives of nations have pronounced ..."⁴

Unification of the whole of mankind is the hall-mark of the stage which human society is now approaching. ... Nation-building has come to an end. The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish *once for all* the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life.

... The unity of the human race, as envisaged by Baha'u'llah, implies the establishment of a world commonwealth in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of

¹ In the 1991 edition, pages 161 to 206.

² *Gleanings* IV.

³ *The World Order of Baha'u'llah* 164.

⁴ *Op. cit.* 192.

the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded.¹

We can see that the ‘members’ of this commonwealth are states, so this is a political union, and that the autonomy of the states is guaranteed. We should also note that the freedoms of individuals are guaranteed, which cannot be said of the present world order, in which the Security Council may intervene to counter threats to world peace, but seldom acts on actual and flagrant breaches of human rights. Shoghi Effendi envisions that it be established “once for all,” so he can hardly have imagined it being replaced by the Houses of Justice or merged with them at some time in the future. He continues:

This commonwealth must, as far as we can visualize it, consist of a world legislature, whose members will ... enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples. A world executive, backed by an international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth. A world tribunal will adjudicate and deliver its compulsory and final verdict in all and any disputes that may arise between the various elements constituting this universal system. A mechanism of world inter-communication will be devised, ... freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvellous swiftness and perfect regularity.²

These institutions are all clearly political, inter-state bodies. Considering that this is a religious vision of society, the absence of religion is striking. Yet religion is present, not as an institutional element but as an underlying rationale:

A world federal system, ruling the whole earth and exercising unchallengeable authority over its unimaginably vast resources, blending and embodying the ideals of both the East and the West ... a system in which Force is made the servant of Justice, whose life is sustained by its universal recognition of one God and by its allegiance to one common Revelation – such is the goal towards which humanity, impelled by the unifying forces of life, is moving.³

¹ *The World Order of Baha'u'llah* 202-3.

² *Op. cit.* 203.

³ *Op. cit.* 204.

‘The World Order of Baha’u’llah’

If we have established that Shoghi Effendi thoroughly understood the principles we have seen in the writings of Baha’u’llah and Abdu’l-Baha, we are entitled to ask what he meant by these words, in a general letter of 1929:

Not only will the present-day Spiritual Assemblies be styled differently in future, but they will be enabled also to add to their present functions those powers, duties, and prerogatives necessitated by the recognition of the Faith of Baha’u’llah ... as the State Religion of an independent and Sovereign Power. And as the Baha’i Faith permeates the masses of the peoples of East and West, and its truth is embraced by the majority of the peoples of a number of the Sovereign States of the world, will the Universal House of Justice attain the plenitude of its power, and exercise as the supreme organ of the Baha’i Commonwealth all the rights, the duties, and responsibilities incumbent upon the world’s future superstate.¹

The letter is called ‘The World Order of Baha’u’llah,’ and is published in the book of the same name.² It is preceded by a reference to a letter of Abdu’l-Baha that was cited above (page 220), which says that the local houses of justice should be called ‘Spiritual Assemblies’ lest the government might think, or enemies might claim, that the Bahai House of Justice was intended to have a judicial or political function in the future. This provides a framework within which we can try to understand what powers, duties, prerogatives and responsibilities Shoghi Effendi does envision the House of Justice exercising.

The quotation from 1929 says that the Bahai Faith will be recognized as “the State Religion” of at least one country, and there are similar references in other works of Shoghi Effendi.³ We need therefore to return to the discussion at page 144 above, which showed first that the establishment of religion does not mean theocratic government, or even non-separation. Establishment is a constitutional agreement between the state and one or more religious organizations to place the relationship between them on a long-term footing, and thus beyond the vagaries of day-to-day politics. Second, the disestablishment of religion does not mean that religion is confined to the private sphere, and establishment does not mean a greater public role. Religion plays a more visibly intrusive role in American politics than it does in either England or Denmark, both of which have established churches. Third, establishment is not compatible with a church-state.

¹ *The World Order of Baha’u’llah* 6-7. Punctuation has been altered to match Shoghi Effendi’s manuscript (Bahai National Archives, Wilmette).

² *Op. cit.* 3-12.

³ *The Advent of Divine Justice* 14 (see also *God Passes By*, Chapter 24).

Establishment is only possible if the church and the state are two separate and distinct institutions, so that they can recognize and affirm one-another. For this reason, the Islamic Republic of Iran, where the religious institutions define the limited role that is permitted to politics and closely supervise political life, is properly seen as a theocracy, not as a state with an established religion. In the present Iranian model, the political order does not have the power or freedom to establish or disestablish religion; whereas in England and Denmark the state as a sovereign entity has chosen to establish particular national churches. Fourth, while establishment *may* privilege one religious group over others, it does not necessarily do so: England and Denmark do not discriminate between citizens on the basis of religion. Fifth, establishment is not necessarily limited to a single church or religion. In a pluralist society the state could invite several religious communities to provide representatives for a consultative body such as the House of Lords, or for regular forums with the leaders of the political parties. Finally, establishment does not in itself say anything about the religious quality of the state: the state may regard religious institutions in a purely pragmatic fashion as a means of inculcating desirable ethics and providing necessary social services, or the founders of the state may be motivated by religious conviction and may commit the state to follow religious teachings. Shoghi Effendi presents these as successive stages in the relationship, when he refers to “the stage of establishment” being followed by “the emergence of the Baha’i state itself.”¹ In Roman history too, we can see a considerable gap between the establishment of Christianity and the Christianization of the Roman state, and also that the latter is not achieved once-for-all.

Having set aside what establishment does not mean, or does not necessarily mean, we are left with a minimal definition. The establishment of religion requires only that there be a constitutional understanding between a state and one or more religious institutions: it is a contract between government and religion as partners.

In the passage we are considering, Shoghi Effendi continues:

And as the Baha’i Faith ... is embraced by the majority of the peoples of a number of the Sovereign States of the world, will the Universal House of Justice attain the plenitude of its power, and exercise as the supreme organ of the Baha’i Commonwealth all the rights, the duties, and responsibilities incumbent upon the world’s future superstate.

This is the only passage of authentic Bahai scripture that I know of that is

¹ *Messages to the Baha’i World* 155.

genuinely open to a theocratic reading. It may help to explain why theocratic ideas are so pervasive in the Bahai secondary literature, although it must be said that I have not found *any* Bahai authors who cite it as a proof text, and did find Bahai authors writing before 1929 who already had a theocratic political theology.

While I have not found any author citing this text as a support for theocratic views, I have found one indication of how it is understood. This is in Hushmand Fatheazam's Persian translation and adaptation of the text. He renders this passage:

[... when the Baha'i Faith has affected the mass of the peoples of East and West, and its truths have been accepted by the majority of the peoples of some independent countries in the world, at that time the Universal House of Justice will attain to the summit of its own power and authority and, by virtue of [having] the most exalted rank [in] the Baha'i Commonwealth, will be charged with all the rights and functions and responsibilities pertaining to the single supreme world government.]

Taking this passage in isolation, this is one possible reading of Shoghi Effendi's words: it says that the Universal House of Justice will exercise the rights of the *government* of the super-state. But is that the most likely way to read the text? From what we have seen, it is clear that this would be contrary to the principles found in the Bahai scriptures, and contrary to the thought that Shoghi Effendi had in mind when, in the preceding paragraph, he referred to a letter of Abdu'l-Baha that says the House of Justice does *not* have political or judicial functions. It would also involve an unexplained contradiction because of the different memberships and electoral methods that are set out in the Bahai scriptures for the Universal House of Justice and the institutions of world government. Beyond this, however, I think that there are reasons in the text itself to believe that Shoghi Effendi did not intend any reference to the Universal House of Justice as a world government when he wrote this passage.

In the first sentence, the Bahai Faith attains the stage of becoming "the State Religion of an independent and Sovereign Power." What has changed in the second sentence? The Faith has become more widely accepted, and by a number of Sovereign States, and the Universal House of Justice has come into being as the supreme institution of a Bahai Commonwealth (Shoghi Effendi was writing in February 1929, before the Universal House of Justice existed).

Now if Shoghi Effendi was intending to say that the Bahai administrative institutions should become the governments of nations, the decisive change in the role of the Universal House of Justice would come when a National Spiritual

Assembly had become the government in *one* nation. But what is said is that the Bahai Faith will first become the *State Religion* of one power and then, as more countries become Bahai States, the Universal House of Justice will come to exercise some function that the superstate is obliged to grant or recognise. One *might* understand this to be the role of government, but it seems more logical, in the light of the progressive structure of the paragraph, to suppose that Shoghi Effendi expected us to understand that it would be the “State Religion.” The Bahai Faith becomes the state religion first of one country, then of more, and finally the Universal House of Justice has rights, duties, and responsibilities *in* the world superstate because it is the supreme organ of the Bahai Commonwealth. It is not the supreme institution of the commonwealth of nations.¹

This seems to imply that the Universal House of Justice is envisioned as an established religious institution at a global level, with a constitutional relationship to the separate institutions of the world government. The structure of the last sentence can therefore be clarified, along lines first suggested by Juan Cole on the Talisman9 discussion list:²

[.. as the Bahai Faith ... is embraced by the majority of the peoples of a number of the Sovereign States, the Universal House of Justice will attain the plenitude of its power and, as the supreme organ of the Bahai Commonwealth, it will exercise all the rights, the duties, and responsibilities that the world’s future superstate will be obliged to grant it].

This is consistent with Shoghi Effendi’s statement, in 1931, that the Bahais should “be on their guard lest the impression be given to the outside world that the Baha’is are political in their aims and pursuits or interfere in matters that pertain to the political activities of their respective governments.”³ A year later, in the letter ‘The Golden Age of the Cause of Baha’u’llah,’ Shoghi Effendi writes:

¹ See pages 235 and 310 above for Shoghi Effendi’s description of a world commonwealth of nations. Shoghi Effendi uses capitalised and uncapitalised pairs of terms, such as Commonwealth and commonwealth, Order and order, to underline the way that developments within the religious community parallel and feed into the simultaneous developments taking place in the world.

² On 31 January 2001. Archives are available (<http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jrcole/talisman.htm>).

³ 13 November 1931, postscript in the hand of Shoghi Effendi, in a letter addressed to an individual believer (*Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 2, page 420).

Theirs is not the purpose, while endeavoring to conduct and perfect the administrative affairs of their Faith, to violate, under any circumstances, the provisions of their country's constitution, much less to *allow* the machinery of their administration to supersede the government of their respective countries.¹

This is very strong: the “much less” construction seems to mean that allowing the Bahai administrative institutions to supersede national governments would be *worse than* a violation of the constitution (as indeed it would, for it would violate God's law as well). It certainly rules out the suggestion that, while the Bahai institutions might not be politically ambitious and are not seditious, they could accept temporal power if it were freely offered to them. As Abdu'l-Baha said:

Should they place in the arena the crown of the government of the whole world, and invite each one of us to accept it, undoubtedly we shall not condescend, and shall refuse to accept it.²

It does not seem unreasonable to assume that what Shoghi Effendi wrote concerning the machinery of the (Bahai) administration was intended to correct misunderstandings that had arisen from the passage in the letter, ‘The World Order of Baha'u'llah’ under discussion here. We must at any rate recognize that it is the same Shoghi Effendi writing both pieces, and read the first in the light of the later. Fatheazam's theocratic reading of this passage must then be rejected.

“The Baha'i theocracy, on the contrary ...”

In the internet discussions that have provided valuable feedback in the development of this thesis, following its first appearance as a conference paper in 1994, several people have brought up a section from a 1949 letter written on behalf of the Guardian:

What the Guardian was referring to was the Theocratic systems, such as the Catholic Church and the Caliphate, which are not divinely given as systems, but man-made and yet, having partly derived from the teachings of Christ and Muhammad are, in a sense, theocracies. The Baha'i theocracy, on the contrary, is both divinely ordained as a system and, of course, based on the teachings of the Prophet Himself.. Theophany is used in the sense of Dispensation...³

¹ *The World Order of Baha'u'llah* 66.

² *Tablets of the Divine Plan* 51.

³ *Directives from the Guardian* 78-9: the dating was provided by the Universal House
(continued...)

It is evident that the secretary is replying to a question, and is explaining a reference in a text by Shoghi Effendi himself, which will have to be located. We can also see that the definition of ‘theocracy’ here is ‘a system derived from the teachings of a prophet.’ It is not stated that it is a system of governing a country. While both the Catholic Church and the Caliphate have at times exercised the power of civil government, this was not the case when Shoghi Effendi was writing. The last of the several ‘caliphates’ that could be referred to is the caliphate claimed in the late Ottoman empire by the Sultan, according to which he would be the spiritual leader – not ruler – of the world’s Moslems. On the several occasions when Shoghi Effendi refers to the end of the Caliphate in his writings, he is referring to this spiritual caliphate. Its abolition, two years after the abolition of the Sultanate, was a renunciation of the idea of a pan-Islamic union that the Sultans had fostered. Thus the theocracies, including the Bahai theocracy, that the Guardian’s secretary is referring to here are systems of leading and guiding a religious community, they are not systems of government.

If we try to locate the earlier passage from Shoghi Effendi that the secretary is explaining, two possibilities present themselves. The earlier is in his 1934 letter, ‘The Dispensation of Baha’u’llah,’ a letter that is entirely devoted to explaining the principles underlying the Bahai Administrative Order, and in particular the relationship between the hereditary guardianship and the elected Houses of Justice. He says:

The Baha’i Commonwealth of the future, of which this vast Administrative Order is the sole framework, is, both in theory and practice, not only unique in the entire history of political institutions, but can find no parallel in the annals of any of the world’s recognized religious systems. No form of democratic government; no system of autocracy or of dictatorship, whether monarchical or republican; no intermediary scheme of a purely aristocratic order; nor even any of the recognized types of theocracy, whether it be the Hebrew Commonwealth, or the various Christian ecclesiastical organizations, or the Imamate or the Caliphate in Islam – none of these can be identified or be said to conform with the Administrative Order ... [which] ... incorporates within its structure certain elements which are to be found in each of the three recognized forms of secular government, without being in any sense a mere replica of any one of them ...¹

³(...continued)

of Justice in a letter to the author 27 April 1995.

¹ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha’u’llah* 152.

The letter continues in this vein for some time, comparing and contrasting the Bahai Administrative Order to democracy, autocracy, ecclesiastical government (with the examples of the Papacy and the Imamate), and aristocratic and hereditary government. It is not describing a system of governing a country or a world, but the system of “the Baha’i Commonwealth,” a commonwealth in the sense Gibbon refers to the Christian commonwealth, operating and growing within the pagan Roman Empire.¹ The passage refers repeatedly to ‘The Administrative Order’ and cannot be made to apply to the institutions of the world political order envisioned by Baha’u’llah and explained by Shoghi Effendi in *The Unfoldment of World Civilization*, which was quoted above. For instance, the Administrative Order, he says, is not purely democratic, in that “the members of the Universal House of Justice” are not “responsible to those whom they represent,”² whereas Abdu’l-Baha said that elected members of national governments should be answerable to the people, and that the leaders who conclude the international pact should “obtain for it the sanction of all the human race” (see page 209 above). The Administrative Order also incorporates an hereditary element, which is absent in Shoghi Effendi’s description of the world political order. The Bahai Commonwealth and the Administrative Order are said to be unlike any previous or existing system, whereas Shoghi Effendi goes to some length, in *The Promised Day is Come*, to demonstrate that in its political teachings, the Bahai Faith endorses constitutional monarchy combined with democracy – a modern, but existing, system. He says there that Baha’u’llah’s “teachings embody no principle that can, in any way, be construed as a repudiation, or even a disparagement, however veiled, of the institution of kingship” – an institution that is entirely absent in the Bahai Administrative Order.³

The second possible reference is to Shoghi Effendi’s review of the first century of the Babi and Bahai history, *God Passes By* (1944). In it he says that:

The Administrative Order ... is ... unique in the annals of the world’s religious systems. ...the Administrative Order ... Nor is the principle

¹ *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chapter 15 section V (www.ccel.org/g/gibbon/decline/home.html)

² *The World Order of Baha’u’llah* 153.

³ *The Promised Day is Come* 70. Shoghi Effendi says that the writings of Baha’u’llah contain “unnumbered passages in which ... the principle of kingship is eulogized, the rank and conduct of just and fair-minded kings is extolled, the rise of monarchs ruling with justice and even professing His Faith, is envisaged, and the solemn duty to arise and ensure the triumph of Baha’i sovereigns is inculcated,” and proceeds to give extracts from these writings (70-73), most of which have been discussed above.

governing its operation similar to that which underlies any system, whether theocratic or otherwise, which the minds of men have devised for the government of human institutions. Neither in theory nor in practice can the Administrative Order of the Faith of Baha'u'llah be said to conform to any type of democratic government, to any system of autocracy, to any purely aristocratic order, or to any of the various theocracies, whether Jewish, Christian or Islamic which mankind has witnessed in the past.¹

This echoes his earlier statement, more briefly. These are the only two instances in which Shoghi Effendi uses the word theocracy in connection with the Bahai Faith, and both refer to its internal organisation as a religious community, not to its theories about the organisation of the state. Since the secretary also answers a question about the term 'theophany,' and this term is used by Shoghi Effendi in another of the letters published in *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*,² it seems likely that the original question put to the secretary concerned the longer discussion of the Administrative Order in 'The Dispensation of Baha'u'llah.' The answer must be taken also to apply only to the Bahai Administrative Order, which is distinct from the world order.

This administrative order can never be a government because the same author had written, just two years earlier, in words that deserve to be repeated, recited and indelibly memorised, that the Bahais must never "allow the machinery of their administration to supersede the government of their respective countries."³

It is hardly surprising that the Administrative order is described as a theocracy. It is after all the order of a religious community. If theocracy is defined as rule by the institutions of the religious order, any self-governing religious order is by definition theocratic. The Methodists and Quakers are internally theocratic in this sense, since they hope and have faith that the church, as part of the body of Christ, will be guided (through its elected system) by God. This is not the same as 'theocracy' in the political sense, which is the kind of government that was attempted in Iran after 1979, a government in which the persons and institutions of the religious order either control or replace the organs of the civil government. In this, the usual sense of 'theocracy,' the Bahai teachings are decidedly anti-theocratic, since they forbid and condemn this usurpation of the power that God has granted to the Kings and Rulers.

¹ *God Passes By* 326-327.

² Page 97.

³ *The World Order of Baha'u'llah* 66.

Conclusions

Although we have dealt with only a small part of the Bahai Writings, the reader who has accompanied me thus far must feel that the case is somewhat over-argued. Would it not be sufficient simply to point to the original political theology in the *Kitab-e Iqan*, and say that this continues essentially unchanged in the later writings of Baha'u'llah, Abdu'l-Baha, and Shoghi Effendi? Are the Bahai teachings on church and state not crystal clear, very simple to understand, and repeated throughout the Bahai writings? The justification for the inevitably repetitious treatment above will be found in the chapter 'Church and State in the secondary literature,' where we will see how the clear and simple has escaped the understanding of dozens of authors, and generations of Bahais. I have used a sledge-hammer to crack a chestnut because it is a very robust old chestnut.

The Bahai teachings on the separation of church and state are one integral part of a Bahai political theology. To conclude we should give a brief list of key themes in Bahai political teachings in general, by way of contextualisation:

- The Day of God has come and the Kingdom of God is being built, but is embodied in two distinct sovereignties.
- God has delegated one of these sovereignties to human governments, which are therefore expected to manifest the qualities of God, particularly by dealing justly, protecting the weak and punishing wrong-doers.
- Religious and state institutions are distinct organs in the body politic. Religious institutions should not be involved in civil administration or policy matters. The separation of church and state is a sign of human maturity and is irrevocable.
- Religion should be 'established': should have a constitutional role and at least moral support, without necessarily implying the exclusive establishment of any one confession. Governments may not interfere with freedom of conscience. Religious institutions have a role in sustaining altruism and deserve support from the state for that reason. Religious institutions have a duty to call the state to meet ethical standards, and to advise it on the implications of religious teachings if asked.
- The entanglement of religious leaders with political leaders corrupts religion, leaves the people with no-where else to turn, and ultimately destroys civilization.
- Governments should be consultative, constrained by law and based on reason. Monarchy should be preserved, but in a constitutional form, along with a separated legislature, executive and judiciary. Consultative and broadly participatory governance is also endorsed for the administration of the Bahai

community, in which doctrinal, administrative and liturgical institutions are separated.

- Governments are responsible for providing security. They should work together to reduce armaments and ensure international security.
- Faithful citizens are required, as a religious duty, to support their governments and to participate in legitimate ways in political processes.
- Governments and people should respect learning and the learned, who function as advisors and admonishers to government. They in turn are obliged to practice what they preach.

What is now required is a theo-logical foundation for these, to construct a theology of the body politic. Practical political reasoning may be sufficient to persuade states that religious organisations functioning within civil society are generally helpful, but religious communities must have a reasoning based on the nature of God's self if the relationship is to go beyond tactical co-operation.



*Now concerning nature,
it is but the essential properties and the necessary relations
inherent in the realities of things. And though these infinite
realities are diverse in their character yet they are in the
utmost harmony and closely connected together.*

Abdu'l-Baha, *Tablet to August Forel* 20





*But for man, who, on My earth, would remember Me, and
how could My attributes and My names be revealed?*

Baha'u'llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 49



*When, however, thou dost contemplate the innermost essence
of all things, and the individuality of each, thou wilt behold
the signs of thy Lord's mercy in every created thing, and see
the spreading rays of His Names and Attributes throughout
all the realm of being, with evidences which none will deny
save the froward and the unaware.*

*Then wilt thou observe that the universe is a scroll that
discloseth His hidden secrets, which are preserved in the
well-guarded Tablet.*

*And not an atom of all the atoms in existence, not a creature
from amongst the creatures but speaketh His praise and
telleth of His attributes and names, revealeth the glory of His
might and guideth to His oneness and His mercy: and none
will gainsay this who hath ears to hear, eyes to see, and a
mind that is sound.*

Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha 41



The Theology of the State

Four landmarks

From the chronological survey of the Bahai scriptures in the previous chapter, four principles emerge that may serve as our north, south, east and west in a more thematic and theological exploration of the issue of church and state. I have associated these with four points with short and memorable texts:

+ The 'kingdom' of religion is a kingdom of the heart. Baha'u'llah says:

The one true God, exalted be His glory, hath ever regarded, and will continue to regard, the hearts of men as His own, His exclusive possession. All else, whether pertaining to land or sea, whether riches or glory, He hath bequeathed unto the Kings and rulers of the earth.¹

+ The civil state is legitimately associated with force and coercion. Baha'u'llah continues:

The instruments which are essential to the immediate protection, the security and assurance of the human race have been entrusted to the hands, and lie in the grasp, of the governors of human society. This is the wish of God and His decree....

+ The state and religion are cooperative organs in society. Abdu'l-Baha writes:

This House of Justice enacteth the laws and the government enforceth them. The legislative body must reinforce the executive, the executive must aid and assist the legislative body so that through the close union and harmony of these two forces, the foundation of fairness and justice may become firm and strong ...²

+ The institutions of the Bahai community have no government function. Shoghi Effendi writes:

Theirs is not the purpose, . . . to violate, under any circumstances, the provisions of their country's constitution, much less to allow the machinery of their administration to supersede the government of their respective countries.³

¹ The Lawh-e Ashraf, in *Gleanings*, CII, 206-7.

² *Will and Testament* 14-15.

³ *The World Order of Baha'u'llah* 66.

The Reason of the matter

My selection of these cardinal points is an interpretation that is based not only on my reading in the Bahai scriptures on this question, but also on my whole understanding of the Bahai teachings. Wider questions are involved. What do we mean by ‘unity,’ as Bahais? The passage in the *Will and Testament of Abdu’l-Baha* refers to a ‘close union’ between the ‘legislative’ body (the House of Justice, see pages 206, 213 above) and the executive (the civil government). But if we say ‘the union of church and state’ in a Bahai context this may mean something rather different than what the same words would mean in a western, or Islamic, or Jewish, context. Equally, the *separation* of church and state in the World Order of Baha’u’llah may mean something rather new.

So in justifying my selection and interpretation, I have to start not with the government and the house of justice, but with the Bahai administrative order which is the “pattern of the New World Order”¹ and so defines the terms. Western religious traditions have not integrated their theologies of the state and their ecclesiologies, but in the Bahai case the relationship between the body of the faithful and the body politic is explicit: the pattern underlying the Bahai Faith as a religious organisation (‘The Bahai Administrative Order’) is also the pattern for the Kingdom on earth (the ‘World Order’). Shoghi Effendi writes:

The second [Bahai] century is destined to witness ... the first stirrings of that World Order, of which the present Administrative System is at once the precursor, the nucleus and pattern – an Order which, as it slowly crystallises and radiates its benign influence over the entire planet, will proclaim at once the coming of age of the whole human race, as well as the maturity of the Faith itself, the progenitor of that Order.²

The administrative order is a unified system, but it has an *organic* unity, characterised by division into separate organs, each with its own intrinsic nature and mode of operation, and each organ requiring the others. If we grasp how fundamental this pattern of organic differentiation is to the Bahai structure, and how it is based on Bahai teachings about the attributes of God and the metaphysical nature of the creation, questions about the particular constitutional relationship that may be desirable in a particular nation at a particular time, and about the moral relationships between being religious and being a good citizen, will fall into place.

¹ *The World Order of Baha’u’llah* 144.

² *Messages to America* 96-97.

The meaning of organic unity

The fourth of my cardinal points was Shoghi Effendi's statement that the machinery of Bahai administration is not, under any circumstances, to supersede national governments. This necessarily means two distinct systems of government: the Bahai administration and the civil (but not necessarily secular) administration, functioning at local, national, and international levels. So we need a model of the relationship between these systems, which I propose to derive from the relationships between institutions *within* the Bahai administrative order.

When we look at the unity of the Bahai administrative order we find that it is, paradoxically, characterised by divisions. There is a consistent pattern in which institutions are differentiated from a partner institution that operates on a radically different basis. I will go further and say they operate on metaphysically different bases, because they embody different *ideas*.

The most obvious of these differentiations is between the twin institutions of the Guardianship and the House of Justice, the one hereditary, the other elected, the one focussed on one individual who holds the office for life, the other an institutional form with the minimum possible emphasis on the individuals who, for their elected terms, comprise it. The one devoted to the interpretation of the sacred texts, the other to legislation for matters not contained in those texts. The one making interpretations that become part of the sacred text and may never be altered, the other applying principle to the needs of the time, and revoking its own legislation as required. Each requires the other, "Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other."¹

I would suggest that these differences are not just incidental peculiarities, but rather evidence that there is in each institution something like a hidden genetic code, what Plato would have called its *idea*,² which determines its own nature and development.

These differences between the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice are reflected systematically in the differences between the elected and appointed institutions: each arm developing according to its own *idea*. If we form a picture of the inner nature that drives the operation of each kind of organ, then the details of their operations and of how they should work together should pose no difficulties. What is required to 'understand' at this level is not primarily a knowledge of the relevant texts, their contexts, the original languages and so forth, but much an act of integrative or synthetic imagination, a willingness to

¹ *The World Order of Baha'u'llah* 147-150.

² The term in the Bahai writings in English is usually 'essence' or 'innermost essence' etc. One term that Abdu'l-Baha uses is the 'individuality' of things (*Selections*, 147).

exercise the inductive capacity with which everyone, scholar or not, is gifted. In a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the USA, the Universal House of Justice refers to the need for the NSA “to obtain an integrated understanding of the Counsellors’ responsibilities and sphere of action in relation to your own,” and they provide an outline of the different operational principles of the two kinds of institution.¹ In this letter, the two organs are not said to be separated according to different spheres of operations, they “share in the functions of propagation and protection.” Rather they are differentiated by different manners of operation, derived from their distinct charters in the writings of Baha’u’llah. The same may be said of the religious and political orders: they have a common function in the advancement of human well-being, but have entirely different means at their disposal to achieve it.

There is a parallel differentiation between the Bahai funds and the Huququ’llah, the one based on the voluntary principle, the other an obligation, the one given to and administered by elected institutions, the other in the hands of appointed trustees. The money of the funds flows from the bottom up, with the donors participating in the institutions that decide on the use of the funds, or even specifying the use to which their own donation is to be put, while the Huququ’llah is passed directly to the top and disbursed downwards. One could say that the idea animating the institution of the fund is ‘participation,’ while the idea of the Huququ’llah is ‘surrender.’ And that is why, when giving to the fund, the right of the individual to specify the use to which a donation is put, and the duty of the institutions to respect that wish, are fundamental principles,² but when giving donations to the custodian of the Huququ’llah that right and principle do not exist.

Another differentiation can be found between the Feast and the Local Spiritual Assembly: the one comprising all believers who can be there on the day, the other with a fixed membership. The one acting as an accumulator for the power that resides in the individual, the other exercising institutional authority over its expression. The first being most valuable, often, for the minority or purely personal opinions expressed there, the latter functioning on the principle of majority vote.

One could go on: the national convention and the National Spiritual Assembly, the international convention and the Universal House of Justice, the local or regional convention and the delegate to the national convention, and so on. The Administrative Order is characterised by the divine twoness of things.

¹ Letter dated May 19, 1994.

² Shoghi Effendi, *Baha’i Administration* 53.

The Bahai administrative order itself functions in partnership with another institution, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar or House of Worship. The term is multivalent, like 'church': it may be literally a building, but also refers to meetings for worship and a community bound together by joint worship. If the administrative order represents the organisation of the religion, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar represents religion as worship. The one functions with defined memberships and often closed meetings, the other holds its doors open to people of all creeds and none. The administrative order has fixed procedures: memberships, elections, quorums, officers, because it exercises authority and it must be possible to distinguish legitimate from illegitimate decisions. The Mashriqu'l-Adhkar however avoids anything that might give the appearance of rigidity, it is a channel for the Holy Spirit.¹

On the basis of these differentiations I think we can venture a definition of 'organic unity,' the structural principle underlying the Bahai administrative order, as a unity based on a differentiation into pairs of distinct organs, each of which needs the other in order to fully express its own nature, and each developing freely according to its own distinctive principle. It is interesting to ask why we

¹ Baha'u'llah's vision of world order has two sides, the political and religious. The religious side of this order will, God willing, be addressed in a separate volume, but one theme should be previewed here. Baha'u'llah's religion is quite unique, because it is itself a harmony of two parts, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar and Hazíratu'l-Quds, the latter standing for the Administrative Order which itself has two arms, the Guardianship and the House of Justice. In every other religion I know of, the ideal is that the "church" is one institution, combining the functions of worship, doctrine and administration, but in Baha'u'llah's vision the three are separated. This has numerous advantages, one being that the exclusive pole and the inclusive pole of the religion, which usually pull a religious organisation in two different directions, are separated. Because the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar serves only the purpose of worship, it is possible for it to be open for all peoples and all religions, without regard to doctrinal views or administrative standing. The membership of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar community and the Bahai administrative community need not be the same.

Clearly there is a parallel between the openness of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar and the idea of a world federal government representing all the peoples of the world, and of national governments that deal equally with people of all religions. So the way the religious and political order fit together in Baha'u'llah's vision is intimately connected with the way his house of worship and house of justice fit together within his religious order. His House of Worship can serve as the bride for the 'groom' of a world order that is of and for everyone, in a way that no exclusive religious body, such as the House of Justice, could.

seem always to find pairs of institutions, and never triplets or foursomes. Abdu'l-Baha notes the same pattern recurring even in subatomic physics:

...the union of created things doth ever yield most laudable results. From the pairing of even the smallest particles in the world of being are the grace and bounty of God made manifest; and the higher the degree, the more momentous is the union. "Glory be to Him Who hath created all the pairs, of such things as earth produceth, and out of men themselves, and of things beyond their ken."¹

The quotation Abdu'l-Baha uses here is from the Quran, 36:36. In Islamic doctrine all things have their pair, or counterpart, or complement: God alone is One.

Dhikrul'llah Khadem, in *The Vision of Shoghi Effendi* recalls;

I remember the time I was in the presence of Shoghi Effendi when he spoke about the significance of twin things in the Cause. In fact, he sent a cable about this to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the British Isles. ... After explaining these things, he paused and looked at me deeply and said, "In the Cause of God everything is twin."

The cable that he refers to must be this:

Greatly enhanced international endowments in Holy Land in twin cities of Acre and Haifa, now include twin Holy Shrines situated on plain of Acre and slope of Mount Carmel; twin Mansions of Bahji and Mazra'ih, twin historic Houses inhabited by Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha; twin International Archives adjoining the Bab's Sepulcher and the resting-place of the Greatest Holy Leaf; twin Pilgrim Houses, constructed for Oriental and Occidental pilgrims; twin Gardens of Ridvan and Firdaws, associated with the memory of the Author of the Baha'i Dispensation.²

Another passage that comes to mind is in Abdu'l-Baha's 'marriage tablet':

... that from the union of these two seas of love a wave of tenderness may surge and cast the pearls of pure and goodly issue on the shore of life. "He hath let loose the two seas, that they meet each other: Between them

¹ *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha* 119.

² Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Baha'i World* 8.

is a barrier which they overpass not. Which then of the bounties of your Lord will ye deny? From each He bringeth up greater and lesser pearls.”¹

This suggests that the reason for the consistent pattern of two-ness that we find in the Bahai pattern of order may have some relation to love. We do not find threesomes or foursomes because love can be most perfectly expressed between two. The two must never become one – crossing the barrier between them and losing their individual identities – although, in the nature of love, they forever long to do so. In the course of the gradual historical development of distinct church and state institutions, many theoretical and practical justifications for their separation have been proposed. But so far as I know, nobody has previously suggested that one reason for keeping the identities of church and state distinct is so that they can love one-another.

Another similarity between the church-state relationship and the marriage relationship is that both are eternal laws. Abdu’l-Baha writes:

Regarding the question of matrimony: Know thou that the command of marriage is eternal. It will never be changed nor altered. This is divine creation and there is not the slightest possibility that change or alteration affect this divine creation (marriage).²

This contrasts with the general principle in Bahai theology, that each successive Manifestation of God can and does change the laws of religion in accordance with the needs of the time, and may forbid what has been allowed, or allow what has been forbidden. We have seen above (page 170, 188 etc) that Baha’u’llah considers the pattern of two sovereignties, temporal and spiritual, to have been ordained “From the beginning that hath no beginning,” and that this principle (or perhaps the ban on ‘conflict and contention’ against it), “is divinely preserved from annulment.” In paragraph 82 of the *Kitab-e Aqdas* (quoted on page 175 above) Baha’u’llah writes that the monarchs are the emblems of God’s sovereignty “for all time.” Likewise, in Abdu’l-Baha’s *Sermon on the Art of Governance*, the two ‘powers’ the spiritual principle and the principle of governance, appear as cosmic principles underlying the order of the universe, rather than as social principles taught by Baha’u’llah for this age.

It would appear that there are some other teachings that are so fundamental as to be beyond the general law of change: God’s relationship to humanity in the greater Covenant, which promises that guidance will never be withdrawn³ and

¹ *Baha’i Prayers* (US edition) 106. The citation is from the Quran, Surah 55:19-22.

² *Tablets of Abdu’l-Baha Abbas* 474.

³ *Gleanings*, XXVII 68-69.

will ultimately be effective;¹ the suffering of devoted believers;² the ban on coercion in religion;³ marriage; and the separation of church and state. But this takes us beyond the metaphor of organic unity, and into higher and speculative realms. Let us return for the moment to organic unity, defined as a unity based on differentiation into pairs of distinct organs, each of which needs the other in order to fully express its own nature, and each developing freely according to its own distinctive principle.

Such an organic unity, I would suggest, characterises the relationship between the religious and civil organs of Baha'u'llah's ideal world order. And might it not apply, in a truly integrated society, to the relations between the religious, political, commercial, scientific, and cultural enterprises, and the world of nature? In short, could it not provide a theology of the postmodern society? The coordination of organs within an organic structure is the necessary result of the harmony between their various natures: it is not imposed by one organ upon the others. The differences between the organs, their specialisation by nature and function, create their need for one another and thus the possibility of unity. Differences, it must be stressed, are not antagonistic to unity. Difference is not to be transcended, ignored, subsumed or otherwise kept within bounds: in an organic social model the essential differences are constitutive of the unity. Baha'u'llah explicitly applies the organic metaphor to the whole:

Regard ye the world as a man's body, which is afflicted with divers ailments, and the recovery of which dependeth upon the harmonizing of all of its component elements.⁴

Each of the principle organs of the social body is itself, necessarily, internally differentiated. Each is vital to the whole. None, of course, can take the place of another. While the religious order has at its heart the things that are of existential value for humans, it cannot, and cannot wish to, absorb to itself the functions or intrinsic principles properly belonging to the other organs – just as the brain cannot become a circulatory system, or instruct the liver to grow according to any pattern other than that 'idea' of a liver that is coded into every cell. It would be unhealthy even to try. As Abdu'l-Baha says:

¹ *Gleanings*, CXIII 224.

² *Gleanings*, LXVI 129. People of all religions would like to think of this as a characteristic of the early years of the religion, when it is opposed from without. However experience shows that human groups, not excluding the Bahai community, have a terrifying capacity for finding internal opponents, and being cruel to them.

³ *Selections from the Writings of the Bab* 77.

⁴ Lawh-e Napoleon III, in *Proclamation of Baha'u'llah* 22.

Glory be unto Him who hath produced growth in the adjoining fields of various natures! Glory be unto Him who irrigated them with the same waters gushing forth from that Fountain!¹

A small diversion is in order here, because the Bahai Faith has become known for its slogan ‘unity in diversity,’ applied for instance to race relations. Unity in diversity is a unity based on underlying sameness, and enriched by superficial difference. There is no difference in essence (in the neoplatonic sense) between black and white, male and female, Jew and Christian. But there *are* differences of essence between legitimated social institutions, for instance between the House of Justice and House of Worship, between Church and State, between Faith and Science. Organic unity and unity-in-diversity together comprise the essential teaching of the Bahai Faith. But it is the former that interests us here, as the pattern underlying the Bahai community’s internal order and Baha’u’llah’s teaching on church-state relationships. Organic unity is harmony with an Other, based on underlying differences. A monist social model – whether it be of an absolutist state or a theocratic church – accepts no other and is therefore loveless. Unicity is proper to God alone, in a Godhead that we may contemplate but not understand. Twoness, and the endless permutations of ‘the many,’ are proper to creation. Attempts to create monist social structures are therefore implicitly idolatrous. As a poet has said:

*Singleness [wahidiyyat] belongs to the highest realm
And unity [wahdaniyyat] to the world below.*²

Applying the model of organic unity, and the divine decree of multiplicity, to social structures implies breaking the monopoly of religious institutions on the management of the sacred. Within the Bahai community’s model of itself, no one institution can claim to be the channel of the spirit. Each of the organs has its own legitimisation directly from scripture. And the microcosm of religious community is reflected in the social macrocosm: the art of government, the creative arts, and science do not have to shelter under the religious umbrella to be graced: each has already been granted the rank and dignity of a divine institution, directly from the source.

This is already sufficient to show that the social structure of the Kingdom of God is not incompatible with that of a decentralised post-modern society. We have a theological justification of ‘the separation,’ but have not yet justified ‘of church and state.’ Do words such as government, science and religion represent

¹ *Tablets of Abdu’l-Baha Abbas* 398.

² Jamali-yi Dihlawi, *Mir’at al-Ma’ani* 18:5.

arbitrary distinctions? If we grant that distinct and autonomous social organs are a prerequisite to love and thus to the Kingdom of God, and that attempts to create the monist society are idolatrous, is there a necessary reason why one of the multiple organs should be civil government? This is what must be demonstrated before we can speak of ‘a theology of the state.’

Three lines of reasoning present themselves. The first is historical. Shoghi Effendi has said that the “formal and complete separation of Church and State” will be part of the process of regeneration in Persia,¹ and history gives us some reason to think that some separation may be essential for the health of any society. It may even be unavoidable. Those societies in which the religious institutions have tried to absorb the whole of the legislative, executive, and judicial functions have not been successful, and all have developed *de jure* or *de facto* civil institutions.

We also see that progress from primitive social organisations at the level of the kinship group through successive levels of urbanisation and nation-building has been accompanied by a progressive differentiation of social functions: the priest, the warrior, the king, the blacksmith, and the herbalist leading to the marvellously differentiated interdependent structures of a nation. In the development of a foetus in the womb, we see the progressive differentiation of distinct organs from what is originally an undifferentiated cluster of cells. The organism is mature when the component organs are fully differentiated, have developed their own internal structures according to the genetic code for each, and all are functioning correctly together. We do not see a stage of greater maturity at which distinct organs become undifferentiated, and we see in history that social organs, once developed, have a strong persistence. The process is not entirely irreversible, since organisms die and civilisations, in their declining phase, may revert to less elaborated structures. Yet it does appear possible to identify an underlying drive in evolution, ontogeny and social development, towards structures consisting of greater numbers of more clearly differentiated, and therefore interrelating, subsystems. There is no apparent reason to suppose that the unity that is the goal of the Bahai movement should require the reversal of this trend.

The second is the argument from scripture. Some of the texts from Bahai scripture have already been cited, and need not be repeated. We have also seen that Baha’u’llah, in *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, uses New Testament and Quranic texts to prove the same thesis.²

¹ *Unfolding Destiny* 76; *Baha’i Administration* 149.

² Quran 4:62 and Mark 12:17, cited in *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 89-90.

The third argument will seek to go beyond ‘it is written’ to an understanding of the reasons why it is written, and to argue the point so far as possible in a common language. To do so will require a little metaphysics.

The Kingdom of Names

Baha’u’llah refers to kings and rulers as “the manifestations of the power, the grandeur and the majesty of God”; “the symbols of the power of God”; “the mirrors of the gracious and almighty name of God”; “the emblems of His sovereignty”; or of “His own power”; “the manifestations of affluence and power and the daysprings of sovereignty and glory”; God’s “shadow amongst men, and the sign of His power unto all that dwell on earth”; “the manifestations of power and the dawning-places of might.”¹ This is a very ‘high’ theology of the state. It should however be distinguished from ‘divine right’ claims, i.e., that the king is personally appointed to authority by God, by virtue of birth. It also differs from the Pauline conception (Romans 13:1-8), in which the ruler is “the servant of God to execute His wrath.” In both cases particular rulers are regarded as personally comprising a necessary part of the divine ordinance for their time, but that divine will is arbitrary in the sense that it reflects God’s provision for a fallen world rather than reflecting the Kingdom of God and God’s self. In the Pauline case, our temporary subjugation to ‘the higher powers’ is a sign of the absence of God rather than His presence. What Baha’u’llah seems to be saying, through these titles, is that the institutions that manifest sovereignty must necessarily exist, because that is in accordance with the Kingdom of Names.

In the titles of kings and rulers that Baha’u’llah uses, the first part of each title refers to them being manifestations, symbols, mirrors, emblems, daysprings or signs, while the second part of the title refers to attributes of God: the power, grandeur, majesty, affluence, power, sovereignty, glory, dominion, authority, might and riches of God. This theology of the state is part of a comprehensive cosmology with affinities to Islamic neoplatonic thought. In this cosmology the created world – visible and invisible – is saturated with the names (or attributes) of God. Every existing thing exists because it manifests attributes of God, and it

¹ Sources (in order): *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 89; Lawh-e Maqsd, in *Gleanings*, CXII 218; *ibid*, in *Proclamation of Baha’u’llah* 115; *Kitab-e Aqdas* paragraph 82; Letter to Nabil-e A’zam, in *Gleanings*, CXXXIX 304; *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 30; Letter to Nasir ad-Din Shah, in *Proclamation of Baha’u’llah* 58; Lawh-e Dunya, in *Tablets of Baha’u’llah* 90. Other titles are found in passages already cited, in *Kalimat-e Firdawsiyyih (Tablets of Baha’u’llah* 65), the *Lawh-e Ishraqat (Tablets of Baha’u’llah* 130, 126) and so on.

exists to manifest those attributes as perfectly as its own station permits.¹ The human person has the unique potential to manifest all of these attributes, and also to perceive these realities or essences by the power of the mind and to understand the universal principles that flow from the relations between them.²

The attributes or names of God emanate from the unknowable Godhead through successive levels of realisation in much the same way as ideas, in platonic philosophy, exist first in the world of forms and are then realised, to a greater or lesser degree, in the material world. For instance, the attribute of ‘sovereignty’ is expressed in the angelic realms in the form of beings whom Baha’u’llah refers to as the “monarchs of the realms of the Kingdom.”³ At another level, the ‘Manifestations of God’ (the founders of religions) embody this attribute, as does human government, and archtypically monarchs.⁴ But as we have seen in the discussion of the *Kitab-e Iqan*, the sovereignty of religious leaders, including the Messiah, operates in a different dimension to that of human governments: the latter is not simply a diminished or delegated version of the former. Sovereignty is reflected in yet another way in the Bahai administrative institutions, because their authority is derived from the Writings of Baha’u’llah and Abdu’l-Baha, and in yet another way in the sovereignty of any individual who ‘knows with his own knowledge,’ who has made an epistemological declaration of independence.⁵ Thus a single attribute, shining as it were from the Godhead through the worlds of God, is refracted from the diverse realities in various shapes and colours in which we can still recognise an original resemblance. Conversely, human beings can respond to the sovereignty of God in all these forms in appropriate ways: by adoring the Godhead, by recognising and following the Manifestation of God, by obeying their governments and fulfilling the duties of good citizenship, by respecting the sanctity of conscience. While the one attribute can be recognised in all these forms, the responses to it must differ: it would be equally improper to respond to an encounter with the Messiah by calling for a vote, or to respond to an earthly government with adoration. This process of emanation is not a question of successive dilution as one moves ‘further’ from the Godhead, but rather of differing manifestations of

¹ See for example Baha’u’llah, ‘Commentary on a verse by Sa’adi,’ in *Gleanings*, XCIII 94.

² See for example Baha’u’llah, untitled work (Bi-ism-e mahbub-e ‘alamiyan) in *Gleanings* LXXXIV 166; Abdu’l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions* 208-209; *Selections from the Writings of Abdu’l-Baha* 61-62, 157.

³ *Proclamation of Baha’u’llah* 29-30, see also *Gleanings* 212.

⁴ Baha’u’llah, Lawh-e Bisharat, *Tablets of Baha’u’llah* 28.

⁵ See Baha’u’llah, *Hidden Words*, Arabic 2; *Gleanings* LXXV, etc.

the attributes of God in differing materials. The responses required therefore differ in kind, and not just in degree.

While this metaphysics has much in common with neo-platonic philosophies, six important characteristics should be noted. In the first place, emanation in this scheme is the free act of a God who desires to be known, rather than an involuntary process. In the second place, platonic thought has tended to consider the unique qualities of things as unimportant, whereas in this scheme both the 'essence' and the individuality of things are signs of God.¹ Thirdly, the 'matter' or raw material to which the ideas attach is not an undifferentiated potential, it possesses its own attributes, which interact with essences to produce the individualities of things: the manifestations of 'sovereignty,' for instance, properly vary according to the national cultures in which sovereignty is manifest. Fourthly, platonism and the classical world-view in general is permeated by a pattern of decline over time, such that any change tends to be interpreted as a further deviation from the original ideal. In the Bahai cosmology, since God is always 'the Creator,' this name of God must always be expressed in a continual process of creation. Supposing that the divine creativity involves not just replication but also the generation of new ideas, the universe is not in decline from an ideal past: it is an evolving ecosystem, progressing towards perfection and increasing diversity. The progressive perfection and differentiation achieved in human history is one expression of the process of emanation. Fifth, since the drive of creation is God's impulse to self-expression, and matter is the final locus for this expression, matter is not dualistically opposed to spirit. The expression of the names of God in the material is the teleological endpoint rather than the most distant and attenuated instance of emanation. Finally, neoplatonic philosophers are free to propose anything as an 'idea,' which can be dangerous, because it can be theorised that there are distinct essences or ideas animating one race, one culture or differentiating men from women. Religious neoplatonic language is less flexible, since not every concept is an essence. Essences are attributes of God, and the words that we are licensed to use in relation to God are derived from revelation. Since there is no scriptural warrant for 'God the American,' 'God the male' or 'God the Bahai,' there are no grounds for theories of manifest destiny for any society, or for institutional distinctions by race, sex or religion within a society.

Another point follows from the observation that the expression of the names of God in the material is a teleological endpoint. A doctrine of the state based on attribute theology implies political activism under all circumstance, since the fullest realization of the attribute is desirable. The doctrine of the divine right of

¹ *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha* 41.

kings on the contrary entails support for the just King, but a degree of quietism in opposition to injustice, since the ruler is believed to be appointed by God and we should not oppose what God permits. The difference is that attribute theology implies a process and teleology, and refers to the institution and not to the person who holds the office. The ‘person’ (human or divine) is the mysterious substratum to which the attributes adhere.

Now it will be recalled that paragraph 83 in the *Kitab-e Aqdas* that repudiates any claim to temporal rule and claims instead “the hearts of men” continues “To this testifieth the Kingdom of Names, could ye but comprehend it.” (See page 175 above). The question arises, why should Baha’u’llah refer to this metaphysical scheme to justify the separation of the spheres of civil government and of religion in the central text of his faith? So far as I know, he does not provide any direct answer, so I pass here from the exegetical role of the theologian to the creative – or speculative – role. In doing so I am encouraged by the epistemological optimism of the Bahai Faith. While it is a religion of revelation, this is a revelation that does not demand unthinking acceptance, but rather leads us as students to develop our own capacity to perceive realities and understand the relationships between them. The decrees of revelation – of which the separation of church and state is one – are not simply to be accepted as the arbitrary will of the prophet:

Briefly, the supreme Manifestations of God are aware of the reality of the mysteries of beings. Therefore, They establish laws which are suitable and adapted to the state of the world of man, for religion is the essential connection which proceeds from the realities of things ... ¹

The first step in a speculative theology of the state is to propose that, since human individuals can manifest attributes of God such as generosity, creativity, knowledge and sovereignty, human acts can also do so, for a reality that does not

¹ Abdu’l-Baha, in *Some Answered Questions* 158-159. It is in this sense that the Bahai Faith is said to be ‘scientific in nature,’ for science is conceptualized as the study of nature (including human nature) and nature “is but the essential properties and the necessary relations inherent in the realities of things” (Abdu’l-Baha, *Tablet to August Forel* 20). The explanatory power of science, in this model, derives from an understanding of these necessary relations. For instance, from the relationship between pressure and the number, speed and mass of gaseous molecules, the behaviour of a gas can be predicted. It should be noted that this is a theological conceptualization of what science is doing. Religion cannot impose this on science as a self-conceptualisation, just as science cannot expect its scientific models of religion to also function as religious self-understandings.

drive towards expression is no reality at all.¹ If human acts manifest the attributes of God, so do human projects and the social organs that embody them. Charity reflects the name of God ‘the Giver,’ as Baha’u’llah says: “To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues.”² Those who discover and apply useful technologies, according to Baha’u’llah, are “the exponents of His Name ‘the Fashioner’ amidst mankind” and should be respected.³ Similarly the arts reflect ‘the Creator,’ scientific research reflects ‘questions’ (which in Bahai theology is an attribute of God), systematic knowledge reflects ‘the All-knowing,’⁴ and the civil state reflects the sovereignty of God the King. “Know thou of a certainty that the Revelation of every other Name is accompanied by a similar manifestation of Divine power.”⁵ This provides the theo-logical grounding for the model of the organic unity of social structures that was proposed above.

The second step in building a theological justification of the existence of the state is to propose that *the names and attributes of God are ontologically distinct*. According to the apophatic theology common to all the Western religious traditions, the Godhead is unknowable and indescribable. The names that are attributed to God are applied only by God’s permission, and in the sense of the double negative: ‘God the forgiving’ is a shorthand for ‘God’s self-revelation in history permits us to say that our God is not an unforgiving God.’ But the story does not stop with what we cannot know. We can both know and manifest attributes such as goodness, mercy and sovereignty: the realities or essences of things which are also the names of God. These attributes are not themselves the godhead, being created and multiple. “Were I to venture to extol Thine attributes, I would be forced to admit that these attributes are Thine own creation, and lie within Thy grasp,” says Baha’u’llah.⁶ He then draws the logical conclusion that the speech of God is also created, endorsing a mu‘tazalite theology. If the attributes are created, there must be real distinctions between them, or God would have created Godself (who, being the Creator, would then have created Godself, and so *ad infinitum*).

¹ This is taken here as self-evident. It could also be argued scripturally, from the role of expression as the motive force in the theology of creation, for instance from the Islamic tradition “I was a hidden treasure and desired to be known, therefore I created thee” and similar verses in Bahai and other scriptures.

² Baha’u’llah, *Hidden Words*, Persian No. 49.

³ ‘Lawh-e Hikmat’ in *Tablets of Baha’u’llah* 150; see also *Gleanings* LXXIV 142-3.

⁴ Baha’u’llah, *Gleanings* LXXIV 144.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Prayers and Meditations*, LXXVI 209.

It could be objected that Abdu'l-Baha says, in the English translation of *Some Answered Questions*, that “the essential names and attributes of God are identical with His Essence,” but it appears to me that he is in fact saying precisely the opposite: that the attributes are really multiple and are an outflowing from the Essence, which is one. In my translation:

... the essential names and attributes of God are the fountain (*‘aín*) of the Essence, but the Essence is beyond understandings. If they [the names and attributes] were not the fountain of the Essence, a pre-existing multiplicity would be necessary [that is, if they, being multiple, were not emanations of the essence, but were the thing itself, then the pre-existing divinity would be multiple]. This implies that the real and pre-existent differences between the attributes and the Essence are necessary, otherwise the sequence of preexistences would have no end. This is an evident error.¹

Since we can know the attributes, and enter the world of the kingdom of names through the power of reason and imagination, there must be an unbridgeable gap between the kingdom of names and the Godhead. As we have seen above, interrelation and multiplicity (love, and ‘the divine twoness of things’) are proper to the creation, while unicity is proper to the Godhead. Multiplicity and interrelation require ontological distinction. To consider that the distinctions between the divine attributes are merely artifacts of human languages would imply that unicity is not unique to the Godhead, but extends to this realm which in turn is accessible to our reason. The implication would be that we can reason our way to God. Moreover, since the emanation of the kingdom of names constitutes creation and we are part of that creation, unicity would then extend to ourselves, and we would conclude that we are God. Neither of these is an acceptable conclusion within the framework of the Western religious tradition. Therefore it is the path of greater piety to suppose that unicity is not a property of the Kingdom of Names: in other words that the attributes of God are ontologically distinct.²

¹ *Mufawadat* 105 (chapter 37, page 112 in the World Centre’s etexts), cf *Some Answered Questions* 148-9. The translation in use in the Bahai community (*Some Answered Questions*), by Laura Barney, dates from 1908 (with changes in the many successive editions) and is seriously deficient. See for example the short chapter 45, where the English says the opposite to the Persian text. Barney’s translation follows the 1907 French translation rather than the Persian text.

² Are the attributes equal, or is there a ranking between them? Bayat (*Mysticism and*
(continued...))

Then it follows that there is some distinct reality, variously called the sovereignty or majesty or dominion of God, or the name ‘God the King’ (here we encounter the inadequacy of language and the variety of languages), and there is another reality which is God the Revealer, and which is distinct from the first, but closely related to it. And it follows that the Kingdom of God is growing where church and state also are distinct, but closely related.

Implications

The premise of monotheistic religion¹ has been used here to provide a religious rationale for embracing the multi-centred post-modern society, and for rejecting social models in which one or other human project is supposed to serve as co-ordinator and standard of value for all others. To use the anthropological metaphor, neither the life of the body nor the human soul are resident in a single organ. This explicitly means that religion renounces any claim to have a unique dignity before God. Religious institutions have no monopoly on the sacred. Religion recognises that the project of civil government has an inherent right to exist, and not merely as a necessary evil or a mediator to ensure civil rights in a plural society, but as part of the divine order of things. The co-ordination of the organs in the organic body politic results from the inherent harmony between the logics proper to each, and this harmony has two causes: an ultimate cause, which is that the names of God are distinct but have common reference to one God, and an immediate cause in the internal harmony of the human agents. Human persons, like the divine person, are the united referents underlying the diversity of attributes. Society does not consist of cities peopled separately by the tribes of public figures, of artists, scientists and people of faith. Rather, each person potentially embodies all of the attributes of God, and so holds multiple citizenship of all of these cities, functioning and developing in each according to its laws,

²(...continued)

Dissent 48) says that Shaykh Ahmad-e Ahsai said that justice could not be given priority over the other attributes, as it is in classical Shiah theology. There is a very similar statement in Baha’u’llah’s ‘Garden of Justice,’ in which he addresses the attribute Justice, and says “your relationship to Us is the same as that of any other [name], and there is no difference between you and any other created thing, in heaven or on earth.” (*Athar-e Qalam-e A’la* IV:300). But is this equality only in the sense that all attributes are created? A single verse is not sufficient foundation for a doctrine: the question requires more study.

¹ The model is not exclusive to Western societies. But the part of the argument required to go from ‘The Lord your God is one God’ to a multi-centred social order would be redundant if one begins with the Hindu pantheon.

harmonising them within his or her own person. This is in accordance with the individualism of the Bahai writings, and the progressive individualisation of post-modern society. The basic unit of society is not the church, the state or the family but the individual.¹

The theology of the state, and the church-state relationship, has now been integrated in a Bahai systematic theology. The reality of sovereignty, and hence the relationship between revelation and sovereignty, are seen projected in five dimensions: in the human person, in political theology (church-state relations), ecclesiology (the role of the Bahai administrative order vis-a-vis the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar), in eschatology or the Kingdom of God, and in theology proper, our speaking about God. It is hoped that this will provide a constructive theoretical basis for the Bahais in their increasing interactions with national and international authorities. And it may be that the approach outlined here can be of use for those of other Faiths.

The reading of the Bahai teachings on church and state presented here is personal, and frankly at odds with the way Bahais as a whole have read their own scriptures. It is by no means certain that some reading along these lines will prevail in the Bahai community, but given the central importance of authentic scriptural texts in shaping acceptable formulations of Bahai teachings there is some reason to hope that it may. Some further implications of this reading for the internal development of the Bahai community will be developed at the end of the next chapter.

This reading of the Bahai teachings on church and state may also alleviate the concern that those observing the growth of the Bahai Faith in a variety of countries have felt, and may provide a constructive theoretical basis for the Bahais in their increasing interactions with national and international authorities. And for those who are neither involved in the Bahai community nor affected by its growth, but who are willing to 'search for knowledge, even if it be in China,' the model of society as an organic unity of fundamentally differentiated institutions may provide food for thought.



¹ Developed further in McGlenn, 'Toward the Enlightened Society.'

Church and State in the secondary literature

The reception of the message

Jewish expectations concerning the Kingship of the Messiah certainly shaped the reception of Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom. What, after all, was Simon Peter doing in the Garden of Gethsemane with a sword (John 18:10)?¹ With the exception of one curious passage in Luke 22:36 in which Jesus apparently advises his followers to buy swords, it seems clear that temporal rule was not a goal in Jesus' vision of the Kingdom, and the liberation that he preached was not political liberation from Roman rule. Yet some at least of his followers were apparently not able to make the adjustment from what they expected the Messiah to say to hearing what the Messiah was actually saying. Even in the book of Revelation, the expectation of imminent worldly supremacy for the faithful is unmistakable. In the first generations of the church, the Jewish understanding of the rule of the Messiah is not transcended but temporarily postponed.

It is not surprising to find much the same pattern in Babi and Bahai history: Shiah expectations concerning the worldly rule of the Imam on his return shaped the reception of the Bab's message in the Babi community, and hence the first reception of Baha'u'llah's teachings. And as we will see in this survey of secondary Bahai literature, the momentum of Christian and Shiah millennialism, and more widespread assumptions about the relationship of religion to politics, have been only gradually overcome by Baha'u'llah's reshaping of millennialist motifs and the old patterns of society. The treatment of the Bahai teachings on church and state in the Bahai secondary literature, in anti-Bahai polemical works and, to a lesser extent, in academic treatments of the Bahai Faith is largely uninformed by the Bahai writings, and quite often diametrically opposed to them.

I have examined the literature in the first place to see whether there might be arguments or references to passages in the Bahai writings that contradict the thesis of the previous two chapters, that the separation of church and state, as distinct but interdependent organs within the body politic, is one of the key themes running through Baha'u'llah's life work. The results were negative: many vague references to the church-state relationship were found, but these were neither argued nor based on what Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha actually wrote on the topic. A secondary purpose was to determine what may have shaped the treatment of the topic in the Bahai secondary literature. The results here are not clear, since almost all of the Bahai writers studied assume a theocratic position *en passant*, in terms that allow only tentative conclusions about why they do so.

¹ See also Matthew 26:51, Luke 22:49-50.

These conclusions may still have some use, at least in so far as they show that no simple explanation for the predominance of theocratic assumptions is tenable.

Early days¹

The background of the early western believers would be expected to influence their understanding. While some had Roman Catholic or conservative Christian roots, this was not typical. Stockman, in *The Baha'i Faith in America*, concludes that "the evangelical roots of most American Baha'is were strong – in fact, they were often stronger than those of the average American."² He also reports that the Bible and the Book of Enoch, rather than the writings of Baha'u'llah, were used by these early Bahais as scripture.³ Many came from families of clergymen, or had themselves been preoccupied with biblical interpretation before coming into contact with the Bahai Faith. Even those who did not themselves come from a millennialist (or in the United States, 'adventist') background used millennialist language to express their conviction and experience that the promise of God had been fulfilled, that a new world had become possible. That, after all, was the language available to talk of a future world touched by God.

The notes on **Kheiralla's** early lessons in America (circa 1894-1900), printed by Browne in *Materials*, (128-142) show a typically millennialist approach to biblical interpretation. In the tenth lesson, Kheiralla taught that Isaiah 9:6 ("Unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder ...") could not refer to Jesus since Jesus was not a ruler (p. 136).⁴ This seems to support Stockman's conclusion that it is very unlikely that Kheiralla knew Baha'u'llah's *Kitab-e Iqan*,⁵ because in the *Iqan* Baha'u'llah argues against the position that some of the prophets and founders of religion have manifested sovereignty, and others have not. Baha'u'llah affirms that all are alike, exercising

¹ The selection of Bahai literature in this section and the following is determined largely by what has been available to me, living in the Netherlands. I have not been able to obtain a number of early works used by the Bahais in North America that might tell us how ideas about the Bahai teachings on social governance developed after the time of Kheiralla, and what their sources were. This section is distinguished from the first part of the following section, on the Bahai secondary literature, not strictly by date (for there is some overlap) but by focussing on talks, lectures, and early pamphlets rather than formal literature that has been officially reviewed and published by the Bahais. Wilson's book is later, but as we will see is based largely on these informal Bahai sources.

² Vol. 1, 103. See also the tables on pages 102, 114 and 127 and the related discussions.

³ *The Bahai Faith in America* Vol. 1, 86.

⁴ This lesson is also reconstructed by Stockman, in *The Baha'i Faith in America* Vol. 1 page 74, drawing on the notes and on Kheiralla's books.

⁵ *Op. cit.* Vol. 1, 20, 56.

a spiritual sovereignty. Kheiralla's position, and that of modern millennialist groups in general, in effect picks up the thread of messianic expectations in the early Christian church, which expected Christ to return in the immediate future and to rule the earth with his saints.

Those who believe a messiah has come have two alternatives: to postpone this part of the promise until the next dramatic intervention by God in history (the return of Christ, or a punitive catastrophe) or to understand it in spiritual terms, and thus perceive that the promise has in fact been fulfilled.¹ Kheiralla represents the former approach. In his eleventh lesson he states that Baha'u'llah's Tablet to the Kings (*Lawh-e Muluk*) called on the rulers "to throw their kingdoms at his feet," whereas in fact the only ruler Baha'u'llah called on to abandon his kingdom was the Pope, and he was commanded to give it to the kings and not to Baha'u'llah.² The mistake can hardly have come about from confusing the tablets, since Kheiralla had only Browne's partial translation of the *Tablet to the Pope*, and this translation does not include the passage in which Baha'u'llah asks the Pope to abandon his kingdom.³ From Stockman's examination of the references that Kheiralla provides in his books, we know that he did have Browne's translation of Baha'u'llah's Tablet to Queen Victoria⁴ in which Baha'u'llah calls on the kings collectively to rule justly, moderate taxation and armaments, and establish international peace. Kheiralla also had Browne's translation of Abdu'l-Baha's *A Traveller's Narrative* in which Abdu'l-Baha cites a passage from Baha'u'llah's Tablet to the Shah that is familiar today from the translation in *Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, but is given here in Browne's translation:

The Lord of He doeth what He will hath committed the kingdom of creation, both land and sea, into the hand of kings, and they are the manifestations of the Divine Power according to the degrees of their rank: verily He the Potent, the Sovereign. But that which God (glorious is His mention) hath desired for Himself is the hearts of His servants, which are treasures of praise and love of the Lord and stores of divine knowledge and wisdom.⁵

¹ See MacEoin, 'Babism to Baha'ism' 222-3 for a discussion of the dynamics of disappointed millennialism in relation the Babi community.

² *Proclamation of Baha'u'llah* 85.

³ Stockman, *The Baha'i Faith in America*, Vol. 1 page 44; Browne, 'The Babis of Persia,' in Momen, *Selections* 269-273.

⁴ In Momen, *Selections* 275-8. The passage mentioned is on page 277.

⁵ *Abdu'l-Baha, A Traveller's Narrative* 63. Cf. *Summons*, paragraph 210.

Moreover, Abdu'l-Baha himself says in that work that “this sect have no worldly object nor any concern with political matters. The fulcrum of their motion and rest and the pivot of their cast and conduct is restricted to spiritual things and confined to matters of conscience; it has nothing to do with the affairs of government ...” (p. 86). He also provides quite detailed advice on various aspects of state organization, all of it presuming the continuing existence of the civil state and its separation from and non-involvement in matters of conscience.

One has to conclude that Kheiralla's interpretation of the Kingdom of God, as a this-worldly theocracy displacing existing political structures, was not a by-product of his ignorance of the *Kitab-e Iqan*, but rather came about *despite* the Bahai scriptures that were available to him. Stockman shows that Kheiralla's main sources were the Bible and evangelical biblical commentaries,¹ and says that “he never cited Browne when he was discussing [the Bahai] teachings,”² although he does use Browne as a source in historical matters. As we will see, the same neglect of Bahai scriptural sources is found in the Bahai secondary literature in general. Stockman continues:

American Baha'is often did not avail themselves of the information on the Faith available in Browne's books. Kheiralla, their only teacher ... [gave] lessons that focussed primarily on the Bible. In these Bible lessons it is difficult to detect the influence of Baha'u'llah's teachings ... Kheiralla put forth his own ideas on the Bible, largely formed independently of the books he had read ...³

Kheiralla's personal role in shaping the first understanding of the Bahai Faith in America was considerable. Stockman says “To this day [1985] a few of the interpretations of biblical passages popular among American Baha'is originally derive not from the Baha'i writings but from Kheiralla's lessons.”⁴ But his influence need not be over-rated. Stockman also points to a number of details of Kheiralla's teachings that Kheiralla evidently acquired from the American believers, and there seems to be a great deal that he picked up from the Protestant religious culture of the United States.

Kheiralla expected the millennium to come in 1917,⁵ following which the world would live “as one family.” This reflects another feature of Christian millennialist expectations: a society is envisioned in which social relationships

¹ *The Baha'i Faith in America*, Vol. 1, 41

² *Op. cit.* 46.

³ *Op. cit.* 46-47.

⁴ *Op. cit.* 188.

⁵ Browne, *Materials* 139.

are not formalized in institutions. In Kheiralla's teaching, the world becoming an extension of the Manifestation's household, in an elaborate system of correspondences.¹

It would appear that the arrival of the millennium was also expected to be catastrophic. When **Ella Goodall** went to Akka in 1899 she was relieved to discover that "the Millennium is not so near as we thought it was, so that things are not going to bust up all at once, but the world will go on for many thousands of years yet ...".²

This is a change of attitude rather than just the postponement of apocalyptic expectations. The world and its institutions are not to be abolished, but rather baptised with the spirit and thus strengthened. Through direct contact with Abdu'l-Baha, the American Bahais had begun a process of redefinition that would gradually move them away from a preoccupation with eschatological hopes and fears and towards constructive social engagement. In subsequent years the writings of Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha would also supplant the Bible as a primary source of Bahai teachings in the American Bahai community.

Isabella **Brittingham**, who also visited Abdu'l-Baha in Akka, cites the eschatological vision of justice in Isaiah 9:6. "Unto us a child is born ... the government shall be upon his shoulder ..." to show that the return of Christ is "in the flesh" but she hastens to add that his government is "a spiritual government."³ Hooper **Harris** likewise emphasises that the Kingdom of God "will be a Spiritual Kingdom. We are therefore not to look for a material Kingdom to be set up in some particular place, but for a 'Placeless' Kingdom to be established in the hearts of men."⁴ Neither author shows any sign of the initial millenarian background we see in Goodall.

The anti-Bahai polemicist **Samuel Wilson** can also be mentioned here, inasmuch as his sources and understanding of the Bahai teachings are very similar to those of the early American Bahais, even if his evaluation is quite different. His book was certainly read by Bahais, and draws on the pamphlets and scriptural translations available to the North American Bahais at the time, some of which I do not have. In *Bahatism and its Claims* (1915) Wilson conflates the Bahai Universal House of Justice with the International Tribunal:

¹ Browne, *Materials* 141-2.

² Cited in Stockman, *The Baha'i Faith in America*, Vol. 1 page 152.

³ *The Revelation of Baha-ullah*, 1902 (4th edition). The words are echoed in Ford, *The Oriental Rose* (1910) 77.

⁴ *Lessons on the Beha Revelation*, 1901, page 34.

Abdul Baha declares universal peace and an international Court of Arbitration to be fundamental principles of Bahaism. The Court will be called the House of Justice and will be composed entirely of Bahais. ... Disputes will find a final sentence of absolute justice . . . before the Bahai House of Justice. War will be suppressed.¹

Wilson identifies his sources for this in his footnotes. His first reference here can be found on page 64 of the 1994 edition of *Some Answered Questions*, where Abdu'l-Baha refers to “a general tribunal of the nations and kingdoms” and *not* to the Universal House of Justice. Abdu'l-Baha's views on the election of the International Tribunal were set out in more detail his 1919 ‘Tablet to the Hague’ (i.e. to the Committee at The Hague in relation to the International Peace Conference). Abdu'l-Baha writes:

[Baha'u'llah's] plan is this: that the national assemblies of each country and nation – that is to say parliaments – should elect two or three persons who are the choicest men of that nation, and are well informed concerning international laws ... The number of these representatives should be in proportion to the number of inhabitants of that country. ... From among these people the members of the Supreme Tribunal will be elected...²

From this it can be seen that Abdu'l-Baha envisions the tribunal as a civil, not a religious body, to be made up of legal experts. Its method of election and membership differ from those that are set out for the Bahai Universal House of Justice. However this explanation was only made by Abdu'l-Baha after Wilson's book was published, and Wilson's confusion simply reflects what was written in a footnote to the 1908 London edition of *Some Answered Questions* at this point, which in turn reflects a misunderstanding on the part of the French translator.

Wilson's second reference in this paragraph is to Baha'u'llah's Tablet of the World or *Lawh-e Dunya*, using a 1917 translation by Ali Kuli Khan.³ The passage he refers to corresponds to page 89 in the 1978 translation, in *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, and has already been discussed (page 194 above), where I concluded that it was most likely that the House of Justice referred to here is not the Bahai religious institution. The 1978 translation says: “It is incumbent upon the ministers of the House of Justice to promote the Lesser Peace.” The 1917 translation reads: “The Ministers [Counsellors, *i.e.*, members] of the House of Justice must promote the Most Great Peace ... for warfare and conflict are the

¹ *Bahaism and its Claims* 71-2.

² *Selected Writings of Abdu'l-Baha* 306.

³ *Tablets of Baha'o'llah revealed at Acca* 28.

foundation of trouble and distress.” The 1917 translation ‘Most Great Peace’ is wrong, according to the convention that *Sulh-i Akbar* is translated as ‘lesser Peace’ (by analogy to the ‘lesser Jihad’ which is outward) because it refers to an outward peace only. However at that time neither this convention, nor the understanding that the term Most Great Peace (*sulh-i a‘azam*) is used to refer to the condition of a spiritualised world civilisation, existed.¹ In both cases, and earlier, where he assigns to religious institutions functions which, in Bahai teachings belong to civil governments, Wilson’s readings may well be honest mistakes.

On page 117 Wilson gives another view, this time without sources:

The government of Bahatism is to be by “Houses of Justice.” Each will be composed of nine or more Bahai men elected by the people. Bahatism will be the state religion. Kings will exist, but the politico-religious hierarchy will perform many of the functions of the state, even to settling international disputes. Churches, assemblies, and conferences, bishops and popes – all will be dispensed with. The Bahai “houses” will conduct and control religion for the world. The first universal vicegerent of God is Abdul Baha. After him the supreme power will be vested in the “house.”

The recognition that the Bahai teachings endorse the continuation of worldly government is significant. The confusion of the Universal House of Justice with the tribunal that is to settle international disputes has already been mentioned. The other claims are not related to the Bahai teachings at all, so far as I can discover, but may derive from Kheiralla’s idea of an idyllic patrimonial state without formal institutions.

Wilson’s chapter 6 is entitled ‘Bahatism and the State.’ The chapter begins with Babism, in relation to the supposed Shiah doctrine that the “Shahs had the right to kingship only in the absence of the Imam.” Accordingly, he says, “disloyalty was an essential corollary of Babism and not a consequence of the repression and persecution which it met.”² Whether this is in fact true of Babism is unclear. Wilson supports this with references to Browne’s works, but I have already quoted Abbas Amanat’s conclusions to the contrary (page 81). The belief that temporal rulers would be displaced by the coming of the Messiah is common

¹ The meaning of the two terms can be deduced from Baha’u’llah’s Tablet to Queen Victoria and Shoghi Effendi’s interpretations in *Messages to the Baha’i World* 74-75, *The Promised Day is Come* 26 and 123, and especially *The World Order of Baha’u’llah* 162-163.

² *Bahatism and its Claims* 134.

to Jewish, Christian and Islamic theologies of most if not all schools (and Wilson, as a Protestant missionary, presumably believed it too), and it is clear that some of the Babis had the same belief.

Wilson goes on to recognise that Baha'u'llah "proclaimed the loyalty of himself and his followers to the Shah ... and pleaded for the toleration of the sect as one without political aspirations. Bahai apologists condemned the Bab and the conduct of the Babis, declaring it contrary to the principles of the Bab."¹ The Bahai apologist referred to is Abdu'l-Baha, in *A Traveller's Narrative*.² Wilson describes this as "political opportunism" and says that "other writings of Baha show a spirit of hostility to the Shah." His notes support this with a reference to the Surat-ul Muluk or Tablet to the Kings, without specifying what he considers hostile to the Shah in that tablet, and with another reference to the *Star of the West* (Sept. 27, 1913, 9-10), but neither the English nor Persian sections of that number of *Star of the West* contain any such reference. He does provide accurate and substantial references to show that Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha were teaching that "this sect has no worldly object nor any concern with political matters, it has nothing to do with affairs of Government neither has it any concern with the powers of the throne." However he claims that a "secret influence" was nevertheless exerted by the Bahais "on the side of the reactionary party," that is, against the Constitutional Revolution. The evidence for this is that Abdu'l-Baha corresponded with Mohammed Ali Shah, but Wilson does not say what the contents of this correspondence might have been. We cannot guess what Abdu'l-Baha might have written in unidentified correspondence which Wilson calls secret, but what he wrote publically in *The Secret of Divine Civilization* and *A Sermon on the Art of Governance*, both of which were in part addressed to the Shah and to court circles, was rather in favour of progressive reform of the state than opposed to it. Wilson then concludes:

We thus see a double failure on the part of this movement. As Babism it failed in 1848-1852 in its rebellion and wars against the Kajars [Qajars]; as Bahatism it failed to enter into and assist the modern movement, which, aiming at reform and progress, inaugurated a constitution. The cause of the latter is not far to seek; Bahatism has a political scheme of its own. We will now consider it.³

This he does, stating correctly that "Bahatism has set forth a system of civil government" and "approves of constitutional monarchy as the best form of

¹ *Bahatism and its Claims* 136.

² Page 65 in Browne's 1891 edition, page 39 in the 1980 US edition.

³ *Bahatism and its Claims* 141.

government, and permits republics” but then, inconsistently, confuses this with the Houses of Justice decreed in the Aqdas “with nine or more members, all Baha’i men.” The references that follow give us some idea of why Wilson, and perhaps the Bahais of his time, understood the Bahai Houses of Justice to be identical to the democratic civil government that is also endorsed in the Bahai writings. His first reference is to **Julia Grundy**’s *Ten Days in the Light of Akka*, consisting of notes she made during her pilgrimage to Haifa and Akka in 1905. According to her notes, Abdu’l-Baha compares the House of Justice, with its explicit scriptural mandate, to the Council of Constantine which lacked this. Wilson does not quote this part, which would undermine his contention that the House of Justice of the Aqdas is a government body. He does cite other words that support his argument: “It is the centre of true government.” “The Law of God will be invested in them, and they will render decisions.”¹ “All judgment will be from the standpoint of God’s laws.” From this chapter it seems certain that Julia Grundy understood the House of Justice as a temporal government.

The next support adduced by Wilson consists of words attributed to Abdu’l-Baha in an address in New York, that have already been discussed (page 229). It says that “The House of Justice ... is endowed with a political as well as a religious aspect” and that the orders of the “World House of Justice” “shall be the Truth in explaining the Commands of BAHÁ’O’LLAH” and “shall be obeyed by all.”

The third piece of evidence advanced by Wilson is some words written by a French Bahai, **Hippolyte Dreyfus**:

The separation of the Religion and the State can only be temporary ... a momentary stage. For the present the two spheres are separate. When Bahatism triumphs they will be united.” “The House of Justice will have under its control almost the whole administration, and naturally will take the place of our municipal councils. Such has been Baha Ullah’s intention. Further he clearly aims not only at a municipal House of Justice, but also at a legislative one, sitting as a national parliament and as an international tribunal.²

None of these sources – a pilgrim’s notes, an unauthenticated record of a talk by Abdu’l-Baha for which no Persian notes are available, and the opinions of Dreyfus – are primary sources of the Bahai teachings, but they do add up to a

¹ At this point there are slight differences between Wilson’s citations from the 1907 edition and the 1979 edition that I have.

² Wilson cites pages 123 and 144 of an English translation (which I do not have), entitled *The Baha’i Revelation*.

coherent picture which must have appeared persuasive for those without a broad knowledge of what Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha had actually written. Wilson goes on to cite works by Remey, Dreyfus and Kheiralla, but I think the pattern is already clear enough. There is a certain amount of deliberately selective citation of sources,¹ but Wilson is reflecting (and reinforcing) an existing tradition of interpretation within the Bahai community and among its critics,² which reads all references to civil governments and to the Bahai houses of justice as referring to one civil-religious institution under different names.

Given this supposition, Wilson is able to present a horrifying picture:

In brief, Bahaism would set up in each town, in every country, ruling councils, and a central one universal in its sway, composed entirely of Bahais, clothed with supreme authority, because God-given, over kings, parliaments, and peoples; councils infallible and absolute, superior to appeal or protest; deciding and exacting obedience in every department of the life of humanity – religious, domestic, social, educational, financial, judicial, and political. It would be not an imperium in imperia, but an Empire over all. It would be a priestcraft such as the world has not yet seen – a religious-political regime in which kings and presidents will go ... to Acca, and alike hold the stirrups of Bahai justices, and laws of parliaments will be subject to revision and veto by the Bahai House.³

Secondary Bahai literature

In the more formal literature produced by the Bahai community, **Charles Remey** provides an early instance of recognition of the essential position of the state. Remey was an influential Bahai writer at the time, but his works have fallen into disuse since 1960 when, following the death of Shoghi Effendi, he attempted to succeed him as the second Guardian of the Bahai Faith. This led to his expulsion from the community.

In *The Baha'i Teachings regarding worship*⁴ (1925) he identifies the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar as the locus of the Bahai "effort to bring all secular affairs

¹ To give one example: Remey is cited as saying "There will be a union of Religion and the State" (Bahai Movement, 69), which is a distortion of Remey's anti-theocratic views (see below).

² Wilson cites a Doctor Holmes, writing in Speer's *Missions and Modern History*, Volume 1, 129 and 130. I have not been able to obtain this source.

³ *Bahaism and its Claims* 145.

⁴ Printed in 'A series of twelve articles introductory ... 113-120.

under spiritual guidance” and “the foundation ... of the spiritual Kingdom upon earth.”¹ Alongside the spiritual kingdom, he says:

Baha’u’llah anticipated various universal institutions for the great benefit of humanity. He exhorted the rulers and governments of the world to abolish warfare and establish peace; to settle international difficulties by arbitration rather than by bloodshed. ... From Baha’u’llah’s writings one learns it was not his idea that the kings of this earth should cease to exist, but rather that all government should be established upon a system of representation, without which no government can uphold the rights of the people. ... While religion and state will never be reunited upon the old lines of creed and dogma, the Baha’is look forward to the time when the states, governments of the nations, will be based upon a spiritual foundation, when the material laws of men will be founded and enforced according to the principles of the divine laws of God. Religion is necessary to man. Nations, as well as individuals, have at times tried to live without religion, and the results have always been disastrous. ... The ideal government rests upon this foundation, which is not a union of church and State, but a union of religion and State.²

Although this is dated 1925, he had used virtually the same words in chapter 8 of *The Baha’i Movement*, published in 1912. His 1908 pamphlet, *The message of Unity* had implied the same understanding, for its summary of the essential ‘Ordinances’ of the Bahai Faith included the establishment of representative government and of the House of Justice as two separate Bahai principles. So did his presentation at the Third National Peace Conference in May 1911.³ The subtitle of his 1925 *Series of Twelve Articles* refers to the Bahai ‘religious and secular doctrines and institutions.’ A talk he gave in 1920, published in *Star of the West* in 1921, defines the House of Justice as a spiritual organisation dealing

¹ Page 118.

² Pages 119-120.

³ Cited by Stockman, *The Baha’i Faith in America*, Vol. 2, 366; published in *Star of the West* Vol. 2, No. 5, June 5 1911, page 11. In 1915 two lists of the essential Baha’i teachings, presumably written by the editors of *Star of the West*, included “Creation of the House of Justice and institution of National Assemblies and Constitutional Governments.” and “the necessity of the creation of the House of Justice and institution of National Assemblies and Constitutional Governments,” formulations that echo Remey’s very closely. (Vol. 5, No. 17 January 19 1915 page 274; Vol. 5, No. 18 February 7, page 282).

with “Baha’i matters.”¹ In an article written in the following year he defines its function as conducting the “business affairs of the Bahai Movement.”²

Remey came from a well-to-do Episcopalian family,³ and the views he expresses here seem to be unusual for the early American Bahai community, although he shared them at least with Isabella Brittingham and Hooper Harris. Yet his views were sustained over two decades, and were published and distributed by Bahai publishing committees and the community’s official magazine as representing the Bahai teachings: there must have been an anti-theocratic constituency in the American Bahai community.

Given the example of Remey, it would be difficult to argue that the Bahai community in the United States of those decades was simply the product of a millenarian Christian background and the theocratic expectations typical of millenarian groups. On the other hand, Remey and Esslemont (in the United Kingdom), both writing in the 1920s, and both from Episcopalian backgrounds, are the two major authors who stand out as having the most text-based (*scriptural*) understanding of the Bahai teachings on Church and state.

A statement commissioned by the National Spiritual Assembly in the United States in 1923, and actually drawn up by **Louis Gregory**, **Agnes Parsons** and **Mariam Haney**, also speaks of the Bahai Administrative Order as one part of the Bahai teachings, and “the International Arbitral Court and the federation of the world” as another part.⁴ A year earlier, a disaffected Bahai couple, the **Dyars**, had published the text of claims they had presented in Bahai meetings in 1921, according to which the ‘earlier’ Bahai teachings concerning an organised Bahai religion, literalist in character and governed by a House of Justice, had failed and had been changed by Abdu’l-Baha into ‘The New Bahaism.’ “Gone are the sacred writings and their authority ... Gone is the House of Justice, and with it all religious interference in secular affairs!”⁵ The earlier teachings, according to the Dyars, were associated with Mirza Abu’l-Fadl Gulpaygani, whom Abdu’l-Baha had sent to America, and the new teachings with Jenab-e Fadl Mazandarani, likewise sent by Abdu’l-Baha, to change old Bahaism into new Bahaism. The Dyars’ fantasy has no value as an indicator of what these gentlemen actually

¹ *Star of the West* Vol. 12, No. 9 August 20 1921, page 154.

² ‘The Bahai Revelation The Religious Need of the Time’ *Star of the West*, Vol. 13, No. 2 April 9 1922, page 39.

³ Stockman, *The Baha’i Faith in America*, Vol. 1 151-153.

⁴ *Star of the West* Vol. 13, No. 12 March 1923, page 328.

⁵ Dyar & Dyar, ‘The New Bahaism’ *Short Talks*, 59.

taught,¹ but its publication may explain why the National Spiritual Assembly was stressing that the teachings concerning the religious order and the political order were two parts of one whole. The Dyars also provide the earliest example I have found of the dispensationalist approach to church and state, which I will return to below.

George Latimer represents an intermediate position, for in his 1916 article ‘The Social Teachings of the Baha’i Movement’² he first addresses the principle of Peace, using scriptural passages and his own explanations, which relate entirely to the role of governments and rulers, without mention of the House of Justice, but then under the heading ‘The House of Justice’ he has a citation from what we now know as *The Secret of Divine Civilization* (page 37) in which Abdu’l-Baha refers to a body of scholars expert in various sciences who would become the legislative body in the state. Latimer supposes that this is the same thing as the House of Justice established in the *Kitab-e Aqdas*, which means that he takes Abdu’l-Baha’s stipulation that the elected representatives should be answerable to the people as applying also to the members of the House of Justice in relation to the believers. Conversely, he supposes that the House of Justice is the executive arm of government, “every community, village, town, city, and nation will be under the control of one of these bodies” which will have legislative and judicial functions but (contradicting his previous statement) no executive powers. A little later, in discussing the revenues of the House of Justice, he says “the House of Justice would not receive sufficient revenue from the inheritance tax alone to carry on the duties and responsibilities of the state.” This is incoherent in itself, and inconsistent with the role of civil governments and rulers set out in his section on Peace. Latimer’s exposition could be called the first clear statement of the confusion, if such a thing is possible: confusion between Bahai teachings about the administrative order in which the House of Justice has legislative, judicial and executive functions, Bahai teachings about the civil order, in which these functions should be separated as they are in Europe and the United States (the two examples of the separation of powers used by Abdu’l-Baha in the talk Latimer is quoting), and the Bahai teaching about the separation of the political order, confusingly labelled ‘the executive,’ and the

¹ A little later they concede that Abdu’l-Baha, when pressed, would reaffirm Baha’u’llah’s teachings in public, but claim that they are aware of Abdu’l-Baha’s real teachings, different and better than those of Baha’u’llah! (‘The place of Abdu’l-Baha’, *op. cit.* 99-100)

² *Star of the West* Vol. 7, No. 15 December 12 1916 from page 133. The quote from *The Secret of Divine Civilization* is at pages 138-9 and the following references can be found at pages 139 and 146.

religious order, confusingly translated as ‘the legislative.’ There is nothing in Latimer’s exposition to indicate an influence from millennialist Christian expectations.

In a 1925 article¹ he says that the House of Justice is both legislature, judiciary, and has the “power and authority to maintain its integrity, enforce its laws and insure to the world permanent peace,” having apparently abandoned the previous idea that the House of Justice should be state legislature but not the government executive. In a 1936 reworking, published in book form, he speaks both of a World Parliament, elected on a national basis, and alongside it:

... a Supreme Tribunal whose judgement will be final. It will enact a single code of international law to control the relationships of the member nations. This body, which is titled the Universal House of Justice by Baha’u’llah, will define the rights to impose taxes, levy tariffs, limit armaments, settle disputes between capital and labor, and stabilize the financial structure of the world.²

This illustrates the frightful muddle that is inevitable when one attempts to outline the Bahai world order model without grasping its most fundamental architecture: the separation of church and state. Having given all powers, secular and religious, to his hybrid House of Justice-Tribunal, there is no purpose left for the World Parliament, which he can nevertheless not abolish because it is stipulated in Bahai scriptures. When we consider that these were the ideas being published in the official journal of the American Bahai community and in books published and distributed in the community, it is hardly surprising that the confusion was passed on to the next generation of American Bahais.

The Latimer articles show both the need for the ‘temporary measure’ of pre-publication literature review that was intended to prevent misrepresentations of the Bahai teachings being published in the community’s own literature, and why the policy has failed. By 1936 (and 1944 when he again wrote on this topic)³ the seasoned Bahais who would be asked to review Latimer’s contribution to this book would be of the generation who had learned about the Bahai social teachings from his pamphlets 20 years earlier. While some misrepresentations may have been excluded by the policy, its long continuation has endorsed and locked in place misunderstandings such as this. The earliest Bahai literature in the United States shows both theocratic and separationist views, and anecdotal

¹ ‘A new social contract,’ *Star of the West* Vol. 16 No. 3 June 1925 page 451.

² ‘A World Community,’ 62, see also 65. My thanks to Jennifer McNair for providing several references from early pamphlets.

³ ‘The Lesser and the Most Great Peace.’

evidence suggests that the question continued to be debated, with differing views, in the American Bahai community. Yet clear separationist views drop out of view in the published literature. It is not impossible that the enforcement of pre-publication literature review was partially responsible for reinforcing one interpretative tradition and excluding the alternative.

In a 1924 fictional presentation ‘A Bird’s Eye View of the World in the Year 2000,’ **Errol Harper** supposes that by that year, income tax would be regulated world-wide “by an International House of Justice, made up of representatives from the National House of Justice of each nation on earth.”¹ But an article by Abdul Hussein **Isphahani** in 1930 delimits the function of the House of Justice as Remey did, to resolving differences between individual Bahais and administering the Bahai Movement.²

Keith Ransom Kehler presents a position similar to Latimer, in her 1933 article ‘Baha’i Administration as Presented to a Group of Free Thinkers,’³ which says that the “International House of Justice has only a legislative function; it alone can enact those universal laws that apply equally to all mankind” ... “Any nation refusing to submit to its commands must be immediately suppressed by a combination of all other nations.” The House of Justice is not to be accountable to its constituents or to the group, because it is guided by God.⁴ What the Free Thinkers would have made of this prospect can be imagined. This authoritarian super-state is to be ruled ultimately by a world monarchy “provided through the Baha’i institution of the Guardianship.” In an earlier article in the series,⁵ Kehler had said that the House of Justice has legislative, executive and judicial functions, but also quotes Abdu’l-Baha’s teaching that its discussions “must all be confined to spiritual matters that pertain to the training of souls, the instruction of children, the relief of the poor, the help of the feeble throughout all classes in the world, kindness to all peoples, the diffusion of the fragrances of God and the exaltation

¹ *Star of the West*, Vol. 15, No. 7 October 1924, page 191.

² ‘The Baha’i Religious and Social Plan,’ *Star of the West* Vol. 21, No. 5 August 1930, 147.

³ *Star of the West* Vol. 24, No. 7 October 1933 page 216. Quoted sections at pages 218-9. A year earlier she had stated that world economic problems would be solved by the establishment of the Universal House of Justice (‘ Religion and Social Progress ‘ in *Star of the West* Vol. 23, No. 5 August 1932, page 143).

⁴ *Star of the West* Vol. 24, No. 7 October 1933 page 217.

⁵ ‘A World at Peace’ *Star of the West* Vol. 24 No. 6 September 1933, pages 170, 172. The source is a tablet cited by Shoghi Effendi in a letter dated 5 March 1922 to the Bahais of the United States and Canada, published in *Baha’i Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932*, pages 22-23.

of His Holy Word.” In this article she implicitly resolves the contradiction by applying the separation of powers to the *International House of Justice* only.

It will be recalled that in March 1932 Shoghi Effendi clarified the Bahai political teachings by writing, in ‘The Golden Age of the Cause of Baha’u’llah’, that the Baha’is did not intend “to allow the machinery of their administration to supersede the government of their respective countries.”¹ The ink was barely dry before we see the first attempt to square the circle, with the argument that they *might* allow it, but only if asked very nicely. This comes in **Florence King’s** article ‘Keeping the Wolf from the Door:’

Let no one think that the Bahai’s seek to overthrow the existing governments of the world because that is not their aim. This thoroughly governs the believers. If, however, the majority of the people of the world should some day accept Baha’u’llah as the ‘Manifestation of God’ and accept the teachings, perhaps this world form of government [the elected Baha’i Houses of Justice] would replace the separate and antagonistic governments of the world and thus a lasting unity, peace and harmony be established in the world. The coming of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth would then be realized.²

Some Bahai authors who might at first appear to be assuming or advocating a theocratic model prove rather to be using terms in unusual ways. **David Hofman**, in his *Commentary on the Will and Testament of Abdu’l-Baha*, first published in 1943, writes

This then is Theocracy. Power and initiative evoked by the Word of God; authority conferred by the Word of God; guarantee and guidance given and maintained by the Word of God. Everything rests on the creative Word and God Himself rules His people.³

Despite the use of the term theocracy, it is not clear from this passage whether Hofman means a godly society, or one in which the institutions of organized religion exercise the power of the state. In chapter 8 of his book *The Renewal of Civilization*, first published in 1946, he writes:

Religion ... has become divorced from other human activities. In fact, our dreadful western civilization has succeeded in dividing life (and therefore people) into separate compartments. Business, recreation, politics,

¹ Published in *The World Order of Baha’u’llah* 66.

² *Star of the West*, Vol. 23, No. 2 May 1932 page 54.

³ Revised edition (1982) 10-11.

religion, social life, are regarded as separate and distinct activities, to be assumed according to the time or day.

Religion should be the co-ordinator of all man's functions, the pervading spirit which gives meaning and purpose to his every action ... This separation of church and state, of government and religion, means that there are two standards of conduct ... murder, arson and robbery are condemned in the private citizen and indulged in and fiercely upheld as the prerogative of states.¹

This is a forthright rejection of functional differentiation and of the organic model of human society developed in this book, but it represents an integrist social model, rather than a theocratic political theory. It seems reasonable to suppose that the passage cited from his commentary on the Will and Testament of Abdu'l-Baha carries a similar meaning, although it uses the word theocracy.

One interesting aspect of this chapter in *The Renewal of Civilization* is that Hofman identifies Christ's saying "Render to Caesar ..." ² as underlying the separation of church and state in Christian history and theory (which he calls a schism "from which Christendom has never recovered.") He seems unaware that this is precisely the biblical verse that Baha'u'llah, in *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (89-90) used and endorsed in upholding the theological legitimacy of the authority of the Shah and other rulers. This endorsement in turn was cited by Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi in works that Hofman would certainly have known.³ Moreover, Hofman claims that "in the World Order of Baha'u'llah there is no cleavage between religion and other human activities ... there is no professional priesthood and no professional politics..."⁴ although both Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha do in fact assume that there will be professional politicians, from Kings and heads of state to ministers and representatives of the people, and have written extensively to them and about them, and both also assign a special role in the state and in the religious community for the learned.

David Hofman is not simply a sample of one: he was a member of the Universal House of Justice from 1963 to 1988, his book has been widely used, and the passage I quoted comes from the fourth edition and at least the ninth reprinting. Each of the editions has presumably been passed by the literature review boards which are supposed to check that books written by Bahais do not

¹ Page 109 of the 1960 edition.

² Matt. 22:15-22, Mark 12:13-17, Luke 20:20-26.

³ *Paris Talks* 159 and *The Promised Day is Come* 71.

⁴ *The Renewal of Civilization*, page 110 of the 1960 edition; 1972 revised edition 121-2.

misrepresent the scriptural tradition. Yet in the space of two pages, this Bahai book directly rejects the teachings of the Bahai ‘key figures’ on two points.

Similarly, in **Horace Holley**’s introduction to Shoghi Effendi’s *The World Order of Baha’u’llah* (1938), he writes that:

the old conception of religion, which separated spirituality from the fundamental functions of civilization, compelling men to abide by conflicting principles of faith, of politics and of economics, has been forever destroyed. The command, “Render unto God that which is of God, and unto Caesar that which is of Caesar,” has been annulled by the law of the oneness of humanity revealed by Baha’u’llah.¹

Holley should have known that Baha’u’llah cites and endorses this principle in his *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (89-90), since Julie Chanler’s translation of the *Epistle* from the French translation by Dreyfus had been published by the New York Baha’i Publishing Committee in 1928, and the relevant section of it was cited in an article in *Star of the West* in 1933.² Holley would also have known that Abdu’l-Baha is reported to have cited and endorsed this verse in the popular and widely used (but unreliable) *Paris Talks* (158). Shoghi Effendi’s translation of the *Epistle* did not appear until 1941.³ In the same year, Shoghi Effendi composed *The Promised Day is Come* which contains a lengthy compilation of texts from Baha’u’llah regarding the position of kings and rulers and the duty to obey them. One of these quotations is this passage from *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*.⁴ Since this comes just three years after Holley’s introduction, it must surely be read as a repudiation and scriptural refutation, by Shoghi Effendi, of Holley’s theories. Strangely enough, the 1974 edition of *The World Order of Baha’u’llah*⁵ still contained Holley’s statement, despite the existence of an office of literature

¹ Page vii.

² Hussein Rabbani, ‘The Baha’i view of organisation and authority’, *Star of the West* 23:11 February 1933, 331. In the same year, Dale Cole endorsed the principle, but without citing Chanler’s translation of the *Epistle*, in ‘Render unto Caesar,’ *Star of the West* 24:1, April 1933, 6-8, see page 8. This suggests that the principle, and the endorsement of the New Testament verse in the *Epistle*, were sufficiently familiar to readers to need no support.

³ This passage from *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* is also cited by Shoghi Effendi in *The Promised Day is Come* 72, but this too was written in 1941.

⁴ Cited in *The Promised Day is Come* 72.

⁵ Called the ‘second revised edition’, but in fact the fourth edition: 1938, 1955, 1965 and 1974. The 1991 edition contains further changes to the text (compare eg 1974 page 10 with 1991 page 9): a text-critical study of these letters is required.

review under the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States whose stated purpose is to correct factual errors in the presentation of the Bahai teachings.

In *Religion for Mankind*, (1956) Holley's thinking has advanced considerably. He refers to "the competitive institutions of state, industry and church which are miscalled 'civilization'" (142), but he does not appear to envision these institutions ever merging. Holley was influenced by the American social gospel movement. His critique of competition may look back to the ideas of the Saint-Simonians, but could also be read as a rejection of the social darwinism of his own time. This section of his book explains the roots of the competitive impulse and the evil effects of making competition rather than cooperation the guiding principle in society. It is not the separation of church and state that he finds damaging, but competition between them, and competition itself in so far as it is elevated to the level of an ideology. Holley's point is that the family, and not the market place, is the model on which a society can be based. This becomes quite clear at page 155, where in summarizing the Bahai teachings (without reference to specific sources) he says:

No justification is given the view that ecclesiastical doctrines and policies can claim a higher loyalty than that rendered the civil state. Faith in God may not be controlled by the state; the state may not require the individual to betray his spiritual conviction; but apart from this, matters of public policy are wholly under government control.

This certainly does not sound like the words of man who has adopted theocracy as a political principle. His views on church and state should rather be regarded as an almost incidental part of his integrist concept of society, a rejection of the organic structure of postmodern society¹ in favour of the seamless wholeness of the European middle ages.

Of these three influential early American Bahai writers, only David Hofman uses the term theocracy, but he is concerned with the integration of human life: "Religion should be the co-ordinator of all man's functions." Holley's primary theme is that cooperation, not competition, is the basis for society. Both of them

¹ See for example his 1925 essay on 'The origin and development of the Bahai Cause:' "To Baha'u'llah those various standards of truth which sway human society; one standard in religion, another standard in science, a third standard in politics, a fourth standard in industry – this conflict of standards is the source of all the world's ills, the spiritual ignorance which all the prophets came to remove. To Baha'u'llah, religion is not one of life's several aspects, but the predominant spirit which expresses itself through all aspects producing, in its purity, harmony among the diverse elements of will, imagination feeling and thought." (page 425)

explicitly reject the verse “Render to Caesar ...” as pernicious, but neither enters into a scriptural discussion. Holley does give a reason: he says the verse “has been annulled by the law of the oneness of humanity revealed by Baha’u’llah,” which implies that his understanding of ‘oneness’ is that it is morally monolithic, under the command of religion, even if there are spheres of responsibility reserved to governments. These are not millennialists looking forward to divine intervention and the rule of God’s elect, but they are doing their best to fit the Bahai teachings, which require a postmodernist conception of society with functionally differentiated spheres that operate according to their own principles, into an older paradigm in which the state is the central institution of a society that ideally functions under the coordination of one ideology. Hofman and Holley, and the writers who will be mentioned below, represent a sustained attempt to bang the square peg of integrist assumptions into the round hole of the Bahai teachings: it is truly astonishing that the difficulties they obviously encounter did not lead them to conclude that their basic premises might be at fault.

Only Remey has considered the institutional relationship between church and state as an issue and tried to formulate a position. While he too cites no scriptural basis, his views are clearly based on the writings of Baha’u’llah available to him. It is interesting that he does so in the context of Bahai worship and the institution of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkar as the central institution of the Bahai community, and joint worship as the centre of unity of society. Since the Mashriqu’l-Adhkar ‘unifies’ a variety of other institutions that surround it, but does so without exercising any administrative control over them, this already implies an organic model of human society.

Several other writers of the period espouse or imply a theocratic model, and these will be discussed below. While they did not have the influence of the major authors, they are interesting collectively as an indication of attitudes in the Bahai community from the 1940s. One other book, **Dr. Esslemont’s** *Baha’u’llah and the New Era* had if anything a greater influence than Latimer, Hofman, Holley and Remey, and it was first published in 1923. Since Esslemont’s book has undergone numerous revisions extending to the present day, it will be more convenient to consider it later, after this approximately chronological review of other Bahai literature. However it should be said at this point that Esslemont’s original text did show an accurate understanding of the Bahai teachings (it arose in part from discussions with Abdu’l-Baha, and was reviewed by Shoghi Effendi personally). Since it was not revised for the first time until 1937, we can assume that Bahai authors writing in the 1920s and 1930s are familiar with the more accurate first edition, but Bahais of later decades may not be.

Hussein Rabbani wrote a series of articles for *Star of the West* which were published in 1932 and 1933. In ‘The social emphasis in the Baha’i Revelation’ he envisions an active social role for religion, which will not be “divorced from man’s social life but will rather guide it, stabilize it and protect it, although its own domain is not to be confused with social and political activities.”¹ The passage that I have quoted is presented in quotation marks in the original, but without indicating the author concerned. It is possible that this is from an unpublished or untranslated work of Shoghi Effendi, who is the source of the preceding quote. The vocabulary and thought match those of Shoghi Effendi.

In ‘Church and State in the Baha’i Social Order’ (1933),² Hussein Rabbani addresses the issue directly. At the outset he mentions views that minimize the role of the state and attribute ultimate authority to the ‘church,’ and also other views “that church and state – both being essential and divine in character – should stand on an equal basis.”³ The first of these is a position that he was already moving towards, the latter sounds so much like a summary of Bahai scriptural teachings that one wonders whether he might have been discussing the question with his brother, Shoghi Effendi. In any case, Rabbani declines to “enter into a detailed study of these different theories,”⁴ and instead presents a model in which the Bahai Faith is one social force within a society, in which the state also exists. The authority relationship between these two is not detailed, but is somehow to be close and harmonious.

The Baha’i state we have said will be religious and religious in the deepest sense of the word. For the Baha’is believe that religious and political phenomena have some common ground; and that any attempt at creating a gulf between them is not only superficial but disastrous in its results.⁵

This harmony is eventually to lead to a fusion of church and state, in which the Bahai Faith evolves “into a political and social organization adequate to deal with the needs of a complex society.”⁶ The source cited for this belief is not scriptural, but a work in French by Dreyfus that will be discussed with the French literature below.

¹ Vol. 23, No 8, November 1932, Page 237.

² The text is identical to that in ‘Religion and Society: A unified society requires elimination of conflict between church and state’, *World Order*, April 1940.

³ Page 1.

⁴ Page 108 (1933); 1 (1940).

⁵ Page 109 (1933); 4 (1940).

⁶ Page 110 (1933); 5 (1940).

The Bahai teachings, he writes, are of two kinds, the first category consisting of “the various ordinances such as prayer and fasting etc.. No one has the right to impose them on any person” and the second of “all the social and humanitarian teachings such as universal peace, universal language and other various sociological principles that are of general concern. These humanitarian teachings constitute the nucleus of the Bahai social and political program that the Bahai state of the future will attempt to carry out.”¹ He cites the words of Dreyfus that will be discussed below, “The separation of Church and State can only be temporary ... In the presence of religious unity, the state will be religious; ...”² This leads him to his main theme. Because the state is religious, and the religion involved is the Bahai Faith which teaches that “religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is progressive, not final,” “the corner-stone of the Bahai state is the principle of toleration.” The rights of minorities are therefore protected.

As a treatment of the Bahai teachings on Church and State this is hardly adequate. Because he has discussed a Bahai state and has not mentioned the Bahai Administrative Order or other Bahai organs, ‘church and state’ is not in fact discussed. The two spheres he has distinguished are the public and the private. The Bahai Faith has teachings which are ‘of general concern’ but are specifically religious. These include the theology of the state itself, and teachings regarding the religious education of children, the governance of the Bahai community as a religious community, and the role of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkar in relation to social institutions. On the other hand there are teachings in relation to the state which ‘no-one has the right to impose’: the duty of Bahais to pray for their governments, for example.³ The distinction between public and private is an inadequate approximation for that between state and church. The next step would be a theology that fully recognizes that “church and state – both being essential and divine in character – should stand on an equal basis,” a view to which he refers, but not one he seems to endorse.

The other criticisms are minor. His discussion of the mediaeval situation, in which Europe formed “a united Christendom under the spiritual and temporal jurisdiction of a single church” and of “the days of Gregory VII and Innocent III before whom emperors had to bow and ask for mercy”⁴ is inaccurate as history, but perhaps no more can be expected of such a brief treatment. Of more concern is its nostalgic tone. One suspects that the author has not entirely accepted his

¹ Page 109 (1933); 4 (1940).

² Page 110 (1933), 5 (1940), the source being *The Universal Religion* 113, *Essai* 55.

³ *Tablets of Baha’u’llah* 220, *Tablets of Abdu’l-Baha Abbas* 375.

⁴ Page 2.

own thesis that the Bahai 'church' is "a social force" rather than the Government of God.

Finally, he writes that religion's "very purpose [is] to carry out what every political organization attempts to do, namely to maintain peace and order and to enable the individual to realize the best that is in him."¹ This is only half true as a statement of Bahai teachings, for while religion may contribute in other ways to peace and order, Baha'u'llah writes:

The instruments which are essential to the immediate protection, the security and assurance of the human race have been entrusted to the hands, and lie in the grasp, of the governors of human society. This is the wish of God and His decree....²

Without a clear appreciation of the distinction between the different kinds of ordering that the state and religion offer to society, and the resulting difference between their methods, Rabbani leans towards the conclusion that, in the long run, the separate existence of religious and state orders is no more than a needless duplication (as we will see in the books by John Hatcher mentioned below).

In 'The Church and the World' (1938), Hussein Rabbani surveys the state of societies of the time and the positions of churches in them, and concludes:

In all these different political regimes the dilemma with which [the church] is faced is the same, namely, to whom the Christian believer should give his final and supreme allegiance. In other words, all Church members are faced with a conflict of loyalties, a conflict between their loyalty to their Church and their loyalty to their government. For men cannot give supreme allegiance to two powers. Either the Church, as the agency of God and the repository of His laws, is supreme or the State is supreme. The Christian must give final allegiance either to Christ or to Caesar. If to Caesar, then he must accept the mandate of the State, and the Church would have necessarily to be relegated to the background, and cease to count as a living social force.³

This is a somewhat arbitrary outline of the problem that does face some Christians, those who do not have an adequate theology of the state, and do have an extremely simply model of authority in society. This is by no means true of all strands of Christian thought, for alongside the verse "No man can serve two

¹ Page 109 (1933); 3 (1940).

² *Gleanings*, CII 206-7.

³ Page 419.

masters” (Matt. 6:24) there is also “Render unto Caesar ...” (Matt 22:21) and the more extended summation of civil obedience in Romans 13:1-7:

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resists the power, resists the ordinance of God ... Wherefore [you] must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For this cause pay tribute also: for they are God’s ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute [is due]; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

However whether Hussein Rabbani’s generalization of the dilemma facing Christians is fair to Christian theology is not to the point here. What one would expect, following this explanation of the supposed Christian situation, is a reference to those writings of Baha’u’llah that relieve the Bahais of this particular dilemma. In particular, Baha’u’llah’s words in *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*:

Regard for the rank of sovereigns is divinely ordained, as is clearly attested by the words of the Prophets of God and His chosen ones. He Who is the Spirit (Jesus) - may peace be upon Him - was asked: “O Spirit of God! Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?” And He made reply: “Yea, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.” He forbade it not. These two sayings are, in the estimation of men of insight, one and the same, for if that which belonged to Caesar had not come from God, He would have forbidden it.¹

It will be noted that Baha’u’llah’s argument is the same as that in Romans: “there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God,” and therefore the verse “render to Caesar ...” does not represent two competing claims, but two expressions of one claim to loyalty. To return to Holley’s concerns, we can see that in Baha’u’llah’s thought the institutions are separate but they are not competing.

However Rabbani does not refer to these, or any other writings of Baha’u’llah on this point: he remains himself within the simplified church-or-state dilemma that he has somewhat unfairly foisted on Christians. And although he recognizes that ours is a “highly ... complicated social order,” compared to the “relatively primitive society in which Jesus appeared” he nevertheless supposes that there cannot be more than one source of authority in modern society. “The Christian

¹ *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 89-90.

Church ... should indeed organize and lead the world,” but it is unable to do so. “Upon the Church, and not the State, ... devolves the supreme task of rescuing the world; but a Church which has the catholicity, the purity ... of the early Churches a Church which seeks to establish upon earth the Government of God, and thus usher in His Divine Kingdom.”¹ This ‘Church,’ it emerges, is the Bahai Administrative Order. While the word theocracy is not used, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Rabbani is now proposing a pure theocratic model, derived from one world-rejecting strand of Christian thought and projected onto the Bahai Faith with scant regard for Bahai teachings.

An editorial by **Stanwood Cobb** in *Star of the West* in 1934 has a different twist:

In the new world order of Baha’u’llah in which there will be no clergy and no church separate from the state, this regenerative training of character will become the foundation of all education.²

This is quite strange: it is an attitude one would expect in the period 1900-1910, when the western Bahais were entirely ignorant of the plan to have Bahai houses of justice, houses of worship, and other religious institutions, and assumed that all such references were to state institutions. Ignorance could hardly be possible in 1934: Cobb had been appointed editor of *Star of the West* by the National Spiritual Assembly. However his target appears to be the functional differentiation of society, rather than any objection to the organisation of the Baha’i religion. In ‘Christ comes to Des Moines’ he laments the “separation of school, church and state” because it has meant that religion is confined to the private sphere.³

We can mention here a work by **Mirza Ahmad Sohrab**, *Broken Silence*, published in 1942, which adopts an anti-theocratic stance. By the time this was written, Sohrab was no longer a member of the Bahai community, having had a long dispute with the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, and ultimately with the Guardian. His book is polemic, seeking examples that show the National Assembly had deviated from the Bahai teachings so, properly speaking, the book does not belong in a discussion of Bahai secondary literature. However his section on church and state does show us something of the range of opinions and the vigorous debates that were current in the Bahai community in the twenties and thirties. When we put it together with Remey’s earlier works that were mentioned above (written when he was a member of the community, and

¹ Page 421 (twice).

² Vol. 25, No. 5, August 1934, page 133.

³ Vol. 16, No. 2, May 1925, page 432.

widely used as official Bahai publications), we can conclude that there never was a time when theocratic views were uncontested in the American Bahai community.

Remey and Sohrab's association with anti-theocratic views may have strengthened the theocratic wing of the American Bahai community in particular, once they had been expelled from the community: non-theocratic views being tainted by association with these two authors. But it could equally be said that the theocratic views in the American Bahai community coincided with those of S.G. Wilson, its most coherent critic, and they do not seem to have suffered from the association.

Sohrab understands the Bahai teachings as applying both to politics and religion, but separately. "In the teachings of Abdul Baha, as in the constitutional laws of the United States, politics is separated from religion. Neither should interfere with the other, for each has definite and essential services to render to society." Government officials should be "conscious of religion and of the spiritual values," while "religious teachers should be conscious of social and democratic values, and must cooperate with the State ... [but] abstain from political plans and schemes."¹ This sounds very much like Abdu'l-Baha's *Sermon on the Art of Governance*, but Sohrab does not mention it. Instead, he refers to the text in *Paris Talks* 158-9, which we have already shown has been corrupted (see page 224). Oddly, he does not use the Persian notes or the unedited English notes in *Star of the West*, which would make his case more strongly, but rather the edited version printed in *The Wisdom of Abdul Baha*, the title under which *Paris Talks* was published in 1924.²

The focus of Sohrab's treatment is not on the separation of church and state, which he presents briefly, but rather the corollary duty of believers to participate in civil politics. If the religious community does not put itself forward as an alternative mechanism of government, but rather recognises the right of the state to perform this function, and if it is a well-wisher of the state and believes that its doctrines contribute to the trustworthiness and altruism of its members, then it cannot restrain its members from taking up their share of the burden of supporting the state. The difficulty for Bahais is that there are contradictory statements from Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi saying that the Bahais should, and should not, participate in politics. We need to understand the historical circumstances of each statement to derive some rules that will tell us when we have a duty to participate,

¹ Sohrab, *Broken Silence* 473-5.

² The three versions of this talk are presented in Appendix 3. Sohrab does in fact quote a short extract from the *Star of the West* version (on page 475), without realising that it is an earlier version of the text in *The Wisdom of Abdul Baha*.

when it is recommended, and when it is forbidden. I have addressed this issue briefly below (page 350) and hope to return to it in a subsequent volume dealing with the more practical issues of the Bahai teachings about society and the state. For now we can see how Sohrab deals with the conundrum.

Sohrab's immediate problem is that the National Spiritual Assembly, acting on instructions from Shoghi Effendi, had told the American Bahais that they may not be members of a party or (according to Sohrab) vote in elections,¹ and he disagrees with that. He uses the text from *Wisdom of Abdul Baha* to show that in Paris in 1911, Abdu'l-Baha praised the involvement of Iranian Bahais in political life, yet he also recognises that Abdu'l-Baha had previously told the Bahais in Iran to have nothing to do with politics. Sohrab proposes that the change comes about because Iran had in the meantime become a democratic country (following the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-6) and therefore that the prohibition on participation applies only under despotic rulers, and was a temporary measure for the protection of the vulnerable and misrepresented Bahai communities in Iran and the Ottoman Empire. The first of these arguments seems to me to be wrong, because there had been Babi and Bahai government officials under the Qajars, who were not required to resign their positions on conversion, and Baha'u'llah's tablet to Sultan Abdulaziz advises the Sultan to select as his ministers people who are faithful, just, and believers in God,² which surely implies a duty for believers to serve a just monarch if asked – even an absolute monarch. Moreover Sohrab must have known that during and after the Constitutional Revolution Abdu'l-Baha changed his position, first urging Bahais to vote for two Hands of the Cause who were standing for the Majles, and later telling them to withdraw.³ Therefore I do not think that the form of government concerned is the essential issue, yet Sohrab's distinction is relevant, since a democratic government relies on the

¹ *Broken Silence* 481. The passage from Shoghi Effendi (*World Order of Baha'u'llah* 63-4) forbids only “interference” in “the political affairs of any particular government.” Later letters from his secretary and from the National Assembly from about 1932 say that the Bahais should not vote or be affiliated with movements that are, in name or defacto, political.

² *The Proclamation of Baha'u'llah* 47-8.

³ See *Makatib-e Abdu'l-Baha* vol. 2, 263 (not specifying which Hands should be supported); Cole, ‘Bahai Faith’ in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* vol. 3 page 440. Cole is incorrect in dating this change, since he has put the *Risalih-ye Siyasiyyah* after, rather than before, the letters encouraging political participation. It is also not correct to say that the *Risalih-ye Siyasiyyah* tells the Bahais not to engage in politics: its theme is the separation of church and state and the non-interference of religious *leaders* in political questions.

participation of all citizens, and can be brought down by non-participation, whereas under an absolute monarchy only a portion of the population can be active participants in the government apparatus, and the mass of the people are expected only to obey.

The effect of Sohrab's argument is that participation in politics is permitted under any democratic government, where it does not endanger the Bahai community.¹ In support of this he presents Abdu'l-Baha's well-known tablet to Thornton Chase, which states that the American believers have a duty to "take part in the elections of officers and take part in the affairs of the Republic."² He also cites an address given by Abdu'l-Baha on July 23rd 1912 and reported in *Star of the West*.³ Abdu'l-Baha says:

The injunction to Baha'is has been this :- They must not engage in matters of politics which lead to corruption. They must have nothing to do with corruption or sedition but should interest themselves in clean politics. In Persia, at the present time, the Bahais have no part in the movements which have terminated in corruption; but on the other hand a Bahai may be a politician of the right type; even ministers in Persia are Baha'is. We have Governor Generals who are Baha'is and there are many other Baha'is who take part in politics, but not in corruption. It is evident they must have nothing to do with seditious movements. For example, if the Americans should arise with the intention of reinstating despotism, the Baha'is should take no part in it.

Sohrab clearly considers the democratic politics of the United States in his day to be 'clean' politics. From what we know of the Democratic and Republican party machines of the 1930s, we may doubt that. But whether the Guardian and

¹ I would propose three conditions, regardless of the form of government: that the politics are non-ideological (see page 350), that the system of government is not corrupt and does not require Bahai participants to compromise their consciences (this is the 'just king' argument, generalised to include democratic systems), and that the condition of the society does not set rulers in opposition to the people and *vice versa*. The ideal of harmony between the ruler and the ruled is a theme in Abdu'l-Baha's *Sermon on the Art of Governance* and *Secret of Divine Civilization*, and I think it explains why, at a certain point in the development of the Constitutional Revolution, he instructed the Iranian Bahais to withdraw, whereas 30 years earlier he had himself been encouraging democratic and modernising reforms.

² *Tablets of Abdul Baha Abbas* 342-3. The text has been cited above at page 221.

³ *Broken Silence* 471-2, from *Star of the West* Vol 4 No. 7 p. 122. This report is not supported by any Persian notes.

the National Assembly were right or wrong in their assessment of the American political scene, Sohrab is clearly inconsistent in his position. He has recognised and argued that Abdu'l-Baha at some times forbade the legitimate political participation which, in normal circumstances, he considered to be a Bahai duty. He could not reasonably argue that, in his own time, this duty to participate in politics had become an absolute that the Guardian and the National Spiritual Assembly could not limit.¹

G.A. Shook's 1946 *World Order* articles, under the series title 'Youth in the Modern World,' include one article entitled 'A Divine Administrative Order,' in which he writes:

We moderns have a decided antipathy, and with some justification, for an administrative order that resembles in any way the theocracies with which we are familiar. We still remember the long warfare between church and state and we do not want to return to anything like the divine right of the church. Ostensibly the complete separation of church and state was a real advance in the evolution of our collective life, but we should not forget that both church and state suffered from the separation. For one thing, science became the ally of the state, and instead of confining its activities to enlightenment and human welfare, the state misused it. After all, the separation of church and state is merely a phase of our sensate culture and will go when the sensate culture goes, but let us see why the theocratic form of government failed in the past.²

The idea that the separation of church and state was a passing phase in the development of civilization echoes a work by Hippolyte Dreyfus, *Essai sur le Baha'isme* (1909) which is dealt with below. The book was translated and widely used in the early American community, and we have already seen that Wilson cites it as a source.³

The reference to science is a *non-sequitur*: there is no necessary connection between the successful separation of church and state, giving each the room to establish its own agenda, and those instances in which science has failed to establish its independence. So far as one can reason from analogy, the fact that science has been subordinated to the logic of the state in some instances would indicate that the process of the successive differentiation of various spheres of life

¹ For example, in *Broken Silence* 508.

² Page 181.

³ I do not have the English translation of this work (*Bahatism, The Universal Religion*, 1909): this phrase is as cited in Rabbani, 'Religion and Society,' 5, who gives the source as page 55.

and of the corresponding social institutions is not yet completed. How Shook comes to deduce that it shows that the separation of church and state is merely a phase, or is related to sensate culture, is not clear. He continues:

In theory a theocracy is the government of a state by the immediate direction of God, but the kind we are familiar with in Christianity is a state which is controlled by the vicegerents of Christ, the successors of the apostles.

He then points to the lack of a clearly designated centre of religious authority in Christianity and Islam, giving the examples of Peter and Ali, and says:

This lack of sanction might not, in itself, prove a serious obstacle to success, but there is always a grave danger with *self-appointed* authority; it may and usually does, assume powers and privileges incompatible with the revelation which it claims to represent.¹

The argument, such as it is, simply stops here. On the face of it, unless we are to suppose that Jesus really intended Peter to govern the world, the argument only addresses the need for a church government with authenticated authority, and tells us nothing about theocracy. In the following section he discusses episcopal authority and alleges:

Episcopal authority recognizes no superior power and when it is in a position to exercise its divine prerogative it is supreme, sovereign.²

This is quite extraordinary as an explanation of Christian teachings, for those churches that have retained the episcopacy are the *least* likely to claim temporal sovereignty, while many of those that have rejected episcopacy retain the hope of eventually exercising supreme sovereignty as viceregents of the returned Christ. This section also addresses another aspect of church order, the sacraments, while the following section contrasts the lack of a clear succession in Christianity and Islam with the situation in the “divinely-appointed [Bahai] administrative order.”³ “The Baha’i Administrative Order is a creation and not a fortuitous composition. It is unique and it is just this uniqueness that distinguishes it from all former systems of *government*.” (ibid, emphasis added). Here he glides from church government, where he has shown the Bahai model to be different from

¹ ‘A Divine Administrative Order’ 181, emphasis in the original.

² *Op. cit.* 183.

³ *Op. cit.* 184.

Christian models, to government per se, which his argument has not addressed at all. It appears, in fact, that it has not occurred to Shook that these might be two different things, either in the Christian past or in the future. The circularity of the last sentence quoted gives a fair indication of the quality of thinking in the argument as a whole.

Emeric Sala's 1946 article, 'New hope for minority peoples' presents a critique of the democratic system of government (meaning a multi-party system), which he says has little to offer minorities. He then says that:

... the Baha'i conception of a democratic form of government, which already operates in an embryonic form in more than seventy countries ... establishes a new standard of social responsibility...

... The world plan of Baha'u'llah calls for democratic elections at regular intervals without political parties, without any campaign promises or party platform ...¹

It seems clear that Sala is assuming that the Bahai administrative order is also to be the temporal government of a Bahai state. He transfers the principles that govern the election and operation of the Bahai administrative order to the political order. But the principles provided in the Bahai writings for these two orders are different, and in some cases antithetical. For instance, Sala refers to the principle that the Houses of Justice in the Bahai administrative order are not answerable to the electors but to their consciences and to God,² but Abdu'l-Baha said that elected government officials should be answerable to the people.³ There is a similar contrast between the combination of the judicial, legislative and executive powers in the constitution of the Universal House of Justice and the separation of these powers in the Bahai model of the ideal state.⁴

David Ruhe, in his 1948 essay 'Religion for adults' speaks in favour of a theocratic model, with some reservations:

¹ Pages 267, 268.

² Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah* 153. The distinction is implied in the terms 'trustees of the Merciful,' referring to the members of the House of Justice, as compared to 'trustees of mankind,' referring to members of civil governments (*Aqdas* paragraph 30; *The World Order of Baha'u'llah* 203).

³ *Secret of Divine Civilization* 24.

⁴ Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions* 276; *Secret of Divine Civilization* 37; Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah* 203.

It [the Bahai Faith] declares the need for fusion of church and state without equivocation. But the ‘church’ is a vastly different organism from that we know; and it will fuse with an enormously different ‘state.’ Neither are precisely in accord with American concepts of this hour.

Like all the other Bahai authors mentioned here, with the exception of Christopher Sprung and Juan Cole, he provides no references to Bahai scripture to support this declaration.

A decade later, in *Christ and Baha’u’llah* (1957) **George Townsend** wrote a section regarding the appointment of the Guardian, who “while distinctly a human being, [is] the nearest approach on earth to the Divine exaltation.” “When it is written that ‘the government shall be upon his shoulder’ the reference can be to the Guardian only and the continuing ‘forever’ of his sovereignty can only be referred to the lineage of succeeding Guardians.”¹ This is interesting because it shows the influence of Christian eschatological symbolism (no Bahai source is cited), and because the focus is on the Guardian as something like a world-king, with only a passing reference to the Universal House of Justice.

In a 1956 article, **Marion Hofman** (the wife of David Hofman) expands on the Hebrew and Christian expectation of the Kingdom of God on Earth, which is distinguished from other utopian ideals by being “a kingdom, and a kingdom not of men but of God.” This can now be established, since God has intervened. Like David Earl’s essay in the same volume of *The Baha’i World* (1950-54), Hofman distinguishes two processes: political unification which is almost completed, and the spiritualisation of the world, which has barely begun. “Ultimately, the two processes are destined to meet and, after a time of gradual fusion, they will culminate in ... [a] World Commonwealth.” This leaves open the question of whether the institutions are to fuse, or to remain separate. Its thrust is to postpone the realisation into the far but finite future, as something like an eschatological hope, coming not at the end of time but at a distant time.

One academic treatment is mentioned here, because it is written by a Bahai and because the position it adopts owes more to the popular Bahai literature than to scholarly study. It appears in the prestigious *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, in the lemma ‘Bahais.’ The article was written in 1958 by **Alesandro Bausani**, himself a Bahai and a scholar of Iranian studies of the highest order. In discussing the Bahai administrative institutions he says:

¹ *Christ and Baha’u’llah*, 1957 edition 100-1. The passage has been changed in later editions of the book. I owe this reference to Vance Salisbury, ‘An Examination of Suppression and Distortion in 20th-Century Baha’i Literature,’ unpublished paper obtained from the Bahai-library web site.

For the Baha'is such a system is not merely a means of internal administration of the Community's affairs, but the prototype of the ideal world government of the future, which will eventually arise after a long process of peaceful evolution. The Baha'is do not accept the separation of Church and State, but maintain that in the absence of priests and sacraments the Baha'i fusion of religion and administration will take on a different character from that of the traditional theocracies.

In an article written in the same year he wrote:

The Baha'is do not accept the separation of church and state or, rather, they accept it only if "church" is understood as a sacramental structure that attributes special honours and sacred functions to a group of individuals, the "priests." Since priesthood and sacraments do not exist in Baháism, Baha'i unity assumes a nature which is different from that of past experiments in theocracy. In all events this explains why declared Baha'is are forbidden to belong to any political party or secret society.¹

But the first does not logically explain the second at all: if the teaching of the separation of church and state extended only to the involvement of priesthoods in political affairs, why would *lay* people, whether Bahai or of other religions, not be allowed to be members of political parties? If that was what was meant by the emphatic statements of Baha'u'llah and of Abdu'l-Baha, then there would be no reason why the Bahais, who lack a sacramental priesthood, should not be involved in politics. Clearly these are different issues.

The first argument remains: could the Bahai teachings be understood as applying only to the priesthoods of other religions, and not to the Bahai religious institutions? This is an argument that has been outlined recently in a conference proposal by **Susan Maneck**, but so far as I know has not been presented or published. I will therefore have to guess at the reasoning that might lie behind it.

First, it could be said that Baha'u'llah's vision of politics is deeply democratic, and the Bahai Faith has some democratic religious institutions. Or perhaps Bausani thought political decisions should be made collectively in consultation, and the priesthoods of other religions are individual. This could be supported by the verse: "From two ranks amongst men power (*'izzat*) hath been seized: kings (*umará*) and ecclesiastics (*ulamá*)."

Second, it might be said that Baha'u'llah considered the religious institutions of other religions to be man-made accretions without a scriptural mandate such as that which he gave to the Houses of Justice.

¹ In *Persia Religiosa*, Milan, 1959, translated as *Religion in Iran* 403.

Thirdly, the thinking could be that the verses in which Baha'u'llah forbids the involvement of religion in political matters are addressed to Islamic ulama and to the Pope, and do not apply to other religions, while those which forbid the state interfering with religion, some of which do specifically refer to the Bahai community, are motivated only by a tactical desire for protection at the time and not by a deep principle.

Against these possible arguments, there are two general points: first that this may be a possible reading of individual verses, but not of Baha'u'llah's writings as a whole. Baha'u'llah wholeheartedly endorses the position of the civil governments and of monarchs, as we have already seen, saying that the sovereignty of the prophets is a spiritual ascendancy not a worldly one (*Kitab-e Iqan*), that the rulers have a divine mandate to rule, and should do so justly (in the Tablets to the Kings), that God reserves the hearts of men for himself and delegates all else to the kings and rulers, and that this is God's "irrevocable decree."¹ To claim that an author who says such things means them only as a tactical justification for removing the influence of the ulama in politics, and is secretly intending – for it is nowhere explicit – to abolish the separation of church and state when his own 'church' is more capable, is an assault on Baha'u'llah's character. It is also inconsistent with the fact that Baha'u'llah envisions a world religious system to be established by his followers, and a world political system to be established by the great powers, in the first place, and then to include all the governments with the support of all peoples.²

A second general point is that such a reading does not give due weight to the dual (but not dualist) metaphysics that underlies Baha'u'llah's social vision. It supposes that the ideal is monist unity, and that the explanation for statements pointing to a continuity of both religious authorities and civil authorities must be

¹ *Gleanings* CXXVIII, 279, *Summons*, Surah-ye Haykal section 217.

² These matters are covered summarily here, because they belong to the theology of the state and the theology of community structures (ecclesiology) respectively, and are to be addressed in subsequent volumes. The line of thought regarding the world political order can be seen in Baha'u'llah's *Lawh-e Maqsud* (in *Tablets of Baha'u'llah* 165, *Gleanings* CXVII): "... the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized. The rulers and kings of the earth must needs attend it, and ... must consider such ways and means as will lay the foundations of the world's Great Peace amongst men. Such a peace demandeth that the Great Powers should resolve to be fully reconciled among themselves. Should any king take up arms against another, all should unitedly arise and prevent him. If this be done, the nations of the world will no longer require any armaments, except for the purpose of preserving the security of their realms and of maintaining internal order within their territories."

sought in one or other inadequacy of the non-Bahai religious authorities. But in the writings of Abdu'l-Baha, in particular, we have seen that the metaphysical basis of society is not monist, but a harmony of separate forces (unicity being a property of God alone), and particularly a harmony of the *do qovveh*, two forces, which are manifest in the religious order and the political order. We need to read Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha not just as social commentators reflecting on the politics of their time, but primarily as theo-logical thinkers, whose starting point is a vision of how social order can best reflect the Kingdom of Names, in order to create the Kingdom of God on earth.

To turn to the first possible argument, if Baha'u'llah's rejection of the involvement of religious institutions in politics was only a by-product of a deeper objection to undemocratic or individually-centred politics, one would expect him to be equally robust in rejecting the institution of monarchy. But, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, "His teachings embody no principle that can, in any way, be construed as a repudiation, or even a disparagement, however veiled, of the institution of kingship."¹ Likewise, Baha'u'llah is not anti-clerical: he measures the Muslim ulama and religious leaders in general against a very high standard, and condemns them where they fall short, but he nowhere calls for the abolition of the institution itself, and does explicitly refer to and praise the Bahai ulama. He writes, "From two ranks amongst men power (*'izzat*) hath been seized: kings and ecclesiastics," and the word *'izzat* would normally be translated as honour and respect. But Shoghi Effendi, in the light of his knowledge of Baha'u'llah's intent, which was not to diminish the honour of the monarchs and ulama, but to remove both from power, translates it correctly. Power is seized from the kings in the sense of absolute monarchy being transformed into constitutional monarchy in which real power belongs to the people's representatives, and from the clergy of all religions because of the separation of church and state, and the maturity of the believers, who are now capable of searching for truth for themselves. If both the religious and political authorities are condemned for a similar fault, which we would now call a 'democratic deficit,' and the remedy for both is similar, why should their healthier successors not continue side-by-side into the future?

The second argument, that Baha'u'llah considered the religious institutions of other religions to lack the scriptural mandate that he gave to the Houses of Justice, and that the House of Justice can therefore appropriately take over the role of government while this is condemned for other religious institutions, rests on a presupposition that a monist social order is what is intended. It also rests on a confusion of terms, for when we say "the Bahai institutions" we usually mean the institutions maintained by the Bahais to support their own religious order:

¹ *The Promised Day is Come* 70.

primarily the Houses of Justice, the Guardianship and its dependent organs, and the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar. But if by Bahai institutions we mean those institutions with a mandate in the Bahai scriptures, then the civil government, constitutional monarchy and a world federal system are all Bahai institutions and part of what Shoghi Effendi calls "the World Order of Baha'u'llah." The proposed takeover would, God forbid, be a struggle within that world order.

The third argument supposes that the term *ulama* refers specifically to Islamic *ulama*, and by extension to all those religious institutions in which leadership rests on expertise. The Bahai faith has its own *ulama*, who have an important role in the community, but its Houses of Justice are lay institutions, elected from among the believers by the believers, without any requirement of religious knowledge. Thus it could be said that the term *ulama* does not refer to them. But while *ulama* is the term most frequently used in those verses that mandate the separation of religion and politics, others are also found. For instance, in the *Sermon on the Art of Governance*, Abdu'l-Baha writes:

If you refer to history, you would find countless examples of this sort, all based on the involvement of religious leaders (*ru'sá-ye dín*) in political matters. These souls are the fountainhead of the interpretation of God's commandments, not of implementation. (See page 391 in Appendix 1)

Another term used is *pishvayan*. It would hardly be possible to claim that the Houses of Justice are not covered by the term 'religious leaders' and it would be a curious twist of logic to say that the Houses of Justice are more qualified to assume the role of government because they lack the religious expertise that is required for the clergy in other religions, while they share with the *ulama* the ignorance of the "complexities of political matters" which is one of the reasons Abdu'l-Baha advances for excluding the *ulama* from politics.

With this I hope I have dealt adequately with the basis of Bausani's claim that the non-clerical nature of the Bahai Houses of Justice exempts them from the general principle of the separation of church and state. Because I have had to guess at the reasoning that lies behind this claim, it may be that I have done Bausani, and others holding this view, an injustice.

In an article originally intended for a non-Bahai audience (publ. 1950) and later reprinted in *The Baha'i World*, 1950-54, **David Earl** refers to social evolution proceeding along two distinct lines, the political, from which the foundation of a world state may eventually emerge, and the non-political, "where in institutions such as those of the Baha'is the new principles of world consciousness and administration without partisanship are being developed." What is unusual about this, as will be evident from the discussion of the revisions

of Esslemont's book below, is that the two processes are seen as concurrent rather than successive. In this he is correctly paraphrasing Shoghi Effendi, in *Citadel of Faith*.¹ Shoghi Effendi refers to two processes, one "associated with the mission of the American Baha'i Community, the other with the destiny of the American nation" of which the first "will be consummated through the emergence of the Baha'i World Commonwealth in the Golden Age of the Baha'i Dispensation," and the second in "the emergence of a world government." That is, for Shoghi Effendi (but not for any other Bahai author I am aware of) the Bahai World Commonwealth is a purely religious community, and world government is and will remain a political matter. Earl sees them as separate, but not as distinct, since he supposes that the Bahai teachings regarding the elections and structure of the Administrative Order are also Bahai teachings for the political order. Moreover he concludes with the hope "that ultimately the spiritual and political lines of administrative evolution will come together" and then reveals, accidentally, that he thinks this would entail the Universal House of Justice becoming a world government. He says, *en passant*, that "the chairman of even the universal authority should have no veto power." There is no reference in the Bahai writings to a chairman of the institutions of world government: this refers to Shoghi Effendi's stipulation in *The Dispensation of Baha'u'llah* that the Guardian, as chairman of the Universal House of Justice, "cannot override the decision of the majority of his fellow-members."²

J.E. Esslemont's *Baha'u'llah and the New Era* has been a standard text and very influential from its first publication in 1923. That first publication does not contain any mention of the Bahai religious institutions playing any possible role in government. The chapter on government begins by stating:

Baha'u'llah did not lay down hard and fast rules for the details of social life ... Baha'u'llah counsels, although he does not definitely enjoin, the form of national government known as "Constitutional Monarchy." In the Glad Tidings he says: "Although a democratic form of government profits all the people of the world, yet the majesty of kingship is one of the signs of God. We do not wish that the countries of the world should be deprived thereof. If statesmen combine the two into one form, their reward will be great before God."

This is followed by some notes of a discussion between Esslemont and Abdu'l-Baha regarding forms of government. Esslemont was fortunate to be able to visit Abdu'l-Baha in Haifa for two months in 1919 and to discuss with him the

¹ Pages 31-33.

² Published in *The World Order of Baha'u'llah* 150.

drafts for the first chapters of his book, but not the chapter dealing with government (although this chapter was read and approved by Shoghi Effendi, according to Esslemont's 'Prefatory Note'). During this discussion, Abdu'l-Baha is reported to have explained that the reason a constitutional monarchy is preferable to a republican form of government is that presidential elections plunge the country into a political contest, and "when the country is in such a state, justice will not prevail." Abdu'l-Baha says that such a monarchy has no legislative power, and that parliament can dethrone an unworthy king. Because of their interest, and because they have been removed from the editions of the book currently available, these notes are cited in full in the appendices (page 403 below). Esslemont continues with sections which can be summarised as follows:

- on political freedom. Esslemont says "Although advocating as the ideal condition a fully democratic or rather representative form of government ... Baha'u'llah teaches that this is possible only when men have attained a sufficiently high degree of individual and social development. Suddenly to grant full self-government to people without education, who are dominated by selfish desires and are inexperienced in the conduct of public affairs, would be disastrous. There is nothing more dangerous than freedom for those who are not fit to use it wisely." The presentation in this section is clearly shaped by the question of decolonisation, but may also refer to the extension of the franchise in light of European anarchist movements. In *Secret of Divine Civilization*, Abdu'l-Baha refers to "the terrible events of the Commune, the savage acts, the ruin and horror when opposing factions fought and killed one another in the streets of Paris,"¹ and the selections from the *Kitab-e Aqdas* that Esslemont cites are addressed particularly to anarchism and libertinism.
- on Baha'u'llah's condemnation of oppression and injustice on the part of rulers, his advocacy of consultative government and the corresponding duty of subjects to obey the law and eschew violence as a means of bringing about change'
- on civil appointments, which should be made by merit only, implying the rejection of aristocracy as a principle, but also requiring transparency in the civil service.
- on economic justice, rejecting both communist egalitarianism, as unnatural and impracticable, and extremes of wealth and poverty. The latter are to be limited both by voluntary sharing and by 'special laws.'²

¹ Page 63.

² Page 127.

Subsequent sections deal with the devolution of fiscal responsibility, and with welfare, voluntary sharing and employment. Nowhere does Esslemont imply that the possibility of a state administered by religious bodies had even occurred to him. The presentation is clear, cites its sources in the Bahai Writings throughout, and accords closely with them. It does not however tell us what Esslemont thought about the role of religious institutions in social and political life.

His book, *Baha'u'llah and the New Era* has since gone through many revisions, to the point that it can no longer be considered Esslemont's work, any more than Gray's *Anatomy* is the work of Gray. Both serve as standard reference works, and are regularly updated and brought into conformity with what is thought to be best practice. As such it gives an insight into the views accepted by those serving on Bahai elected institutions and the editorial committees they have appointed. In the 1980 edition, which is the fifth revised edition of *Baha'u'llah and the New Era*, the section on 'government' (135-137) is entirely different to the original. It begins:

The teachings of Baha'u'llah contain two different types of reference to the question of true social order. One type is exemplified in the tablets revealed to the Kings, which deal with the problem of government as existing in the world during Baha'u'llah's life on earth; the other references are to the new order to be developed within the Baha'i community itself. Hence arises the sharp contrast between such passages as: "The one true God, exalted be His glory, hath ever regarded, and will continue to regard, the hearts of men as His own, His exclusive possession. All else, whether pertaining to land or sea, whether riches or glory, He hath bequeathed unto the Kings and rulers of the earth" and "It beseemeth all men, in this Day, to take firm hold on the Most Great Name, and to establish the unity of all mankind. There is no place to flee to, no refuge that any one can seek, except Him." – *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah* 206, 203.

The apparent incompatibility of these two views ...

What incompatibility is referred to here? The first passage cited states that the delegation of worldly power to the 'Kings and rulers' is a permanent part of the divine plan, and says indeed that it always has been so. The editors' supposition that it applies only to Baha'u'llah's lifetime is contradicted by the text itself, and has no possible basis in the Bahai scriptures. The second passage refers to the duty of all – including, presumably, those in government – to recognise the new revelation and act on it, by establishing unity. The authors have created a

difficulty that is not there, a problem that requires the solution they have ready at hand:

... The apparent incompatibility of these two views is removed when we observe the distinction which Baha'u'llah makes between the 'Lesser Peace' and the 'Most Great Peace.'

The solution offered here is to divide history into two consecutive periods. This is one possible meaning of the terms 'Lesser Peace' and the 'Most Great Peace,' although someone familiar with the use of the terms 'Lesser Jihad' and 'Greater Jihad' in Islamic theology might be inclined to view the 'lesser peace,' like the 'lesser struggle,' as applying only to outward forms, while the Most Great Peace like the Greater Jihad refers to outward change achieved by inner transformation. These would then correspond to the two simultaneous processes that Shoghi Effendi refers to (see page 232 above). Be that as it may, if the reference to two periods resolves the 'apparent incompatibility,' the authors must suppose that either the principle of the delegation of power to governments or the religious duty "to take firm hold on the Most Great Name, and to establish the unity of all mankind" belongs to the first period, and the other to the second. The authors do not explain, but it seems likely that it is the first – the separation of church and state – which is regarded as belonging to a preliminary period of 'lesser peace.' The difficulties are in any case equal, since the first passage they cite from Baha'u'llah says explicitly that it is an immutable principle, and the second, the duty to recognise the Manifestation and obey the revelation, is a paraphrase of the first paragraph of the *Kitab-e Aqdas*, whose provisions cannot be changed within the Bahai dispensation.

The authors of this section of *Baha'u'llah and the New Era* continue by referring to Baha'u'llah's tablets to the Kings, which assign political rulers a specific role in achieving and maintaining "political peace, the reduction of armaments and the removal of the burdens and insecurity of the poor."

But His words make it perfectly clear that their failure to respond to the needs of the time would result in wars and revolutions leading to the overthrow of the old order. Therefore, on the one hand He said: "What mankind needeth in this day is obedience unto them that are in authority," and on the other, "Those men who, having amassed the vanities and ornaments of the earth, have turned away disdainfully from God – these have lost both this world and the world to come. Ere long, will God, with the Hand of Power, strip them of their possessions, and divest them of the robe of His bounty." *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, pp. 207, 209.

Is this the incompatibility they refer to? But then the problem would be resolved by pointing out that God's eternal delegation of worldly power to human governments does not mean that any particular form of government or particular government is good, or is permanent. Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha both expected that absolute monarchies would continue to give way to republics or, preferably, constitutional monarchies. They both warned that particular rulers of their time had but short futures and would answer to God, but that is true of all mortals. Perhaps the authors feel there is a contradiction between urging obedience to government and expecting bad governments to fall? But clearly the Bahai teaching of obedience to government does not imply that governments should never be replaced. As we have seen, even monarchs can be replaced,¹ but then by a vote of parliament, not by acts of disobedience.

The section then cites Baha'u'llah's reference, in the *Lawh-e Maqsd*, to the role of 'rulers and kings' in establishing 'the world's Great Peace' by international treaty and by acting together against any aggressor, and his reference to the role of the religion in this process:

That which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world is the union of all its peoples in one universal Cause, one common Faith. This can in no wise be achieved except through the power of a skilled, an all-powerful and inspired Physician.

They conclude, in what seems a non-sequitur to all that has gone before, "In former ages, a government could concern itself with external matters and material affairs, but today the function of government demands a quality of leadership, of consecration and of spiritual knowledge *impossible save to those who have turned to God.*"² Clearly they envision some unspecified shift in the role of government, perhaps extending it into the sphere of religion, which demands that only religious believers should participate. Neither the details nor the basis of these beliefs are specified.

This ends the presentation of the Bahai teachings on 'government' in the current edition of *Baha'u'llah and the New Era*. In reading it one has the sense that it is shaped by assumptions about politics or religion in general, or about the Bahai teachings, which the writers are not conscious of, or are unwilling to state explicitly. It is tempting to make some sense of it by imputing a theocratic theory to the authors, but the text does not appear to me to support this or any other coherent reading. It will seem unkind to say it, but with all its brevity, vagueness

¹ See Appendix 2, page 403.

² Page 137.

and incoherence this is the most extensive and best grounded presentation of current Bahai political thinking available in the Bahai secondary literature. Unusually, it cites scriptural texts, even if the reasoning by which the authors have proceeded from those texts to their conclusions is unclear. The book, in its various forms, has served as a standard outline of Bahai history and teachings for three-quarters of a century, and for the first fifty years was almost the only book that could be regarded as an ‘introduction’ to the Bahai Faith. It has been translated into many languages. Collins’ bibliography lists 21 printings of the English edition between 1923 and 1985. Moreover the work as we now have it is the 5th revised edition, representing the efforts of a series of editors, publishing and reviewing committees and National Spiritual Assemblies. It is not unreasonable to take it as evidence of the almost complete lack of understanding of politics and the Bahai political teachings in the Bahai community as a whole.

Another interesting indicator of change over time is the successive versions of a footnote to chapter 45 of Abdu’l-Baha’s *Some Answered Questions*, in which Abdu’l-Baha refers to the infallibility (*ma^csúm*, protection) of the Universal House of Justice.¹ In the 1908 London edition an explanatory footnote has been added:

Baitu’l-^cAdl, i.e. the House of Justice, is an institution designed by Baha’u’llah for the administration of the future city. The General House of Justice will determine the laws of the nation, and the International House of Justice will act as a tribunal of arbitration.

The term ‘General’ House of Justice is simply an alternative translation of *Bayt-u’l^cAdl Umumi*, also translated as the International or Universal House of Justice, so the translator, Laura Barney² has in effect split one institution in two. Her national ‘Universal House of Justice’ has become the *legislative* branch of civil government at the national level, while the local House of Justice is the *executive* branch at the city level, and the international Universal House of Justice has been assimilated to the world tribunal, an international *judicial* body. The world

¹ I am grateful to Gerald Keil for noticing the relevance of the footnotes in the translation, and for information regarding the German edition (Talisman9, 14 February 2005).

² There is good reason to suspect that her translation relies more on the previous French translation by Dreyfus (whom she later married) than on reading the Persian, and that her explanatory note is taken from a similar note in the French translation, and not *vice versa*. This will be discussed with the writings of Dreyfus, under the secondary literature in French.

tribunal is also described in *Some Answered Questions*, in Abdu'l-Baha's commentary on the eleventh chapter of Isaiah. In Barney's translation, this reads:

When the laws of the Most Holy Book are enforced, contentions and disputes will find a final sentence of absolute justice before a general tribunal of the nations and kingdoms (*mahkama-ye umúmiy-ye duwal-o-milal*), and the difficulties that appear will be solved.¹

In assimilating the Universal House of Justice and the International Tribunal, Barney passes over the fact that Abdu'l-Baha has used different terms, and that the task of the members of the House of Justice is "to take counsel together regarding those things which have not outwardly been revealed in the Book, and to enforce that which is agreeable to them,"² that is, that it has both legislative and executive functions (but for the religious, not the civil law). What Barney could not have known (because it was first published in 1920) was that the electoral methods for the world tribunal were set out by Abdu'l-Baha in the 'Tablet to the Hague,' while the electoral methods for the Universal House of Justice are explained in other letters of Abdu'l-Baha that Shoghi Effendi has translated (see eg. pages 218, 231 above). The electoral methods for the two institutions are different, and neither can be changed.

In the 1962 German translation (presumably based on some earlier English version), this footnote moves the Universal House of Justice from the judicial to the legislative branch of civil government at the international level, but keeps the local House of Justice as the civil executive:

Baytu'l-^cAdl is the 'House of Justice,' an institution envisioned by Baha'u'llah for the administration of future cities. The National House of Justice will issue legislation for the nation, whereas the Universal House of Justice is for the whole world.

In an undated edition from the United Kingdom (probably Collins item 3.128, which he dates 196X), the footnote explains:

¹ Page 74 of the 1908 edition, page 64 of the 1990 pocket-sized edition, pages 48-9 of the Persian edition. In the 1908 edition, a footnote to this explains that the general tribunal means: "The universal *Baitu 'l-^cAdl*, a sort of tribunal of international arbitration, instituted by Baha'u'llah in the *Kitabu'l-Aqdas*, the Most Holy Book."

² Baha'u'llah, *Kalimat-e Firdawsiiyih*, in *Tablets of Baha'u'llah* 68.

Bayt'l-^cAdl. i.e., the House of Justice, is an institution designed by Baha'u'llah for the administration of the future city. The Universal House of Justice will determine laws not already revealed by Baha'u'llah.

This appears to be based on the 1908 version, but again moves the Universal House of Justice from the judicial to the legislative branch. The 1964 American edition has the same note as the 1908 edition, but in the 1970 printing of this edition, there is an erratum slip bound in, which reads:

p. 198n: Baytu'l-^cAdl-i-A'zam, i.e., The Universal House of Justice, elected by members of the National Spiritual Assemblies. This body can make and abrogate its own laws and legislate on matters not explicitly revealed by Baha'u'llah.¹

This implicitly separates the Universal House of Justice from the Bahai teachings about world government. The footnotes in the 1987 edition and the 1990 American pocket-size edition are also correct on this point. The successive versions reflect the efforts of a substantial group of the more educated western Bahais to make Baha'u'llah's world order model coherent, without knowing about (or while refusing to concede) its fundamental architecture: a dual structure in organic unity. In the end, they have found a correct formulation, which avoids the issue by not mentioning the tribunal.

Recent western Bahai literature

From the above it would appear that there is a growing consensus in the secondary Bahai literature in favour of a theocratic model. I have not found any indication that this was changing in the 1980s or 1990s: most of the recent literature supposes that the Bahai teachings support the assumption of temporal power by the Bahai religious institutions. Probably the clearest instance in recent popular literature is from **John Robarts**, who writes in *The Vision of Shoghi Effendi* that "the Baha'i spiritual assemblies will be the local government and the national spiritual assemblies the national government."² He bases himself here on his own shorthand notes of remarks made to him by Shoghi Effendi in 1955, but the words flatly contradict what Shoghi Effendi had written in 1932, in the essay 'The Golden Age of the Cause of Baha'u'llah':

¹ My thanks to Randy Burns, on the Talisman9 discussion group 15 February 2005, for information regarding the 1964 edition and 1970 printing. The erratum clearly draws on explanations given by Shoghi Effendi in the 1930s: see for example *The World Order of Baha'u'llah* page 150 and 153.

² Page 174.

Theirs is not the purpose, . . . to violate, under any circumstances, the provisions of their country's constitution, much less to allow the machinery of their administration to supersede the government of their respective countries.¹

If he indeed said the words that Robarts attributes to him, that would be a remarkable about-face. But Robarts says that his shorthand was slow and "I missed much of what he said."²

Explicit references to church-state relations are scarce in more recent Bahai literature in English. Despite its promising title, Loni **Bramson-Lerche's** paper 'An analysis of the Baha'i World Order Model' (1991) contains little that is pertinent here, because her focus is on the development of world governance over time rather than on the relations between religious and state institutions at any one time. Indeed she appears to avoid the possibility of a relationship, by substituting a temporal separation of church and state for a constitutional separation. The essay contains a detailed description of the 'Lesser Peace,' regarded as a historical period characterized by political unity that is "to be the result of a political effort by the governments of the world, independent of the Baha'i community."³ This part includes an outline of world institutions to be developed during this period: an international executive, a world parliament and a supreme tribunal, with a separation of powers.⁴ This section is followed by a description of "the catastrophic nature of the disintegration process," which is also called a transition process leading to "Baha'u'llah's prescribed world order, 'the Most Great Peace.'"⁵ I am not clear why the development of an international executive, a world parliament and a supreme tribunal are linked to catastrophic disintegration. The section dealing with the Most Great Peace covers world unity and some features of the Bahai community: the Bahai administrative order and consultation. The state institutions that were developed during the Lesser Peace receive hardly a mention. She does say "The Most Great Peace is the period in which the world government, which will have developed during the Lesser Peace, will begin to function as a Baha'i government, that is, a world commonwealth functioning strictly according to Baha'i law and principles."⁶ But she also says that "the Universal House of Justice is the supreme legislative and judicial body

¹ Published in *The World Order of Baha'u'llah* 66.

² In *The Vision of Shoghi Effendi* 172.

³ 'An analysis of the Baha'i World Order Model' 20.

⁴ *Op. cit.* 25-6.

⁵ *Op. cit.* 33.

⁶ *Op. cit.* 37.

both in the Baha'i administrative order and the Baha'i world order model."¹ One at least of these must be incorrect, since the institutions of world government in her model already include, separately, an "International Executive adequate to enforce supreme and unchallengeable authority," "a supreme Tribunal whose judgement will have a binding effect..."² and "a world legislature, whose members will ... ultimately control the entire resources of all the component nations."³ There would seem to be little room for another supreme legislature and a second supreme judicial body within this world order model.

Although it is not explicitly stated, these competing claims seem to be dealt with in this model by dividing the period of the Most Great Peace into an initial period governed by a world government characterized by a separation of powers, and a later period in which the Universal House of Justice is the supreme body. She cites a passage from Shoghi Effendi that envisions the institutions of world government and the glories of a world civilization in an idyllic future when war has ended, hatred is no more, and the world's "life is sustained by its universal recognition of one God and by its allegiance to one common Revelation,"⁴ but she introduces this as Shoghi Effendi's "vision of a future Baha'i world commonwealth, at least in its *early stages*."⁵ There is nothing in the passage cited to suggest an early stage – on the contrary, Shoghi Effendi says that this is "the goal towards which humanity ... is moving."⁶ But some such interpretive strategy is required in a Bahai theocratic model, to cope with the fact that Shoghi Effendi plainly does not include the Universal House of Justice among the institutions of world government.

Adib Taherzadeh also claims that the world federal system is only an interim stage pending the maturation of the Faith.⁷ "The world federated system, a world commonwealth, a world legislature, a world government, backed by a new international force ... and other institutions enunciated by Baha'u'llah [must] ... govern humanity until such time as the nascent institutions of the Faith of Baha'u'llah will have attained their state of maturity. Then the Baha'i World Order will be established in its great glory and this vision of Shoghi Effendi stretching far into the future will be realized." This is completely incoherent: the vision of Shoghi Effendi, in *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, which he says

¹ 'An analysis of the Baha'i World Order Model' 40.

² *Op. cit.* 26-7.

³ *Op. cit.* 35.

⁴ *The World Order of Baha'u'llah* 204.

⁵ Page 35, emphasis added.

⁶ A phrase that Bramson-Lerche herself cites, page 37.

⁷ *The Revelation of Baha'u'llah*, volume 3 page 314.

represents the ultimate future, includes the world federal machinery that he regards as provisional, but which Shoghi Effendi says must be established “once for all”¹ and will exercise “unchallengeable authority.”² Moreover, he thinks that the institutions of the world federal system, which are “enunciated by Baha’u’llah” are not part of the Bahai world order and will be replaced. On whose authority, and by what mechanism?

Bramson-Lerche’s claim that the Universal House of Justice is also the supreme legislative and judicial body in the Bahai world order model is supported by words attributed to Abdu’l-Baha, and published in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*:

He has ordained and established the House of Justice, which is endowed with a political as well as a religious function, the consummate union and blending of church and state...

The history of this text has already been discussed (page 229 above), along with the principles by which the Bahai scriptural canon is defined. It goes against a very strong principle of Bahai hermeneutics to use any such reports as a basis for a “Bahai” world order model. In this case, the phrase ‘consummate blending of church and state’ is an editorial insertion by Howard MacNutt, who was taught the Faith in Kheiralla’s lessons, was appointed by him as the ‘teacher’ for New York, and remained close to him even after Kheiralla had split with Abdu’l-Baha.³ We have seen above that Kheiralla’s views of Bahai teachings owe more to Christian eschatology than the Bahai Writings. We have also seen (page 267) that Kheiralla taught that temporal government would end, to be replaced by a patrimonial religious system. This enables us to trace one element of the lineage of theocratic beliefs in the Bahai community, from Christian eschatology to Kheiralla’s teachings and his disciples, and then to two important Bahai books (*Promulgation of Universal Peace* and *Baha’i World Faith*) as a result of this remarkable exercise of editorial freedom by MacNutt, to be copied from there into informal Bahai publications,⁴ and from there even into the academic literature⁵

¹ *The World Order of Baha’u’llah* 202.

² *Op. cit.* 204.

³ Stockman, R., *The Baha’i Faith in America*, vol. 1, 125, 177. MacNutt’s estrangement and reconciliation with Abdu’l-Baha are described in Marzieh Gail, *Arches of the Years* 111-126.

⁴ The relevant passage from *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* was cited in a letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 23 June 1987, and published in *Baha’i Canada Supplement*, ed. 3, July 1988. This may be the immediate

(continued...)

and to more influential media such as David Hofman's lectures on theocracy at Maxwell Bahai School, which will be discussed below.

Moreover, while Abdu'l-Baha says, according to the original notes, that the Universal House of Justice has a political aspect, or 'a political function' in the MacNutt version, it is Bramson-Lerche who has identified this function with the legislative and the judicial body of the world commonwealth. Thus the one quotation that Bramson-Lerche brings forward on the issue of church-state relations cannot bear the weight she puts on it, and the essay falls into two halves – a description of the civil order of the lesser peace (extended where necessary to the 'early stages' of the Most Great Peace), and another description of the religious order of the Most Great Peace. That leaves a very important question: is the state to be baptized only to be abolished, or does it have a continuing role as part of the organic structure of the Bahai World Order? And if it does, what principles should govern the relationship?

Bramson-Lerche's earlier paper, 'Some aspects of the development of the Baha'i Administrative Order in America 1922-1936,' (1982) states:

In a letter written on 5 March 1922, Shoghi Effendi explained ... the responsibilities of the National Spiritual Assembly and the Local Spiritual Assemblies. These he characterized as the embryos of future local and national Houses of Justice (a term that implies their future establishment as institutions of government). (Page 260)

The designation 'House of Justice' could well be misunderstood to imply that these are government institutions. This is precisely why Abdu'l-Baha instructed that the name should be changed (see page 220 above). Shoghi Effendi writes:

For reasons which are not difficult to discover, it has been found advisable to bestow upon the elected representatives of Baha'i communities throughout the world the temporary appellation of Spiritual Assemblies, a term which, as the position and aims of the Baha'i Faith are better understood and more fully recognized, will gradually be superseded by the permanent and more appropriate designation of House of Justice. Not only will the present-day Spiritual Assemblies be styled differently in future, but they will be enabled also to add to their present functions

⁴(...continued)

source of Bramson-Lerche's mistake (1991), but this letter does not draw the conclusion that she does, and is careful to label the text as a reported saying.

⁵ Another instance can be found in Sprung, 'Baha'i Institutions and Human Governance' 160.

those powers, duties, and prerogatives necessitated by the recognition of the Faith of Baha'u'llah, not merely as one of the recognized religious systems of the world, but as the State Religion of an independent and Sovereign Power.¹

Clearly he understands that a name that refers to spirituality rather than justice will reduce the likelihood of misunderstanding, and when the teachings of the Faith are better understood (by the Bahais, presumably) and recognized (in the world), it will be possible to use the term House of Justice without this misunderstanding. It is also clear that at that stage, he envisions the Houses of Justice having greater powers, duties and prerogatives, and that these are not the powers of the state itself – since in his vision an independent state will recognise the Bahai Faith as the state religion. The conclusion seems inescapable: the potential misunderstanding that the name “house of justice” could lead to, and which Shoghi Effendi delicately avoids stating with the phrase “for reasons which are not difficult to discover,” is precisely the misunderstanding that Bramson-Lerche displays, in common with some of the Bahais of Shoghi Effendi’s time: the assumption that the term Justice necessarily implies government.

Later in the same paper, she claims that Shoghi Effendi’s letter, ‘The World Order of Baha'u'llah, further considerations’ says that the institutions of the “Administrative Order of the Baha’i Faith ... was being built to replace the present institutions of government and society when they collapsed.” Shoghi Effendi does indeed contrast “the tottering institutions of present-day civilization” to the “God-given institutions which are destined to arise upon their ruin.” He does not however mention *government* institutions. Shoghi Effendi’s essay contrasts the Bahai *religious* institutions (specifically, the Bahai Administrative Order), which have an explicit scriptural charter, to the Christian and Islamic religious institutions which lack that basis. The Bahai institutions are described as the ‘pattern’ ‘instrument’ and ‘agency’ of a new civilization – but not as its government.²

In an article in *The Baha’i World* for 1993-4,³ **Ann Boyles** also imagines that “If nations break down, Local Spiritual Assemblies will still be able to govern the affairs of the communities they serve, often with a greater sense of service than officials elected through the traditional democratic process ...” Her rhetoric is

¹ *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, pp. 6-7

² Bramson-Lerche, ‘Development of Baha’i Administration,’ 270, referring to Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Baha'u'llah* 15-16. The passages of the latter I have cited are from pages 16 and 19.

³ <http://www.animana.org/tab1/12bahai-postmodernism.shtml>

similar to that of the Islamists, in that moral virtue, inculcated by religion, is considered sufficient to ensure better governance. Problems and solutions are reduced to questions of the virtue of the ruler or leader. In “a world adrift, where no certain values remain” we suffer from “lack of leadership; a questioning and rejection of authority; an absence of systems of hierarchical ordering...” “The loss of a common point of reference or authority has alarming ramifications” which cannot be resolved except through “a central, universally respected moral authority” whose arrival will mean the end of postmodernism as an “obsolete doctrine.”

Important as a culture of public service is, at least two other necessary conditions for good governance are inherently denied to the Bahai Assemblies. Good governance requires a sense of ownership and participation on the part of all the governed, whereas Bahai Assemblies are elected from and by members of the religion only, and all government must come reasonably close to achieving a monopoly on coercion, whereas the Bahai Assemblies and communities are voluntary associations. Boyle’s dream is naive survivalism, which would evaporate on the first day if Bahai Assemblies did indeed try to assume power following the breakdown of nations. It is also directly opposed to Shoghi Effendi’s dictum that the machinery of Bahai administration (the Assemblies) must not be allowed to replace the governments of nations. How this article came to be published in a more or less official Bahai publication is a mystery.

John Hatcher’s treatment, in *The Arc of Ascent* (1994), like that of Bramson-Lerche, relies on periodisation to resolve contradictions:

... for an indefinite period at the beginning of this process, the secular and sacred institutions will evolve separately, the Lesser Peace being a political pact of federation ... there will come a stage in the evolution of these distinct institutions when the world federated government will assume a Baha’i identity by recognizing the Baha’i Faith as the ‘state religion’ of this secular body.

The final and complete stage in this process will occur when, through some process we can only imagine, the secular system of federated governance merges with the Baha’i administrative order. This event will simultaneously signal the arrival of the Most Great Peace, the wedding of the bride with the bridegroom, the new heaven with the new earth, and the emergence of the Baha’i Commonwealth as the Kingdom of God come on earth in all its plenitude.

Perhaps as piece by piece the secular system comes to appreciate and emulate ever more completely the systems and procedures of the Baha’i administrative order, the distinction between the two will eventually

become so nebulous that it will be seen as unnecessary to maintain two systems ... Yet it is clear in the Baha'i writings ... that this convergence will not produce a third entity from the two distinct systems, nor will the Baha'i institutions become subsumed by secular governance. Rather we can imagine that it will be seen as needless to maintain two systems doing essentially the same task.¹

One interesting feature here is that power is transferred from the political federation of states to the Bahai administrative order by a peaceful transition, whereas Bramson-Lerche refers to a period of apocalyptic upheaval that serves as a transition leading to the Most Great Peace (she also argues that this transition process is already under way, which appears to be a contradiction). In this respect, Hatcher's description has moved further from millenarianism. But without an apocalyptic change, as a *deus ex machina* to move the world from one state to another, how is the transition to be achieved, and why would it be desirable in any case? The theocratic premise, that the "Kingdom of God come on earth" must mean that government power is exercised by the Bahai Administrative Order, is not questioned or substantiated in any way. But the Bahai writings quite plainly speak of the need to build up institutions of world governance and of national governance, institutions which are not the same as the Bahai administrative order.

The dissonance between the premise and the Bahai teachings is evident where Hatcher seeks to envision the future: the author is placed in the awkward position of supposing a transition *from* the system adumbrated by Baha'u'llah and clearly delineated by Shoghi Effendi *to* a theocratic government.

Two alternative ways of making the two systems one are rejected by John Hatcher: the Bahai administrative institutions are not to be absorbed by the state, and the two are not to give way to a new creation. The third logical possibility is that the state is absorbed by the Bahai administrative institutions, but Hatcher seems shy of mentioning that possibility explicitly. Nevertheless, if one concedes the premise that it is desirable for "the two systems to become one,"² this is all that remains, and we must suppose that that is what he intends us to deduce. Two years later, in *The Law of Love Enshrined* he refers in passing to "a spiritually based society, essentially theocratic in form,"³ as if the two are necessarily synonymous.

This conclusion can be avoided by questioning the premise that the two systems are to become one. Hatcher himself provides us with an alternative

¹ *The Arc of Ascent* 281-2.

² *Op. cit.* 282.

³ *The Law of Love Enshrined* 176.

model, for he uses the image of the wedding of the bride and the bridegroom. But what happens after the wedding? A well-told story normally says that the couple lived together happily ever after, and not that one partner was absorbed by the other – unless of course the happy couple are praying manti. There are forms of unity that do not require either that the parties become identical, or that one imposes its will on the other. These forms of unity, known as ‘unity in diversity,’ ‘organic unity,’ ‘mystic union’ and, more simply, ‘love’ are expounded at length in the Bahai scriptures. Indeed the Bahai revelation might be described as a midwife intended to aid the birth of social structures that transcend the unities of dominance or uniformity. Hatcher’s Bahai world order model has been developed, not only without references to the Bahai writings, but also without any apparent acquaintance with some of the finest and most progressive and characteristic of Bahai beliefs. Its nostalgia and airy impracticality is tellingly revealed in *The Law of Love Enshrined*, where he envisages a Baha’i society as “a commonwealth of autonomous and closely knit communities, much like tribal communities in the collaboration and close association among their members.”¹ As I warned the reader in the Foreword and Introduction, there is little common ground between my progressive reading of the Bahai scriptures and the traditionalist discourse at the opposite end of the spectrum in the Bahai community.

Another recent treatment, in **John Huddleston’s** *The Search for a Just Society*, is similar to those of Hatcher and Bramson-Lerche which have just been discussed, except that Huddleston’s book is a presentation of the Bahai Faith to a non-Bahai audience. It lacks the argumentation and analysis of the previous examples, and is even more resolute in not citing scriptural sources for what he asserts is ‘the Bahai view.’ The Bahai administrative order is explicitly referred to as an ‘alternative system of government’ which is to replace obsolete democratic institutions in a peaceful transition.² Shoghi Effendi’s denial (page 240 above) is naturally not considered. Nor does he explain how he can interpret the development of democracy as one of the main steps towards ‘a just society’ in his historical section, and call for a union of “progressive forces” who are committed to “a free society with a democratic form of government,”³ while also advocating the abandonment of democracy in the future. He must realise that if progressive forces knew what he had in mind, they would fight against his programme, not for it.

¹ *The Law of Love Enshrined* 180.

² *The Search for a Just Society* 425, 426, 448.

³ *Op. cit.* 396, 399.

Huddleston's attempt to fit the theocratic assumption with the Bahai teachings regarding the world federal government results in curious inconsistencies. He says that all *elected* bodies in the federal administrative structure would be called Houses of Justice, but also that the legislative, executive and judicial branches would be separate.¹ Are we to conclude that two of the three are not elected, or that two of them or all three would be called houses of justice but would have different functions? The latter apparently, because he says that all would apply the *electoral* principles of the Bahai administrative order, but then contradicts this by referring to representation of various population groups in proportion to size. This is a principle found in the Bahai writings regarding the number of representatives that countries should have in the world federal government,² but the principle does not apply to the Bahai Houses of Justice, where there are no representatives of population groups or of countries, proportional or otherwise. Nor do the national Bahai communities receive votes in the international Bahai convention according to the size of their communities. Even at the local level, in the Feast or Assembly meeting, the principle within the Bahai administrative order is that the voice and idea of one person, unsupported and representing a group of one, is of equal weight with the voice of a person backed by others or speaking for a substantial or majority identity in that community. There are therefore two distinct sets of Bahai electoral principles, for the obvious reason that the Writings refer to two distinct social orderings, religious and civil.

In a booklet entitled 'A new world order' by **Philip Hainsworth**, but copyrighted and presumably published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahais of the United Kingdom about 1992, page 12, he writes:

Baha'is and politics:

As in the classical sense, 'politics' relates to the science or art of government, Baha'is have a great deal to say about the subject. Its 'Administrative Order,' functioning at local, national and international levels is, Baha'is believe, the embodiment of a true theocracy which could be summarised as 'the government of the people, for the people *by some of the people according to the word of God.*' Yet it poses no threat to any of the existing governments of the world as the Word of God, i.e., Baha'i Scripture, states categorically that Baha'is must obey the government of whatever land in they reside. (Emphasis added)

Hainsworth goes on to give quotations to support the claim that loyalty to government is a Bahai principle, and several quotes that refer to the Bahai

¹ Pages 434-5.

² *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha* 306.

administrative order as a means for ordering the internal life of the religious community, comparing it favourably with other systems of government and of religious order. He does not however provide any support for his central premise, that the Administrative order is destined to become a government.

Christopher Sprung, in his essay ‘Baha’i Institutions and Human Governance’ (1996) asks:

In the future Baha’i Commonwealth, will we have separation of religion and State? ... What are the governing institutions of such a State? These questions – and more – must be addressed by future Baha’i theology and legal studies. In fact, theology and legal studies are very close in our religion. We can however, even today, attempt early answers, which can serve as points for discussion, if not solid conclusions. Such thoughts still cannot be considered a scholarly hypothesis, as the foundation of our theology is still too weak.¹

He goes on to suggest that the term ‘theocracy’ should be used with caution, not because it has negative connotations, but rather because there is “a solid ambiguity linked to the question: is it completely correct to suggest that the Bahai system means and implies ‘rule by God’?”² “... the emphasis of the future Baha’i world commonwealth lies more on the rule of the people... rather than on the rule of an order mystified by ‘holy people’ claiming to rule on behalf of God.”

While he declines to come to any conclusions, Sprung’s essay is useful in several respects. It recognizes that the church-state relationship in the Bahai world order model cannot be separated from the theology of the state in the Bahai writings. It is one of the few treatments of the Church-state question in the Bahai secondary literature in English which in fact argues the question with extensive reference to the Bahai Writings (the others being works by Cole, Saeidi and myself). While he does not cite any of the many passages in Bahai scripture which mandate the civil state, this seems not to be a deliberate bias, since he also does not use the lack of references to these texts to promote the contrary (theocratic) thesis. It seems more likely that the author was not familiar with the many writings of Baha’u’llah and Abdu’l-Baha on politics.

The texts from Shoghi Effendi and Abdu’l-Baha that Sprung cites as indicative of “a more theocratic nature of the Baha’i system”³ include a number of relevant references in the writings of Shoghi Effendi, although he has missed the key text in *The World Order of Baha’u’llah* page 66 cited above, has

¹ ‘Baha’i Institutions and Human Governance’ 153.

² *Op. cit.* 154-5.

³ *Op. cit.* 156.

missattributed one statement by a National Spiritual Assembly to the Guardian,¹ and frequently uses letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi as if the phrasing was the Guardian's own – which may be true in some cases, but has to be demonstrated. He also cites the words ‘consummate blending of church and state’ that are wrongly attributed to Abdu'l-Baha in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, page 455, which have already been discussed, saying:

While quotations from Abdu'l-Baha's public addresses do not enjoy the kind of authority assigned to His Writings, yet this statement is surely a strong indication of the direction in which Abdu'l-Baha wished to lead us in our understanding of the House of Justice.

He does correctly identify the importance of one passage in Abdu'l-Baha's *Will and Testament*, which refers to the close relationship between the House of Justice and the government. In addition to the partial, and in one case careless, use of sources, Sprung's argument is bedevilled by a failure to define the term ‘Commonwealth,’ which he seems to think is a sort of state but refers to at one point as a ‘world society.’²

There are several mentions of church and state issues in **Michael McMullen's** *The Baha'i: the religious construction of a global identity*. This is a sociological study of the Atlanta Bahai communities, but it is included here rather than among the academic studies because its value is that it gives us a picture of popular beliefs in a grass-roots community in the early 1990s.³ According to McMullen's research, Bahais say that their Administrative Order “will form the bedrock of the future world order and world government as the Kingdom of God,” and is “the model of world government.” One assumes that McMullen himself supposes that it *is* the world government, since he heads his chapter on the Administrative Order with a quote from Shoghi Effendi that refers to the world federal

¹ The passage quoted on pages 158-159, which is said on page 159 to be “a statement from Shoghi Effendi.” In note 5 page 164 Sprung correctly attributes this passage to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States (1937), but alleges that it was approved by the Guardian in 1935. From the dates, and the fact that the 1937 NSA statement actually cites the 1935 letter of the Guardian, this is impossible. The 1935 letter would appear to be approving an earlier NSA statement concerning membership in churches.

² ‘Baha'i Institutions and Human Governance’ 159.

³ The picture can be updated by looking at their web site, www.atlantabahai.org. In March 2005, the ‘one minute tour’ of Bahais teachings included “World Order/World Government” (apparently confusing the two), illustrated with a picture of the headquarter building of the Universal House of Justice.

government, and does not mention the Administrative Order.¹ The value of his work is that he shows not only the prevalence of theocratic ideas in a contemporary Bahai community, but also the confusion and rather disinterested attitude surrounding them. Theocratic ideas are present, apparently universal, but are not coherent and have a low salience. His subjects believe that the Universal House of Justice will become the world government, but were “unwilling to say when the UHJ might take on this role.” He notes that the local administrative institutions “are enjoined not to interfere with ‘matters of public and civil jurisdiction,’” but also that Bahais say that LSAs “will take on greater political and economic functions in the future.”²

The question then arises, given Baha’i prohibitions against political involvement, what will be the future relationship between local and national Assemblies and corresponding municipal, ... and national government? ... it is unclear for most Baha’is how Baha’i laws and institutions will *become* the basis of social and global order. When I ask Baha’is what will be the relationship between the Atlanta LSA and the Atlanta City Council ... they confess they do not know, and are not sure how that relationship will evolve. Some point to passages by Shoghi Effendi, who said of a Baha’i’s relationship to social change via political involvement: “We must build up our Baha’i system, and leave the faulty systems of the world to go their own way. We cannot change them; through becoming involved in them; on the contrary they will destroy us.”³ However, Baha’is take it ‘on faith’ that the UHJ will advise local and national institutions on these emerging relationships, which likely will evolve over hundreds of years. ... Baha’is patiently wait for direction and clarification on how their potentially revolutionary message and world order should interact with the secular world.”

The letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi that the Atlanta Bahais refer to explains why they feel they cannot be involved in politics, but not why they also expect their institutions to become political. The reference to the Bahai

¹ *The Baha’i* 8, 35, 56 respectively.

² *Op. cit.* 61. See also page 115, which cites Hofman as the source for these ideas.

³ The source McMullen quotes is Helen Hornby (ed.) *Lights of Guidance: a Baha’i reference guide*, New Delhi, Bahai Publishing Trust, 1983, page 450, where it is undated. Other sources give variant punctuation. The letter is dated July, 1948 and was addressed to the Teaching Committee for Central America. The difference between this and Abdu’l-Baha’s instruction to the believers in America may relate to the fact that the Central American republics were not democracies.

Administrative Order as a ‘model’ and ‘bedrock’ of world government probably refers to passages in which Shoghi Effendi describes the Administrative Order as the “nucleus and pattern of His World Order” or as “the very pattern of ... divine civilization.”¹ Nowhere, so far as I know, is it described as the model or bedrock of world government as, he says, the Atlanta Bahais claim. It would appear, first, that the Atlanta Bahais suppose that ‘World Order’ is a synonym for a world government, and second that they have not considered that the Administrative Order itself is not unitary but binary, consisting of two arms, doctrinal and administrative, headed respectively by the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice. Being multi-national, multi-ethnic, global yet locally devolved, and organic rather than monolithic, the Administrative Order may very well serve as a model for a World Order in which religious and political organs work together, but it cannot itself be a world government. The evidence from Atlanta does not indicate what scriptural or social basis may lie behind theocratic beliefs, but it does tell us that the most important factor is that they have not thought about the issue.

Huschmand Sabet touches on church and state in *The Way out of the Dead End* (especially pages 87-89); and *The Heavens are Cleft Asunder*. Both were published in German, but the English translations have been widely used as introductory books about the Bahai Faith. In the second book, Sabet has written about the new idea of a comprehensive world order, and this has been glossed in a footnote to the English edition with a passage from Shoghi Effendi about the Bahai Commonwealth and the Bahai Administrative Order. The reader is left with the damaging impression that the world order envisioned by Baha’u’llah consists of a religious administration. The fault here lies not with Sabet, but with those charged with ‘correcting’ his work for an English-speaking audience.

Finally, we can mention some informal materials, of which the most interesting is ‘the theocracy tapes,’ an unedited recording of lectures delivered by the former member of the Universal House of Justice, **David Hofman**, at the Maxwell International School in 1993. They are entitled ‘David Hofman on Theocracy: Divine provisions for governance in the World Order of Baha’u’llah.’² The tapes show that there has been a development, but not a radical change, in his views since the 1940s. Where he was earlier concerned mainly with

¹ *God Passes By*, xv, see also *Citadel of Faith* 5, *Letters to Australia and New Zealand* 48, *Light of Divine Guidance* Vol.1, page 151, *Messages to America* 79, 88, 96-97, *The Promised Day is Come* 118; *The World Order of Baha’u’llah* 152.

² Available as a set of 12 audio tapes from Live Unity Productions, 23 Toronto St., Ontario. The citations that follow are from 1:1 (i.e., tape 1 side 1), 4:2 Q&A, 8:2 Q&A, 1:2 Q&A, 3:2 Q&A, 7:2 (three citations), 11:2 Q&A.

the ‘godly society,’ he is now interested quite literally in the establishment of the political institutions for a theocracy. Unlike the other authors, he does try to work out a coherent theory, although nothing is achieved in that direction. The separation of church and state is said to be due to a “misinterpretation of religion by Christendom,” yet he also says that the worldly power of Bishops was a corruption: “Jesus came only for salvation.” “The Spiritual Assemblies will become the House of Justice of the theocratic state,” they will become “God’s instruments for ordering the human race,” with the Universal House of Justice as the world government. The Administrative Order is in fact said to be a synonym for the World Order of Baha’u’llah and the Kingdom of God on earth. The principle of democracy is first misrepresented and then rejected as “baloney,” and he boasts “in all my long life, I have never yet cast a vote in a non-Bahai election.”

Naturally there is no scriptural evidence offered for these positions. Shoghi Effendi’s reference to the Bahai Faith becoming the established religion of some states is interpreted to mean that “obviously the National Spiritual Assembly is going to have to be the government.” Since David Hofman served as a member of the Universal House of Justice from 1963 to 1988, and the quasi-theocratic views he expressed in *The Renewal of Civilization* in 1946 were stronger in 1993, we can probably assume that such views were not seriously questioned during the meetings of the Universal House of Justice during this 25-year period.

Another member of the Universal House of Justice, **Ali Nakhjavani**, gave a talk on the subject in 1984, which is reported by Kathy Lee in *Prelude to the Lesser Peace*. There is no way of knowing whether the report is accurate. On page 12, Nakhjavani appears to conflate Shoghi Effendi’s allusion to the Universal House of Justice as “the supreme organ of the Baha’i Commonwealth” and his subsequent reference to “the world’s future super-state”¹ with the result that he makes the Universal House of Justice into “the supreme organ of the Baha’i super-state.” On page 85, however, he cites a letter via the Guardian’s secretary which does exactly the same, so there are some grounds for the confusion. What is not clear is why he prefers the formulations in a secretary’s letter to those of the Guardian himself. In other words, finding one speaker citing the secretary’s phrase (“the supreme organ of the Baha’i Super State”)² is a clue to how these ideas are transmitted and sustained in the Bahai community, but I do not think it tells us where the ideas have *come from*. The reliance here on an

¹ *World Order of Baha’u’llah* 7.

² Letter of 14 March 1939 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the USA and Canada and an individual, cited in the ‘Peace’ compilation (*Compilation of Compilations* 194-5). This phrase is not found in the Guardian’s published writings in English.

inferior phrasing in preference to the authentic original might speak of a predisposition for theocratic ideas, a more generalised aversion to the concept of a functionally differentiated society, or simply poor reading skills.

Bahai literature in French

If we turn to the French literature, a very partial survey seems to reveal similar characteristics. We have already noted the various attempts made, in footnotes to *Some Answered Questions*, to explain what is meant by the Universal Tribunal and the Universal House of Justice. These appear to originate in a 1907 translation by **Hippolyte Dreyfus**, which at chapter 12 (the explanation of Isaiah chapter 11) explains Abdu'l-Baha's reference to 'a general tribunal of nations and people' with the note that this is "The universal *Bayt-u-^cAdl*, a sort of international tribunal of arbitration." At chapter 45 (the explanation of 'infallibility'), Abdu'l-Baha's reference to the Universal House of Justice is explained with a note saying:

The *Bayt-u-^cAdl* or House of Justice is the body created by Baha'u'llah for the administration of the future city. The General *Bayt-u-^cAdl* will determine the laws of the nation, and the international *Bayt-u-^cAdl* will function as an Arbitration Tribunal between peoples.

These notes are taken over literally in the Barney's 1908 English translation, the first being slightly enlarged, and have passed through Barney's version into Bahai Lore, despite subsequent corrections in *Some Answered Questions*.

In Dreyfus' introductory book, *Essai sur le Baha'isme* (1909), the chapter on the Bahai Faith and the State begins by stating:

The separation of church and state can only be a provisional formula – a momentary stage in the march of societies. It is true that history shows us that, in the ancient exclusive religions (except where the sovereign has concentrated the spiritual and temporal powers under his own control), the state has seen the development of another power, distinct from it and often in opposition to it – the redoubtable power of the church, which the state has not taken into account, and against which it has battled, often quite literally. But this will not be the case in the future city, founded on the Baha'i principles. The absence of all religious rituals, and therefore of any clergy or sacerdotal hierarchy, means that there never can be any question of the separation of Church and State. Even a government which loves liberty and desires to respect everyone's beliefs will not need to

take refuge either in offensive atheism, or within the vaguer boundaries of irreligion.¹

His reasoning here is clearly shaped by the long anti-clerical background of the separation of church and state in France, and the specific measures to limit the political rights of practising Catholics in his own time. It also appears that he imagines the Bahai religious community to have no administrative machinery that could form itself into a power comparable to the state (he knew of the House of Justice, but thought it was a civil institution, as we have seen).² He is saying in short that there cannot be a separation of church and state because there will be no church, no religious order as such (and no rituals!), so the state will not need to protect itself from religion. In this situation, he thinks:

In the face of the unity of religions, the state will become religious: not that it must give to all its acts a mystical appearance, which could not be in keeping with their material purpose, nor by issuing coins or banknotes that remind its citizens of the special protection that God has accorded to their land. Rather, religion being put into practice in all acts of life, from the minister of state down to the humblest official, each one will be penetrated by the sacred character of his task, and the responsibility incumbent on him to act in conformity with the divine law. Thus each in his own measure, while working for his own well-being, will become an instrument for the general development of the collective.

This is very similar to Hofman and Holley. It is primarily the secularization of society, and not the separate existence of the state and religious orders, which Dreyfus expects to be “a momentary stage in the progress of societies,” because he is not aware of the existence of a Bahai religious order. It is true that he writes that the Bahai Faith:

... deals with the relationships of diverse religions existing alongside states. The great principle which, in these conditions, dominates the entire question is naturally that of the absolute separation of the two spheres, the spiritual and the temporal. So long as the ancient religions and their clergies remain, the priests should not under any pretext busy themselves with politics, and the state should never interfere in religious questions.³

¹ *Essai sur le Baha'isme* 55.

² Repeated in *Essai sur le Baha'isme* 64.

³ *Op. cit.* 56.

From this one might suppose that he felt that the existence of two separate spheres was no more than a necessary response to religious pluralism and the existence of clerical hierarchies which can threaten the sovereignty of the prince. However he follows this immediately with a verse from the Kitab-e Aqdas:

By the righteousness of God! It is not Our wish to lay hands on your kingdoms. Our mission is to seize and possess the hearts of men. Upon them the eyes of Baha are fastened.¹

It could be that Dreyfus was thinking here of the modern history of continental Europe as a whole, in which the creation of nation-states spanning multiple religious communities was achieved by separating the state from religious confessions. He predicates his 'religious state' of the future on the impossible condition of 'religious unity,' i.e., the end of religious pluralism. If so, he sees the removal of religion, morals and values from the public sphere to the private as an unintended side-effect of a policy that was primarily anti-sectarian rather than anti-religious.²

However, given the specific reference to the clergy, it seems more likely that Dreyfus is writing quite particularly out of the situation in France in his time, when the widespread Roman Catholic support for the royalist cause on the one hand³ and anti-clerical feeling and a positivist philosophy among the leaders of the Third Republic on the other hand, had led to the disappropriation of church property, the closing of church schools, the banning of most Roman Catholic religious orders, and an extreme distrust of the political motives of French Catholics, to the extent of excluding practising Roman Catholics from senior posts in key ministries and spying on army officers to ensure that promotion and choice assignments did not go to practising Catholics. The 'separation of church and state,' especially in the Combes government of 1902-5, had almost come to mean that state institutions could not in any way accommodate either belief or believers.⁴ Our reading of Dreyfus (and of Moayed below) is complicated by the fact that in the debates of the Combes period, the word used for the end of the

¹ Paragraph 83.

² This is intended only as a broad generalization. It should at least be tempered by recognition of the efforts of humanists and others who have endeavoured to sustain altruistic values in public life without recourse to religion.

³ Paul, *The Second Ralliement* 21.

⁴ It is sometimes asserted that practising Catholics were excluded from wide categories of civil service, even at the lower levels, but the evidence is conflicting. See Larkin, *Religion Politics and Preferment*, especially the Preface.

concordat with the Roman Catholic church was *séparation*, although what was being discussed would be called disestablishment in English.

In either case, Dreyfus is not saying that societies will eventually revert to the situation in which church and state were not separate organs, as in the Vatican states prior to 1870, or to a situation in which the prince decides and supervises the religion of his subjects (as in the German states prior to German unification). The direction of social evolution is clearly in the other direction. Rather he is saying that irreligion in public life is a side-effect of a particular stage in the evolution of the state, at which the state and religious orders must differentiate themselves one from another to make the development of the modern state possible, and to ensure freedom of conscience.

Dreyfus' book was translated and widely used in the early American community, and we have seen it cited by Wilson, and Hussein Rabbani, and implicitly by Shook. The opening words of his chapter on 'The Bahai Faith and the State' find an immediate echo in the title of **Vafa Moayed**'s 1988 article 'La separation des pouvoirs spirituel et temporel: une formule provisoire?' The entire article is devoted to the church-state questions, but like much of the literature which has been examined, it tells us little about why some Bahais have believed in a theocratic order. He seems uncertain himself:

According to the Baha'i vision of the evolution of the human race, it appears that the unity of the human species will be realised around institutions having jurisdiction in the spiritual and temporal domains. From that time, the separation of the two powers will be relegated to a 'provisional formulation' in human history.¹

This position is not argued, except by a reference to the opening words of Dreyfus already cited. What would appear to have happened is that Moayed has begun with a very narrow definition of the separation of church and state, as the form of strong constitutional separation that is found in the French constitution. He deals only with the French situation, and says that:

... this is not due to ethnocentrism, but because the very idea of the separation of the spiritual and temporal powers is unique to Christianity, and its ultimate outcome, the secular state, ... developed historically, to a great extent, in relation to the Catholic church and is a specifically western and even French phenomenon.²

¹ 'La separation des pouvoirs ...' 55, my translation.

² *Op. cit.* 53.

On the face of it this is absurd: almost every society of which we know has observed a distinction between the spiritual and temporal, and societies that have developed stable institutional forms have almost all had distinct institutions representing these powers.¹ Here, and elsewhere in Moayed's article, one has to bear in mind that he is writing exclusively from a contemporary French perspective. By 'separation' he means 'separation as it is in France now,' and naturally he concludes that this is a French phenomenon.

He then cites Shoghi Effendi, who foresaw the recognition of the Bahai Faith as the established religion of various countries, something which would be impossible in France at present. Thus far he is on strong ground: in the light of Shoghi Effendi's words we cannot place the present French constitutional settlement, which amounts to deliberate irreligion on the part of the state, within a Bahai world order model. But Moayed thinks that he has shown that the separate *existence* of the church and the state is a recent and temporary phenomenon. He says that "the Baha'i Faith envisages the future reunification of the two forms of power,"² a possibility which, as we have seen, Shoghi Effendi said must not be allowed "under any circumstances."

Moayed's following remark is interesting in relation to the model of organic unity I have used. He says that "in a Baha'i society, the domination of the spiritual over the temporal would be permanent and absolute. ... *The Baha'i Faith has a monist conception of human society.*" If by 'the Bahai Faith' we mean the formal teachings of the Faith as these are embodied in the Bahai scripture, nothing could be further from the truth. The inadequacy of Moayed's paper reinforces the point made by Sprung, that the question of the Bahai attitude to the church-state relationship cannot be approached without first turning to the Bahai writings to form a clear idea of the theology of the state, and indeed of human society.

Moayed's article is substantial, and many other points could be criticized, but these have all been encountered in one or other of the Bahai authors writing in English, so a systematic treatment seems unnecessary. One important element of the argument is a reference to a passage on page 7 of Shoghi Effendi's essay 'The World Order of Baha'u'llah' (1929), in the book of the same name, but this has

¹ The notable exceptions are states such as the ancient Egyptian or Mayan states that had a God-king. In these cases the temporal powers has subsumed the spiritual to its own benefit. The opposite phenomenon also occurs, for instance in some Mahdist Islamic states, the anabaptist state of Münster in 1533-5, or Iran since 1981 and Afghanistan under the Taliban. Such states are usually short-lived, whereas those in which the state subsumes religion may be long-lived, but static.

² 'La separation des pouvoirs ...' 57.

been treated in the discussion of Shoghi Effendi's writings on the topic. Another interesting feature is that he explicitly rejects the view that the unification of the human race will come about as the result of a miraculous event, arguing instead for historical continuity and progressive change.

The book by the French authors **Gouvion and Jouvion**, which is described among the non-Bahai literature below, may also be taken as evidence that attitudes in the French Bahai community are not very different to those in the English-speaking community, since some of their research is based on the French Bahai community. The similarity between French and North American Bahais' views is not surprising, since we have seen that Dreyfus' book was a significant influence on the early American community.

Bahai literature in German

The scant evidence I have from German sources suggests that the interpretive tradition in the German Bahai community has been somewhat less theocratic than in the English or French communities. In reading German authors, we should bear in mind that German is unable to translate Shoghi Effendi's device of using capitalised and uncapitalised pairs of terms, such as Commonwealth and commonwealth, for the religious and temporal institutions. German orthography requires all nouns to be capitalised.

I have already mentioned a footnote in the German translation of the *Some Answered Questions*, explaining that the House of Justice will administer the future city: the German translation slightly softened the theocratic premise of the footnote by not specifying the judicial function of the Universal House of Justice. As early as 1911, **Röemer** understood that the Bab's sovereignty was spiritual and salvational.¹ I have also referred to more recent works by Sprung and Sabet, which have been published in English: Sprung being ahead of his time in thinking, but led astray from reaching the correct conclusion by the use of corrupted and misattributed sources. Sabet, who is primarily concerned with inter-religious apologetics, appears unwilling to adopt a theocratic model, but not able to produce an alternative.

On the other hand, in a 1927 presentation, a German Baha'i, Dr. Ernst **Kliemke**, entirely conflates the Bahai teachings about the Administrative Order and about the state:

... Baha'u'llah demands a state arrangement whose highest organization shall be the House of Justice, composed of men and women who possess most noble character, rich knowledge and experience, and the highest

¹ *Die Babi-Beha'i* (thesis), not sighted: referred to in Schaeffer *et al.*, *Making the Crooked Straight* 19, 422.

prudence and wisdom. The members of the House of Justice should be elected by the people.¹

Dr. Kleimke's conflation seems to come from not having access to the Baha'i writings that speak of the broad religious functions of the House of Justice, of the separation of powers in civil government, and the separation between the two. It is comparable to the confusion in the English and French speaking communities twenty years earlier.

Ulrich Gollmer, in *Making the Crooked Straight*, attempts to argue against Ficicchia's claim that the Bahai Faith aims to establish a global theocracy, by placing the political order (the 'Lesser Peace') in the sphere of secular action to be taken by all the peoples and nations of the world, while the goal of the religious order, to achieve the Most Great Peace, is indefinitely postponed and even called "eschatological."² This is not convincing, since Baha'u'llah claimed to be the Promised One, and said that this is the Day of God: he taught a realised eschatology. And it is not reassuring, since Gollmer says that the Universal House of Justice will become humanity's supreme legislative organ (but without replacing the world parliament – how there can be two supreme legislatures is not explained). He has apparently not realised that, in Shoghi Effendi's terminology, the Administrative Order, in which the Universal House of Justice is the 'supreme legislative body,' is not the same thing as the World Order of Baha'u'llah, and the Baha'i Commonwealth is not the same as the commonwealth of nations.³ The resulting picture is similar to that presented by Bramson-Lerche. Gollmer has been misled by the editorial change of the phrase "for all time" in the chapter in *Paris Talks* discussed above, to read "in the present state of the world," so that he thinks the Bahai political principles will change over time.⁴ This is just what Ficicchia claimed: only the timing has been made more remote.

Summary of the Bahai secondary literature

This survey reveals some general features of the treatment of church and state in the Bahai secondary literature. In the first place, most of the writers either argue or strongly assume that the Bahai political teachings favour a theocratic system in which the religious institutions also govern the state. There is a broad trend to move from the belief that the Bahai faith does not have institutions that could constitute a 'church' in the first decades of the 20th century, to the belief that the

¹ Translation published in *Star of the West*, Vol. 18, No. 10 January 1928 page 317.

² Schaeffer, Towfigh and Gollmer, *Making the Crooked Straight*, 432-6; 436. The German original was published in 1995.

³ *Op. cit.* 437, cf. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Baha'i World* 158.

⁴ Cited in *Making the Crooked Straight* 438 note 100; see page 224ff above.

elected Bahai institutions (and in some cases the Guardian as world monarch) will eventually form a government that replaces civil government. A few authors use theocratic language, but are in fact concerned with the extent to which the state lives up to religious and ethical ideals, rather than with the form of governance. Nevertheless, their inexact use of terms reinforces the interpretive tradition that does speak of theocracy as the institutional form of government.

Second, there is an increasing reliance on a dispensational argument, in which the Bahai teachings on civil government and on the structure of the Bahai institutions are seen as referring to two consecutive stages.

Third, there is a striking lack of scriptural references in the majority of these works. The differentiation between the spheres of religion and of politics is ironically present: when one talks of politics, the scriptures are not consulted.

The near unanimity of the theocratic view in Bahai secondary literature should be distinguished from the theocratic views we find among Christian or Islamic integrists, where there is an elaborated theory of divine government and a collection of scriptural texts and arguments that support it. I have reviewed a good selection of the Bahai theocratic writers, but have not found one who bases this belief on Bahai scriptures. If I took a similar sample of Christian writers supporting 'dominion theology' or theonomy, or a sample of Islamic writers supporting the restitution of the caliphate, I would find a fairly well defined collection of biblical or quranic quotes, repeated over and over by the various authors, with the same arguments being used in many different authors. That would be the sign that there is a group of people committed to theocratic theory who are talking to one another, in print and informally, and are working out their political theory. The absence of that sort of agreement among the Baha'i theocratic writers tells me that there has not been a group of Bahai integrists thinking about the issue and searching for scriptural supports. In this respect I think it would be seriously misleading to simply characterise the Bahai theocratists as a variety of religious fundamentalist, even if their political model resembles the ideas of Christian and Islamic integrists. The theory may be the same, but the religious dynamics behind it are quite different. From reading the Bahai theocratic authors, one has the impression that if they did read the relevant portions of their scriptures, most of them would simply change their minds and reject theocratic ideas. Leaving aside David Hofman in his later years, it is an issue of low salience for them, and their ideas are shaped mainly by what they do not know, and the questions they have not thought about.

Many of the authors mentioned have used what I call the **dispensationalist argument** to cover the contradictions that arise if one supposes that all of the Bahai teachings about religious and civil governance must refer to the same

institutions. It is a way of explaining away passages in the Bahai writings that emphatically endorse the civil state and the project of human governance, and of dismissing the texts that condemn the involvement of the political order in matters of religion or *vice versa*. Such texts are made to refer only to a preliminary stage. Dispensationalism allows the reader to regard the Bahai teachings on civil government and on the Bahai administrative order as referring to two consecutive stages in future development, rather than to two different things. In effect, a temporal separation of church and state takes the place of a constitutional separation of church and state. Loni Bramson-Lerche's paper 'An analysis of the Baha'i World Order Model' is a good example, because the insertion of the temporal clause "at least in its early stages" is explicit, but we have seen the argument in John Hatcher's treatment in *The Arc of Ascent*, and in the fifth edition of J. E. Esslemont's *Baha'u'llah and the New Era*, in Gollmer's work, and it is implicit in many of the other works considered above.

The first thing we should note about the dispensational argument is that it is a seductively easy strategy for the interpreter to adopt. Any texts that do not fit can simply be wished away by supposing that they refer to an earlier stage and are therefore not the real Bahai ideal. The real Bahai ideal is the idea already in the interpreter's mind. The second weakness in the dispensational type of argument is that it supposes that quite central Bahai teachings may change over time. An observer would have every reason to ask, if the principles concerning government can change as the Bahai community takes its place in the world, what about those concerning tolerance and the treatment of minorities, or the equality of men and women, or the election of houses of justice?

The answer is that such a change is impossible. We have seen in the passage cited from Hatcher's *The Arc of Ascent* that he is unsure about how the world could move from the system of world federal government outlined in the Bahai writings to a system in which the Houses of Justice would take over the task of government. What would be the mechanism of transition? A coup is unthinkable, and even passive acceptance of a power "thrust upon them" is ruled out by Shoghi Effendi's dictum that Bahais must not "*allow* the machinery of their administration to supersede the government of their respective countries." Apart from the mechanics of change, where would the *authority* for change come from? The rights and duties of civil government are embedded in the sacred texts, including both the *Kitab-e Aqdas* and the *Kitab-e 'Ahd*, as well as the writings of Abdu'l-Baha. The details of the institutions of the world federal government are explained by Shoghi Effendi. It is doctrinally impossible for any authority to arise within the Bahai community that could authorize us to abolish these institutions and change these principles, unless it be a new Manifestation of God. And that,

according to Baha'u'llah will not happen “ere the expiration of a full thousand years.”¹

These problems apply to dispensationalist thinking in general, and not just to the question of church and state. Wherever we see an author using it, we should immediately suspect that some element of the Bahai writings that does not fit the author's scheme is being swept under the rug of “earlier stages.” However the illegitimate appeal to dispensationalist arguments should be distinguished from references to historical change as such. Shoghi Effendi for example refers to a historical process:

. . . which will carry the steadily evolving Faith of Baha'u'llah through its present stages of obscurity, of repression, of emancipation and of recognition . . . to the stage of establishment . . . a stage which must later be followed by the emergence of the Baha'i state itself, functioning, in all religious and civil matters, in strict accordance with the laws and ordinances of the Kitab-i Aqdas . . . a stage which . . . will culminate in the establishment of the World Baha'i Commonwealth, functioning in the plenitude of its powers, and which will signalize the long-awaited advent of the Christ-promised Kingdom of God on earth...²

Some have suggested that the existence of stages beyond that of establishment of the Bahai Faith as a state religion implies that the principles of the church-state relationship may also change. In other words, that a “Baha'i state” is necessarily a theocratic state. But what is this assumption based upon? Shoghi Effendi has defined the Bahai state here as one that functions in accordance with the laws of the Kitab-e Aqdas, and that book states “It is not Our wish to lay hands on your kingdoms. Our mission is to seize and possess the hearts of men. ... To this testifieth the Kingdom of Names, could ye but comprehend it.”³ Thus a theocratic state would be contrary to “the laws and ordinances of the Kitab-i Aqdas,” and could not be called Bahai. Conversely, a Bahai state as Shoghi Effendi defines it could not be theocratic.

For the dispensationalist argument to be successful as a way of resolving a contradiction it must do more than point vaguely to the existence of various stages, eras, and ages in the Bahai view of the future. It must also show that the relevant principle embodied in the initial situation *can* be changed at the various subsequent stages, and furthermore demonstrate that the undesired outcome represents an earlier stage, and the desired outcome a later stage.

¹ *Kitab-e Aqdas* paragraph 37.

² *Messages to the Baha'i World* 155.

³ K82-3; see also K78-83, 88, 91-93, discussed above.

With the exception of Shoghi Effendi and Mason Remey (and the early pamphlet writers Brittingham and Harris), I have not found any Bahai authors writing in English before 1990 who definitely accept the distinction between church and state as a permanent and desirable feature of society. Since this distinction is one of the major themes of Baha'u'llah's writings, including the writings that were translated and available to the Bahais from the 1920s, these theocratic ideas must derive from some other source that influenced all or most of the community. This could be in the form in which the Bahai teachings were available, or in the social background of the believers. As for the first, there are a few passages in the Bahai writings or in reports of the words of Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi that directly point in this direction, but these are for the most part unauthenticated, and were known to be unauthenticated. Given the importance that was attached in the early Bahai community in the West to the distinction between authentic and unauthenticated texts¹ it would be remarkable if such reports were an important reason for theocratic beliefs. There are other texts that are open to a theocratic or non-theocratic reading, or can be mis-read to yield a theocratic message, and that have in fact been cited to me in email discussions and responses to conference presentations as counter-texts. In most cases a theocratic reading requires a very robust preconception, so these readings are rather the result than the source of theocratic ideas in the Bahai community. Some of these passages have been dealt with in the chapter on church and state in the Bahai Scriptures.

It does not seem likely that the works of Dreyfus, Hofman, Holley, Robarts and Ruhe were individually decisive. While they were much respected, no one person appears to have had sufficient influence, after the episode of Kheiralla, to decisively shape the ideas of the community. With the exception of David Hofman, in the last years of his life, none seem to have actively campaigned to have theocratic ideas accepted. However the consensus between them, as important authors in a community without a broad literature, must certainly be considered a major factor, and within this, Holley's adoption of Dreyfus' ideas seems the most important link. Dreyfus incidentally provides an independent

¹ Letters from Shoghi Effendi on this point have already been cited (pages 227). There is every reason to think that the same general principle was widely applied before the time of Shoghi Effendi. Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, a well-known Bahai scholar who lived for some years in the United States (1900-1904) and had some influence in the early Bahai community, in his book *The Brilliant Proof*, provides a list of the distinctive features of the Bahai Faith as compared to the Christian and Muslim religions. The first of these principles is "abstaining from crediting verbal traditions." (Cited in Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Baha'u'llah*, vol. 3, 375.)

example of the way an idea, once in print, can continue in use in the Bahai community by sheer momentum, for he claimed that the Bahai Faith had no rituals (see page 323 above). Dreyfus knew little about the Baha'i Faith when he wrote these words, having been a Bahai for nine or less years, and with limited access to Bahai scriptures. In fact the religious practice of Bahais involves many rituals such as a prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, ablutions, marriage and the celebration of festivals, and these are described in the *Kitab-e Aqdas*, which was read in early English translations from the early days. Nevertheless, Dreyfus' simple error was repeated by numerous Bahai authors for some 90 years, with the Bahai Faith even being entered in the *Guinness Book of Records* as the 'largest religion without rituals.'

As for social factors, one possible source is the Christian millenarian background of many of the early believers in the west. I would caution against putting too much weight on the millenarian heritage. While millenarian themes are found in many of the writers considered, their writing lacks the vivid apocalyptic rhetoric and the symbolic aggression *vis-a-vis* the existing order that one finds in millennialist movements whose expectation of becoming God's earthly government is more lively.¹ None of the authors who favour a theocratic model directly connect this with the coming of the Messiah, the end of the powers of this world and a government by God through his elect (Revelations 20:1-5). Nor do any of the writers appear to be personally interested in the prospect of participating in theocratic institutions ruling the world, or in inciting their readers to anticipate the prospect of sitting on the thrones of the elect and witnessing the debasement of their enemies. While the fit with Christian millennialism or Islamic Mahdism may seem very strong, it would be a mistake to locate the early Bahais of the West entirely or even largely in a millennialist framework. Other features that characterize millennialist movements are weak or entirely absent, and two of the more recent writers have rejected the expectation of an apocalyptic break in the continuity of history to bring about the Kingdom, suggesting that any millennialist influence there was is now weakening.

The same cannot be said of theocratic ideas. With the exception of Remy, Sprung and to some extent the 1940 essay of Hussein Rabbani, none question the assumption that a theocratic government is the Bahai ideal, but they also do not make a strong argument or provide scriptural references to support it. From the

¹ It must also be said that I have not considered some Bahai writers, notably Ruth Moffet (*New Keys to the Book of Revelation*, New Delhi, Bahai Publishing Trust, 1977) and Robert Riggs (*The Apocalypse Unsealed*, New York, Philosophical Library, 1981) whose writings reflect a vivid apocalyptic imagination. I consider these authors marginal in the Bahai community.

weakness of the argumentation and the low rhetorical temperature of the treatment, it appears that this assumption was rather a feature of the cultural background than a strongly-held opinion. To be more specific, if culture consists of relatively crystallised patterns of communication, and embraces the three subsets of symbolic structures, ideology and common sense, the roots of Bahai theocratic ideas lie more in the common-sense element, while the roots of Christian theocratic thought lie more in symbolic structures, and those of contemporary Islamic integrism in ideology.¹

Another possibility is that the many Persian believers who travelled to North America, France and England may have brought with them millenarian ideas derived from the Shiah background. This can be no more than a supposition, since confirmation would have to rest on a detailed examination of the religious and social backgrounds of a substantial number of these early travellers to the West, and of their diaries and letters where these are available. The Shiah background presents many different attitudes to the state, so the presence of Persians from a Shiah background does not in itself make them a plausible source of these ideas. We can also note that the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahais of Iran in 1983 stated the Bahai Administrative Order does not have any political function:

Baha'i administration has no aim except the good of all nations and it does not take any steps that are against the public good. ... it does not interfere in political affairs; and it is the safeguard against the involvement of Baha'is in subversive political activities. Its high ideals are to improve the characters of men; to extend the scope of knowledge; to abolish ignorance and prejudice; to strengthen the foundations of true religion in all hearts; to encourage self-reliance and discourage false imitation; ... to obey outwardly and inwardly and with true loyalty the regulations enacted by state and government. ... In brief, whatever the clergy in other religions undertake individually and by virtue of their appointment to their positions, the Baha'i administration performs collectively and through an elective process.²

Another plausible factor in the second part of the 20th century is that Bahais quite rightly form their ideas about the patterns of the World Order of Baha'u'llah by analogy to the patterns of the Bahai community. The loss of the Guardianship and the fact that the Mashriqu'l-Adhkars have not been established as institutions,

¹ This analysis has been developed from a suggestion in Fischer, *Iran* 7.

² 'An Open Letter from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Iran about the Banning of the Baha'i Administration (12 Shahrivar 1362 / 3 September 1983), translated in The Universal House of Justice, *Messages 1963 to 1986*, 596.

or even understood, leaves a community that looks superficially like a centralised state of the ‘modern’ period, with the Houses of Justice as the central and coordinating institution, and its power providing the guarantee of unity of the whole. The model we should be drawing analogies from is not the Bahai community as it is, but as it is intended to be – a network of interrelating institutions, with the greatest and central institution (the Mashriqu’l-Adhkar) not exercising authority over any other, and a harmony that is guaranteed by the fact that the organs all need one another, and are all expressions of one Will.

Even more recently, there may have been some external influence in the United States from the new Christian Right and its critique of contemporary US society. Bahai authors who write for that audience naturally seek to present the Bahai Faith in a way that will speak to the religious integrists’ view of society and of the role of religion in it. This can easily slip into actually adopting the conservative Christians’ social ‘agenda.’ I think John Hatcher’s *Ocean of His Words* reveals this at several points.¹ In an interview published in the 1997 Religion News Service, Robert Henderson, secretary-general of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, said “The Baha’i faith is outwardly liberal but inwardly conservative ... It’s a matter of scripture.”² I do not see any sign of alignment with conservative religious forces in Bahai communities outside the mainland United States, and I assume (and hope) that this is a local and temporary phenomenon.

I would like to put forward another, and sobering, possibility. Perhaps theocratic ideas are no more pervasive in the western Bahai communities than they would be in western countries at large, if there was a plausible candidate for the position of divine deputy. Perhaps the ready acceptance of such ideas by Bahais, entailing in some cases an explicit rejection of democracy, and in every case the rejection of some of democracy’s essential principles, is not due to some abnormality in the social background of the early Bahai believers, and is not to be explained solely by the artificial plausibility ideas may obtain when repeated over time in a closed, all-encompassing, community. Perhaps it is in fact a fair representation of the general population’s lack of understanding of, and lack of commitment to, the operating principles and mechanisms of a modern society. Perhaps it reflects a common-sense assumption about the nature of religion that is not confined to millenarian, Bahai or Shiah circles.³

¹ I have published a full review in *Baha’i Studies Review* volume 9.

² “Critics chafe at Baha’i conservatism”, by Ira Rifkin, February 27, see www.religionnews.com.

³ The circularity of thought that is evident in the Bahai secondary literature is replicated

Recent non-Bahai authors

Given what we have seen in the secondary literature by Bahais, it is not surprising that observers who are not apparently ill-disposed to the Bahais, but have not studied the Bahai writings extensively, conclude that the Bahais intend to create a world theocracy. **Jeff Simmonds**, who made a serious and sympathetic study of the Bahai Faith at the postgraduate level can serve as an example of the impression given to an outside observer by the English-language Bahai literature:

While it is often down-played by Baha'is, the fact is that the ultimate goal of the Baha'i Faith is the establishment of a completely Baha'i society which means a Baha'i State or a theocracy where religion and politics, or "church" and state are not separate. The Universal House of Justice will be the governing body of the world or of those states which become Baha'i. This goal is not incidental, but is central to the teachings of the Faith.¹

³(...continued)

in some Christian political theology, without any association with millenarianism or biblical literalism. David Cassidy, in *Jesus, Politics and Society*, attempts to argue that the dictum "Render unto Caesar ..." does not establish the legitimacy of two distinct realms since, he says, "Jesus really taught and acted in terms of only one realm: *God's*." (Pages 58, 78) But the issue that Jesus addresses in the question concerning tribute is the legitimacy of the claims of Caesar versus those of the Law and the Temple – since it was the Sadducees who had initiated the question. Cassidy does understand, at least unconsciously, that it is *religion's* claims, and not *God's*, which are compared to Caesar's. His argument passes silently from arguing that there is only one realm, *God's*, to saying that "Luke does not show Jesus positioning any dichotomy between the so-called *religious* sphere and the so-called worldly sphere." (Page 83) He has silently assumed that the claims of religion are synonymous and coextensive with the claims of God, which would of course leave no room for any real duty to render anything to Caesar. His conclusion that Jesus did not really support the legitimacy of the state, and was a threat to the Roman empire ((pages 78, 79) is unavoidable, given this assumption. But the two spheres model in both Christian and Bahai theology supposes precisely the opposite – that not all the claims of God are expressed in the claims of religion. Religion is not everything, since *God's* will is also expressed in history and in politics (and in the universe and science, and no doubt in other ways).

¹ Unpublished paper, 'The relationship of the Laws [of the] Kitab-i Aqdas to the Laws of the Bayan of the Bab.' Simmonds is a PhD student at the Dept. of Religious studies at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

Another sympathetic critique, from Colette **Gouvion** & Philippe **Jouvion**, speaks of “a disturbing scenario for a science fiction film. Imagine a religious group ruling the entire earth, imposing its shalls and shall nots, and the frightening possibility of its getting out of control.”¹ **Naqavi**’s article in a 1975 number of *Islamic Studies* asserts that “The Baha’is do not accept the separation of the Church and State” and that the Bahais consider their administrative system to be “the prototype of the ideal world government of the future, which will eventually arise after a long process of peaceful evolution.”²

The most pointed and extended criticism of the Faith on this point that I have seen comes from Francesco **Ficicchia**’s 1981 book, *Der Bahá’ismus: Religion der Zukunft?*³ which has already been described briefly in the introduction to this book. Ficicchia sets out to show that the Bahai Faith constitutes a danger to the state. This is not so much argued as repeatedly asserted. Texts from the Bahai writings that prohibit the Bahai administrative order ever replacing national governments are ignored. The charter of temporal government in Baha’u’llah’s tablets to the Kings and Lawh-e Dunya are passed over in silence. The principle that neither government nor religion may interfere in affairs proper to the other is disregarded. Bahai protestations of respect for government are merely a short-term tactic:

The requirements of loyalty to the state and abstaining from political activities should not be taken too easily as guarantees of pacifism. What we have here is more a matter of opportunistic considerations, which are likely to be maintained for just so long as the community in its period of growth is not yet ready to realize its declared purpose. In this respect the Baha’i practice of dissimulation⁴ should also be mentioned.⁵

Such suggestions were made from the earliest period, since, as we have seen, Baha’u’llah refers to them and repeatedly denied that there is any element of dissimulation in his acceptance of the legitimacy of civil governance.

Ficicchia’s repeated allegation that the Bahai Faith aims at a theocratic world state finds an apparent echo in the German literature in **Jäggi**’s 1987 dissertation, which is in other respects a non-polemic scientific work, but on the critical point

¹ *Gardeners of God* 208.

² ‘Babism and Baha’ism’ 205, 212.

³ See Schaefer, Towfigh, and Gollmer, 1995, for a Bahai response.

⁴ Ficicchia uses the Persian term *taqiya*, a practice permitted in Shiah Islam but in fact forbidden in the Bahai Faith. This is discussed in Susan Maneck, ‘Wisdom and Dissimulation,’ *Baha’i Studies Review*, 6 (1996).

⁵ *Der Baha’ismus* 399, my translation.

that interests us here simply repeats what Ficicchia has said. He refers to the “literally theocratic” Bahai World Order in which the social and political ordering of society is the responsibility of local and national Spiritual Assemblies, and the Universal House of Justice.¹ This is supported by a quotation from Shoghi Effendi’s *World Order of Baha’u’llah*, which refers to “the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity,” “*the coming of age of the entire human race,*” “the emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture,” and so on, but makes no mention at all of institutional ordering.² Eisegesis (reading one’s preconceptions into the text) of this sort is a familiar pattern in the entire secondary literature, both Bahai and non-Bahai, especially where the reference is to the writings of Shoghi Effendi. The assumption that any religious vision of ideal political structures must be theocratic is so deeply rooted that any religious language concerning political theory is taken *per se* as theocratic. In Jäggi’s case he has probably been directly influenced by Ficicchia, since Jäggi does not use primary sources and does cite Ficicchia, for instance as an authority on Babi history (which seems unwise).

Another example worth considering, because it is typical of anti-Bahai polemic in English and seems to have influenced some later writers, is W.M. Miller’s *The Baha’i Faith*:

As one studies the Aqdas it becomes clear that ... there are ... numerous laws which presuppose the existence of a Baha’i State, with an executive, a judiciary and a police force. How else could taxes and fines be collected, and crimes be punished by imprisonment and death. Baha’u’llah definitely anticipated the time when the “People of Baha” like the People of Islam will establish a regime in which Religion and State will be one. The Most Holy Book is supposed to contain the basic laws for this world Theocratic-State for the coming one thousand or more years.³

It would be hard to argue with the first part of this. Any model for future society, or the good society, which did not include the organs of government and judges, taxes and prisons would be utopian. But from where does he deduce that Baha’u’llah expects that “Religion and State will be one”? Does not the Aqdas say, according to Miller’s own translation, that Baha’u’llah does not desire to take

¹ *Zum interreligiösen Dialog* 150.

² *World Order of Baha’u’llah* 163. Italics in the original (1938 and 1974 editions).

³ Page 160.

possession of the kingdoms of the kings, but rather their hearts?¹ Does it not look forward to a time when “the multitude (*jumhúr*) of people” will rule in Tehran, a reference that Miller himself glosses as possibly indicating a republican form of government?² It seems likely that Miller is interpreting the Aqdas in the light of a later tablet which he cites, the Lawh-e Ishraqat which (using Miller’s translation again) says that “all *political* matters shall be referable to the House of Justice.”³ The question of the translation of this phrase (*umúr-e siyásiyyih*) has already been mentioned: it should be read as ‘policy matters,’ for the term is not specific to state policy and thus to what we would think of as ‘politics’ in the narrower sense of the word.

It requires no great effort of charity to assume that Miller’s deduction is an honest attempt to understand the implications of this tablet, for if Baha’u’llah did place political matters in the hands of the Universal House of Justice that would, by normal definitions, be a theocracy. While Miller’s writing is unashamedly polemical, it does not follow that it is dishonest. Miller seems to be simply unaware of Baha’u’llah’s self-interpretation in the Lawh-e Dunya (discussed at page 185 above), which makes it clear that neither verse is intended to abrogate his other writings that recognise that temporal affairs are in the hands of the kings and rulers. The conclusion must be that ‘matters of policy’ are divided into two spheres: worldly matters being delegated by God to civil governments, while matters of policy within the Bahai religious community are referred to the houses of justice.

In *New Jerusalems* Denis **MacEoin**⁴ provides a series of descriptions of New Religious Movements that have succeeded, or seem likely to succeed, in gaining

¹ Miller, *The Baha’i Faith: Its history and teachings*, appendix page 47, corresponding to paragraph 83 of the 1992 translation of the *Kitab-e Aqdas*.

² *Op. cit.* appendix page 50 and note 2, corresponding to *Kitab-e Aqdas* paragraph 93.

³ *Op. cit.* 161, emphasis added. Authorized translations are to be found in *Tablets of Baha’u’llah*, page 27 (the thirteenth Glad-tidings) and page 129 (the Eighth Ishraq).

⁴ MacEoin is an academic of recognized standing in Middle-Eastern studies who has written extensively on Babi history, doctrines, and documentary sources. He is included here, and not under ‘Academic treatments’ below, because *New Jerusalems* is a collection of journalistic pieces rather than academic papers. Other works by MacEoin, notably *Sources*, ‘Holy War’ and ‘Babism to Baha’ism’ are academic studies of the highest order. They do not directly address the question of theories of government, but do deal with related questions (e.g. *jihád*). They are especially relevant as regards the Babi community, and are cited in the section dealing with Babism. Another non-academic treatment by an academic, an essay by Dabashi, has been critiqued on pages 90 to 94 above.

political influence, usually in third-world states.¹ The Bahai Faith is included in the article because of the conversion of the king of Western Samoa² to the Bahai Faith.

As a confirmed Baha'i, Malietoa Tanumafili is expected to render unquestioning obedience in all matters to a supreme Baha'i council known as the Universal House of Justice ... What would happen if George Bush became a convert tomorrow? And what will happen if a small Baha'i state does eventually emerge somewhere, ultimately subject to the overriding authority of an outside body deemed infallible in all its judgements and governed by a canon of laws divine in origin and unalterable?³

He writes that "Baha'ism perpetuates the Muslim theory of society as a unity, without the distinction between 'religion' and 'politics,' 'sacred' and 'secular' characteristic of Christianity."⁴ This is an odd comment for someone with some knowledge of Islam, and who reads Persian and Arabic and claims to have read the Bahai scriptures widely,⁵ since the distinction between religion and politics is the theme of Abdu'l-Baha's *Risalih-ye Siyasiyyah* (*Sermon on the Art of Governance*) and one of the themes of Baha'u'llah's *Kitab-e Aqdas*. Moreover he himself quotes from shorter passages from the writings of Baha'u'llah that establish the rights of civil government as a fundamental principle:

In one passage of Baha'i scripture we read that "God ... hath bestowed the government of the earth upon the kings. To none is given the right to act in any manner that would run counter to the considered views of them who are in authority."⁶

¹ This section of *New Jerusalems* is based on an article first published in the *New Humanist*, 102:2, 1987, 9-11. The new religious movements covered include Soka Gakkai (in Japan), the Unification Church (in Honduras and Korea), the Church of the Complete Word (Guatemala), Transcendental Meditation (the Philippines), and the 'Free' evangelical churches in Latin America.

² MacEoin describes Western Samoa as a "strategically-important" state. One assumes this is tongue-in-cheek.

³ *New Jerusalems* 190. For brevity's sake I will refrain from addressing the issues MacEoin raises, since they are only an issue if the entire argument of this dissertation is wrong.

⁴ *Op. cit.* 184.

⁵ MacEoin, 'Baha'i Fundamentalism,' 66 and 82 n.19.

⁶ *New Jerusalems* 187-188, the source is *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah* (continued...)

He compares this to what Márkus has called ‘theologies of oppression:’ the theologies of evangelical churches in South America that have justified political inactivity. “Bahaism is, therefore, a movement whose spread is bound to be attractive to rulers only too happy to have large numbers of their ... populations embrace an ethos of political quietism.”¹ This is a fair criticism, but also points to an inevitable trade-off: if religion recognises that political affairs are the proper province of political mechanisms, this necessarily implies that religion renounces some claim to immediate political relevance. In the light of historical examples of societies in which religious organs have directed or interfered in political affairs, or religion has been used to mobilise the masses in a revolution (as in Iran in the Constitutional Revolution and again in 1979, the Boxer rebellion in China, and the Mahdist rising in Sudan) it seems self-evident that this is in the long term a price worth paying. The critique also omits to mention the fact that all people *as citizens* (as distinct from people *as believers* in particular religions) have civic duties which are endorsed in the Bahai Writings, and that these include (in a democracy) voting and other political activity. The result is a nuanced position, combining strict institutional separation with an ethic of responsible political activism within the law, that does not allow the religious authorities to endorse *any* political position, be it support for an oppressive regime or for the opposing revolutionary movement. Yet certain political goods, such as democracy, freedom of the press, freedom from corruption and the full participation of women *are* endorsed: this is not a value-free approach to politics, but it recognises that the principle of the separation of church and state is fundamental, and limits the legitimate possibilities for religious organisations in the political sphere, with the result that the primary interface between them is through the individual who is at once a believer and a citizen.

A person who lives under a non-democratic government that is not simply governing badly, but is actively engaged in evil, then faces a quandary. This is not particular to Bahais in such a situation, it is the issue that faced the Christian theologian Bonhoeffer in deciding whether to support a plot to assassinate Hitler. It is a quandary that is inherent to the liberal democratic values that MacEoin himself appears to support, for liberal democracy depends on the rule of law, so that an illegal act – even if it is only distributing forbidden literature – is a contradiction *within* the political conscience, as well perhaps as a contest with the religious conscience. The quandary can only be eliminated by establishing liberal democratic regimes throughout the world, and by establishing a world political

⁶(...continued)

CXV (one of two Tablets of Dhabih) 241.

¹ Page 187.

and judicial order capable of delegitimising a government that grossly violates the human rights of its citizens. Such a ruling would legitimise the activities of that state's citizens or outside powers to remove the illegitimate government. There must in short be a World Tribunal to which citizens can take complaints against their government, in cases where the government concerned does not provide a means of constructive political participation sufficient to correct the situation within a reasonable time. Shoghi Effendi's vision of a world political and judicial order to sustain the universality of human rights thus has a great deal to offer the liberal cause.

MacEoin goes on to say, "at a deeper, less public level. ... in its attitude towards secular authority, Baha'ism betrays an anti-liberalism that is disturbing indeed." He supports this with a reference to Baha'u'llah's statements on liberty, in paragraphs 122-125 of the *Kitab-e Aqdas*. What MacEoin says here is very similar to **Ignaz Goldziher's** critique in *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*,¹ which was first published in 1910, and since Goldziher has been answered at length by Cole in 'Iranian Millenarianism,'² and by Udo Schaefer in *The Crooked Made Straight*,³ we need only note here that, according to Goldziher's own citations, Baha'u'llah merely states that societies need to function according to laws. Goldziher calls this "frankly reactionary." Most liberal political philosophers would regard laws, and their prompt, certain and transparent enforcement, to be essential to a liberal society, and the absence of law as an invitation to tyranny.

MacEoin continues:

... it is important to remember that there is yet another dimension to the Baha'i mission. Whereas the average Protestant sect is content to collaborate with regimes that support its ends and wait for the future return of Christ, the Baha'is are actively working to establish religious states in which the functions of government will be taken over by Baha'i institutions. Shoghi Effendi writes of the emergence of a '*Baha'i theocracy*' or a '*Baha'i World Commonwealth*' ruled by the laws and institutions of the true faith ... He looks forward to the time when '*humanity will emerge from that immature civilization in which church and state are separate*' and to the day when Baha'ism will be recognized, 'not merely as one of the recognized religious systems of the world, but as the *State Religion* of an independent and Sovereign Power.'

¹ Page 250.

² Pages 15-16.

³ Pages 302-16.

However familiar and chilling that sounds, it is likely to remain a utopian dream; but the spread of Baha'ism in countries with unstable regimes holds out the possibility of small-scale theocracies by the next century.¹

There is a similar remark in his article 'The Shi'i establishment in Modern Iran,' where he asserts that the Bahai Faith has a "long-term aim of establishing theocratic rule in Iran and throughout the world." In 'The Baha'is of Iran' he states that "the Baha'is seek to fulfil the theocratic vision of messianic Shi'ism."² It will be noted that the Bahai Faith is said to be simultaneously a political threat to the state, and politically quietist, and is criticized on both counts. The views cited here, which must be regarded as polemic rather than serious academic evaluations, contrast with those in MacEoin's 'Babism to Baha'ism,' one of the first academic studies to recognize that Baha'u'llah's repudiation of Babi militancy was not primarily pragmatic or temporary.³

From the words he attributed to Shoghi Effendi in the excerpt from *New Jerusalems* that were italicised in the citation above, it would appear that MacEoin has based himself there and in 'The Shi'i establishment' on a statement by the anti-Bahai polemicist William **Miller**, in *The Baha'i Faith: Its history and teachings*, where Miller says:

In the *Baha'i World* 1934-1936 (p. 199) he [Shoghi Effendi] is quoted as saying: "Former faiths inspired hearts and illumined souls ... The Faith of Baha'u'llah, likewise renewing man's spiritual life, will gradually produce the institutions of an ordered society fulfilling not merely the functions of the churches of the past, but also the functions of the civil state. By this manifestation of the Divine Will in a higher degree than in former ages, humanity will emerge from *that immature civilization in which church and state are separate*, and partake of a true civilization in which spiritual and social principles are at last reconciled as two aspects of one and the same Truth."⁴

If we turn to the volume of *The Baha'i World* cited by Miller, we find an almost identical paragraph, except that it refers to "that immature civilization in which church and state are separate *and competitive institutions*." Miller has removed three words so as to radically change the meaning of the citation for polemic

¹ *New Jerusalems* 187-9, emphasis added.

² Page 81.

³ Page 233.

⁴ Page 290.

purposes. He has also incorrectly attributed it to Shoghi Effendi: it was in fact written by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahais of the United States in 1937. At that time Horace Holley was the secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly, and we have already seen his abhorrence for competition as the governing principle in society. Nowhere in the text is there anything that would justify Miller's assertion that these words are attributed to Shoghi Effendi. Since MacEoin has made the same two mistakes, it seems likely that he has simply taken over quotations from Miller without checking them. This is remarkable because MacEoin cites the words of Shoghi Effendi in *World Order of Baha'u'llah* which refer to the future recognition of the Bahai Faith as "the State Religion of an independent and Sovereign Power."¹ Clearly such recognition presupposes that state and religion are distinct, cooperating, entities. The contradiction should have alerted him to check the words that Miller attributes to Shoghi Effendi. MacEoin lives in the United Kingdom, and should be aware that the establishment of the Church of England there has not created a theocratic state, and he should also be aware that Shoghi Effendi refers to Tsarist Russia, Greece in the 1920s, Spain and Mexico before disestablishment, the Ottoman empire before the Young Ottoman revolution and the Roman empire following Constantine as states having a state Religion.² None of these would normally be considered theocratic states. So why does he find talk of a State Religion 'familiar and chilling'? And, one might add, why does he say that "the spread of Baha'ism holds out the possibility of small-scale theocracies by the next century." Apart from the obvious difference between the establishment of religion and a theocracy, he has himself cited statistics showing that the Bahais constitute "a very small percentage of the population"³ and could not possibly establish theocracies, if that was their goal, by the year 2000. One has to conclude that these things are said simply to create a climate of fear. A few pages later⁴ he is comparing the architecture of the buildings at the Bahai World Centre in Haifa, Israel, with the monumental neo-classicism of German fascism. This is mere polemic, for while some of the buildings in the Bahai gardens at Haifa are large in terms of floor area, they are designed to blend into the mountain and the trees planted around them. The mass is minimized by placing much of the structure underground.

¹ Pages 6-7.

² Russia: *God Passes By* 227; Greece: *op. cit.* 389-90 and *The Promised Day is Come* 108-109; Spain and Mexico: *op. cit.* 104-105; the Ottoman Empire: *The World Order of Baha'u'llah* 175.

³ *New Jerusalems* 185.

⁴ *Op. cit.* 190.

Academic studies¹

MacEoin is an academic in the field of Islamic and Babi studies himself, but his conclusions regarding the Bahai Faith are radically different from those of other non-Bahai authors who also have the original texts and the necessary expertise at their disposal. In addition to the works mentioned above, in his ‘Shi‘i Establishment’ he asserts that “although the sect has categorically repudiated militant action in favour of a return to the original Shi‘i policy of quietism and cooperation with the state, it retains the long-term aim of establishing theocratic rule in Iran and throughout the world.”² Compare this to the conclusion of the historian **Mangol Bayat**, who said:

[Baha’u’llah] embraced what no Muslim sect, no Muslim school of thought ever succeeded in or dared to try: the doctrinal acceptance of the de facto secularization of politics which had occurred in the Muslim world centuries earlier.”³

This comes closer than any of the authors discussed thus far to understanding the teachings of Baha’u’llah regarding the church-state relationship. While some academic writers have recognized the importance of the separation of church and state in the thought of Baha’u’llah, and his importance in terms of developing political thought in the Ottoman empire⁴ and Iran,⁵ these writers have generally attributed Baha’u’llah’s stance to pragmatic considerations relating to the vulnerability of the young Bahai community. Bayat, for example, says;

... contrary to the Babi and Islamic view of the prophet as the absolute sovereign, Bahau’llah, the pragmatic leader facing exile and persecution, having lived through the military defeat of the early Babis, expediently declared his religion totally divorced from political concerns.⁶

A similar tactical motive is supposed in **Hamid Algar’s** *Religion and State in Iran*:

¹ Early orientalist works are not covered here: see also the brief mention of Goldziher, above, and the work of E.G. Browne listed in the bibliography.

² Page 96.

³ *Mysticism and Dissent* 130.

⁴ See especially the works by Cole discussed below.

⁵ See, for example, the works of Browne, Keddie, Algar and Arjomand cited in the bibliography, and Cole’s *Modernity and the Millennium*.

⁶ *Mysticism and Dissent* 130.

The Baha'is dissociated themselves from the attack on the Shah, and in fact sought to achieve with Nasir ud-Din Shah what the Bab had failed to accomplish with Muhammad Shah: to present themselves as allies of the state against the ulama. ... in reality the Baha'is came to occupy something of a position between the state and the ulama, not one enabling them to balance the two sides, but rather exposing them to blows each side was aiming at the other.¹

It is reasonable to suppose that the safety of the Bahai community must have weighed heavily with Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha. Nevertheless, they both wrote works advocating and foretelling parliamentary democracy and other democratic reforms in Iran, which in itself would have been an offence if they had been living in that country. They had these books printed in Bombay and distributed through the Bahai community, which must have been regarded as an act of sedition by the Iranian government. However great their concern for the safety of the Bahai community may have been, it did not weigh heavily enough to make them withdraw from a position of principle in relation to democracy, so it seems unwarranted to regard their recognition of the legitimacy of the Qajar state as a mere tactical position. I hope that the previous chapter has shown that this recognition has more substantial roots in Baha'u'llah's vision of the deep structure of the universe (i.e., his metaphysics).

Abbas Amanat seems rather to attribute Baha'u'llah's attitude to quietism:

[Nasir ad-Din Shah's] deep fear of a recurring Babi revolt was not substantially obviated by Baha'ullah's statements that he and the moderate Babis who adhered to him as Baha'is had abandoned (if they had ever entertained) any wish to overthrow the Qajars and assassinate the shah.

Baha'ullah's call for moderation in the nascent Baha'i doctrine, particularly after his 1869 exile to Akka, came to represent a moral ethos increasingly disengaged from political involvement as it fit [*sic*] his essentially mystical worldview. Nasir ad-Din Shah never recognized the sincerity of Baha'ullah's disclaimers and his doctrinal dissociation from the still politically active Azali-babi minority ... In spite of the doctrinal and political reorientation of the Baha'i majority toward a tacit recognition of the Qajar monarchy, the Babi idea of dual opposition to the state and the ulama remained a major source of popular dissent in Persian society ...

¹ Algar, *Religion and State* 149-151.

Under Baha'ullah the revisionist wing of the movement began to seek peace with the state while opting for milder opposition to the religious establishment. This strategy ultimately crystallized in the Baha'i doctrine of political nonintervention.¹

The distinction between Baha'u'llah's policy and the Azali rejection of the state is well put here, but 'noninvolvement' is not an accurate description of the policy of either Baha'u'llah or Abdu'l-Baha, as can be seen in Juan Cole's 1992 article, 'Iranian Millenarianism and Democratic thought in the 19th Century,' which will be discussed below. After having demonstrated Baha'u'llah's links with the Young Ottomans and statesmen, Cole concludes "Historians have tended, without warrant, to read the policy of nonintervention in politics adopted by Abdu'l-Baha in 1907 ... back into the period 1868-92."² Given that Abdu'l-Baha's letter to Thornton Chase advocating political participation (page 221 above), was written after 1907, this should refer to the policy of non-involvement in *Iranian revolutionary politics* adopted in 1907.

Before turning to Cole's study, **Peter Smith's** excellent paper on 'Millenarianism in the Babi and Baha'i Religions' (1982) should be mentioned. The theoretical part of this paper, which attempts to refine existing models of the sociological dynamics of millenarian movements, need not detain us although it is valuable. Of more interest is his firm location of the Shaykhi, Babi and Bahai religions in the framework of millenarian expectation, first in Shiah Islam and later in adventist America, and in the dynamic that moves successful millenarian movements beyond millenarianism. Babism he calls "the only clear instance of a modern Shi'i millenarian movement" with the possible exception of the millenarian aspects of Sayyid Alamgir's short-lived revolt in 1891.³ He notes that the Bab's claim to Mahdihood implied, in the Shiah context, a revolutionary challenge to the authority of both the government and the religious leaders. But, he says, "it seems difficult to credit the Babis with the intention of a physical seizure of power."⁴ "Whilst politically, the Babis desired to establish a theocratic state, their major conflicts with the civil authorities do not appear to have been intended as directly insurrectionary acts. Hopes of royal conversion must be weighed against the questioning of Qajar authority."⁵ It is unfortunate that he does not clarify what is meant here by 'a theocratic state': from the lack of source

¹ *Pivot of the Universe* 412, 217.

² Page 22.

³ Pages 238, 252.

⁴ Pages 242-3.

⁵ Page 269.

references one suspects that he is no nearer to understanding Babi political theory, if such a thing existed, than other authorities to date.

At least in regard to the Bahai Faith he is clearer, although not entirely accurate. He represents the Bahai Faith as advocating progressive political positions, such as constitutional rather than absolute monarchy and the development of an international political order, but also says that the Bahais “were not to concern themselves with political affairs.” This is an odd comment coming from an historian, since as we will see from Cole’s paper, Baha’u’llah and Abdu’l-Baha were both closely involved in progressive political movements, while not having any political ambitions for themselves, and Abdu’l-Baha told Thornton Chase that the Bahais in America must “take part in the affairs of the republic.”

It is unfair to single Smith’s comment out here, since any number of examples could be given in the Bahai secondary literature that give the same impression, that the Bahai teachings are against any involvement in political affairs. This contains an element of truth, but embraces at least three confusions. The first is historical, and one would have expected Smith to avoid it. The practical instructions given to Bahais regarding political behaviour, and the example set by their leaders, have changed over time and in different countries. For example, in Iran the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-6 led to a marked withdrawal of the Bahai community from involvement with progressive political movements, partly to preserve the safety of the community and partly because conservative religious forces had seized control of the coalition backing the revolution, and these forces insisted that the Bahai minority should be excluded from the political process. This was the price that ‘progressives’ such as Afghani and Malkum Khan (*Mirzá Malkum Khán*) paid, for having used religious networks to mobilise support for democratic change, not realising apparently that the separation of church and state is not a fruit of democracy and progressive government, but its foundation.

Later, in the United States of the McCarthy era, the Bahais found it impossible even to register as a voter without becoming entangled in the polarized party-political system. From the 1940s to 1960s, Bahais from the United States were instrumental in founding many of the Bahai communities outside of the Middle East. To this day one finds Bahais who think that Bahais are required to abstain from voting, and may even hope that the political system will eventually be destroyed by such concerted abstention. But as Abdu’l-Baha’s letter to Thornton Chase shows, the principle that Bahais must support and obey their governments means that, in a democratic society, they must fulfil the political duties of citizenship, as participants. This is the general principle. There are exceptional circumstances in which this is not possible: in Iran because the

price of participation would have been to deny being Bahai, in McCarthy's America because the price was signing up for one or other mainstream party and against the communist party. Such temporary exigencies should not be confused with political quietism as a matter of principle (as in some world-denying millennialist movements), and the present situation should not be read back into the time and teachings of Baha'u'llah. World peace is the goal, and Abdu'l-Baha has stated that the enfranchisement of women and their participation in politics will be a factor in securing it.¹ Are we to suppose that Bahai women should participate in politics, and Bahai men should not? Or that women in general should participate, but the Bahai women, who have as much stake in achieving lasting peace as any of their sex, and more guidance on how to go about it, should not lift a finger? Clearly the institutional separation of politics and religion cannot mean that believers cannot be political: this is an absurdity.

The second confusion here is between taking part "in the affairs of the republic," which is encouraged, and joining external organizations, whether political, religious or social. Bahais are called on to support and participate in progressive movements,² but also to exercise great caution in joining organizations so far as this implies giving allegiance to them or to an ideology, or supporting the organization's actions and programme as a whole. In particular they are not permitted to be registered members of the Bahai community and at the same time members of a church or a political party. This policy dates from the 1920s³ and, in my opinion, will eventually have to be changed. One would not

¹ "If, in the future, women like unto men are given the franchise, assuredly they shall prevent the occurrence of war .." Letter of Abdu'l-Baha printed in *Star of the West* Vol. 10 No.3. April 28 1919, 39-40.

² Shoghi Effendi, *Baha'a Administration* 126, 174; *God Passes By* 330.

³ The earliest mention I have found is in Shoghi Effendi's letter 'The Golden Age of the Cause of Baha'u'llah' dated March 1932 (published in *The World Order of Baha'u'llah* 64). He apparently modified this instruction in the following year, when Abdu'l-Baha's letter to Thornton Chase came to light (see page 222 note 2). Subsequent letters in the early 1930s specify that the instruction to avoid actual membership applies to political parties. A letter of 1947 (*Arohanui* 51) indicates that the policy was not particular to the United States in the McCarthy era, but this letter was written by the Guardian's brother, Ruhi Rabbani, who elsewhere in the same volume asserts that there is no reference in the Bahai Writings to a naming ceremony for a baby (*Arohanui* 47, cf *Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha Abbas* 149-50). We can also compare the letter by a secretary on vivisection on page 69 of *Arohanui* to Abdu'l-Baha's endorsement of the practice in a tablet to Ella Goodall Cooper held in the Bahai archives in Wilmette. At one point in *Arohanui* the secretary says directly that he is expressing only his own views (page 89), but in many

(continued...)

expect the writings of Baha'u'llah or Abdu'l-Baha to mention it, since institutionalised political parties in the contemporary sense did not exist in the Middle East of their time. Indeed ideological political parties are a relatively recent and, I think, short-lived phenomenon. Prior to the 20th century, parties such as the Tories and Whigs of English politics, or those in France and the United States, represented interests rather than ideologies. Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha supported a consultative government in which various interests, such as the nobility, agricultural interest, labour and capital would be represented, and it is hard to see how the interests and concerns of farmers, for example, can be represented in parliament unless they are organised to choose their representatives and to maintain contact with them. Twentieth-century ideological parties, on the other hand, were built on a homogeneity of class interests that no longer exists, and on a claim that one ideology could provide the coordinating function in society, in effect replacing religion in the Durkheimian model of a simple society. The policy in force from 1930s to today, that Bahais cannot be members of a political party, is evidently defensible so far as it refers to an era of ideological politics. But since democracy requires political parties, or something with the same function and a different name, and the Bahai teachings evidently endorse democratic government and also require believers to contribute to the system of government they live under (democratic or not), the position of the Bahais in an era of non-ideological politics becomes less clear.

Multi-party democracies today consist of a mixture of ideological parties such as communists and racists, purely pragmatic parties with varying ideas and emphases about how to achieve good government, and largely pragmatic parties that are still living with a party tradition inherited from the ideological era, such as Labour parties. It would be invidious for a National Spiritual Assembly to make case-by-case judgements that membership or candidacy for some political parties is permissible, but not for others, so the policy could only be changed where all or most parties have shed any ideological, race or class basis. The question evidently requires more study, but as a rule of thumb I would suggest

³(...continued)

other letters this is implicit from the tone. In short, in these letters in *Arohanui* it is not clear whether the mistaken references to details of the Bahai teachings expressed in the secretary's words reflect only the secretary's lack of knowledge, or show that Shoghi Effendi himself was unaware of relevant letters from Abdu'l-Baha on these points. Shoghi Effendi frequently added a postscript greeting, but we need not generally suppose that he intended to endorse his secretary's comments by doing so, unless the words indicate this. In view of such uncertainties, the general policy in this study has been to avoid reliance on letters written by Shoghi Effendi's secretaries, except where a postscript specifically endorses what the secretary has written.

that those parties that allow multiple party memberships and public selection of candidates can be supposed to be representing legitimate social interests, rather than ideologies.¹ Interests overlap. A farming family for example may wish to support both an organisation that ensures that the concerns of the countryside are heard in parliament, *and* one that is primarily concerned with ensuring that legislation takes into account the needs of families with young children. At election time a decision must be made as to which issue is most urgent, or which organisation warrants the greater confidence, but a vote for one is not a vote *against* the other, if they recognise their complementary nature. In this situation there seems to be no objection in fundamental principle to Bahais joining one or other, or both.

The third confusion is immediately relevant to our theme. We have seen that the Bahai Faith was received in North America in a largely millennialist milieu. As Smith says, “Millenarian movements are centred on the urgent expectation of eschatological events which will utterly transform the world. The world as it is, is rejected as irredeemably corrupt, only the intervention of superhuman agencies can bring about the hoped-for age of bliss ...”² Political quietism is one logical outcome, although not the only one, so it would not be surprising if those who heard the announcement that ‘superhuman agencies’ had already intervened in the persons of Baha’u’llah and Abdu’l-Baha expected their message to include condemnation of political participation. And what we expect to hear is very often all that we do hear. As we have seen, Baha’u’llah and Abdu’l-Baha both taught that the state and religious orders should be separate and distinct, that the state should not involve itself in matters of belief and conscience and that the religious order should not be involved in politics. In *Paris Talks*, Abdu’l-Baha includes this in one of his talks listing the essential Bahai teachings:

The ninth principle of Baha’u’llah is that Religion should not concern itself with political questions. Religion is concerned with things of the spirit, politics with things of the world. Religion has to work with the world of thought, whilst the field of politics lies with the world of external conditions.³

¹ These have been called open parties. Although no country today has a political system based on open parties, Paul Hilder has assembled a list of parties and platforms in many countries that are experimenting with new concepts of the political party, in the face of falling memberships and the declining relevance of the traditional political party. His article was published on www.opendemocracy.net in January 2005.

² ‘Millenarianism in the Babi and Baha’i Religions’ 232.

³ Pages 132-3, typography and punctuation has been altered.

The question of the authenticity of this text need not concern us:¹ the interesting point is not what Abdu'l-Bahai is reported to have said, but that these words are then summarized by the editors of *Paris Talks*, under the heading of the principle of the “non-interference of religion and politics.”² If one was expecting to hear a message of political quietism, the words attributed to Abdu'l-Baha might be mistaken for it. But clearly it is not the same thing. In the first place, Abdu'l-Baha is speaking about the need for clear distinctions in the institutional relationship between two orders of society. It does not follow that a religious person may not fulfill the political requirements of good citizenship. In the second place, this is not a quietist negation of politics but rather a positive theory of the rights and dignities of both orders, of the right relationship between church and state.

Cognitive psychology makes use of drawings, such as the profile of a wine-glass whose negative is a face, or a cube that can appear either to project from the page or recede into it, to illustrate the relationship between cognition and perception. With a little practice, the viewer can learn to see the glass or the face, the cube projecting or receding, at will. A similar effort may be required to hear from Abdu'l-Baha not ‘non-involvement in politics,’ the negative message, but rather “the formal and complete separation of Church and State,”³ not millenarian quietism but respect for the independence of the state and the dignity of statecraft.

Smith's paper was later expanded in his book *The Babi and Baha'i Religions: From Messianic Shi'ism to a World Religion* (1985), which again describes the Bahai attitude as “political quietism,” in contrast to the “messianic theocracy” in which the Babis had believed.⁴ We can guess that Smith does not use quietism in its usual sense, since he writes that “Baha'u'llah ... sought to depoliticize Babism. Abrogating the Islamic-Babi injunction to engage in holy war, Baha'u'llah stressed that his followers should be loyal to their government and should absolutely avoid sedition and political violence.”⁵ Avoiding violence and sedition is not the same thing as depoliticization, but this seems to be what Smith means by ‘quietism.’ The book does go into some detail about the circumstances that led

¹ As already noted the reports of Abdu'l-Baha's talks based on *ad hoc* interpretations cannot be regarded as scripture, and are not reliable as historical records. In the case of *Paris Talks* in general, the reservation is even stronger. In the case of the talk cited here, given at the Theosophical Society in Paris, I am not aware of any information as to who took notes, or in which language(s).

² Page 127, see also page 157.

³ The phrase is actually not from Abdu'l-Baha, but from Shoghi Effendi, in *Baha'i Administration* 147. But, as can be seen from the discussion of Abdu'l-Baha's *Sermon on the Art of Governance*, it can serve very well as a summary of his thought.

⁴ Pages 2 and 79.

⁵ Page 97.

to a Bahai withdrawal from electoral politics first in Iran, and in the United States in the early 1930s, and subsequently from some but not all progressive social movements,¹ but Smith does not distinguish between quietism as a position of principle and the more complex position in the Bahai community, compounded of necessary local and tactical withdrawals or exclusion from particular spheres of action, as in Iran; concern that public positions taken in one country might endanger Bahais living in countries where they are persecuted; a desire in principle for cooperation with governments in social reconstruction; and an attitude of respect for the rights of states and the dignity of the art of governance that precludes Bahai institutions from lightly pressurizing or even advising government organs, while requiring Bahai individuals to participate in political life in the broader sense.

Despite the book's title, Smith is cautious about over-emphasizing the immediate importance of millenarian expectations as an explanation of the way the Babi religion developed.² In dealing with the Bahai period, he writes:

Babi millenarianism may be said to have culminated in the establishment of Baha'u'llah's authority over the Babi community ... Fulfilment of the messianic promise did not entail the establishment of the millennium, however, and the clear religious focus was the theophanic presence of Baha'u'llah rather than any hoped-for Babi theocracy.³

Thus far this corresponds closely with the theme of Baha'u'llah's *Kitab-e Iqan*: the transmutation of a theocratic sectarianism shaped by Shiah expectations into a new religion defined by Baha'u'llah's own ideas and person. But Smith continues:

Not that the goal of establishing a theocratic state was abandoned; rather, it was reasserted in a radically different form. Fully in keeping with the Isma'ili-Shaykhi view of history as the progressive unfoldment of the divine will, the establishment of the Baha'i millennium, the *sulh-e a'zam* or Most Great Peace, was projected into the future as the eventual culmination of human progress.

What Smith avoids telling us here is what this radically different 'form' is, specifically what form of government he thinks it entails. The implication is either that it is theocratic, or that the form is undefined and irrelevant since it emerges in the eschaton rather than in history.

¹ Smith, *Babi and Bahai Religions* 146-8.

² *Op. cit.* 55-56.

³ *Op. cit.* 74.

In dealing with the period of Abdu'l-Baha's leadership, Smith details the considerations that led Abdu'l-Baha to require the Bahais to withdraw from connection with any party in the Constitutional Revolution.¹ He fails to mention Abdu'l-Baha's own earlier involvement, and his support for the involvement of prominent Bahais on the constitutionalist side. He does mention some of the factors that made it impossible for the Bahai's to be associated with some parties within the unstable constitutionalist coalition. His summary also explains how Abdu'l-Baha's stance, which is compounded of these practical considerations and a principled distinction between the powers of government and of religion, came to be seen as political quietism:

The Baha'is had shown themselves to be seeking to be above politics, but by remaining obedient to a despotic government at a time when its legitimacy was being massively rejected, they gave the impression of at least tacit support. The Baha'is might wish to accomplish radical social change, but they rejected radical means of accomplishment. For the increasing number of Iranians who saw the solution to Iran's problems in secular political terms, the Baha'i stance was doubtless perceived as an irrelevance ... The Baha'i response to Iranian political change exemplifies the modern dichotomy between 'religious' and 'political' action.²

Smith treats the development of the Bahai communities in the West in terms of five motifs: millenarianism, social reconstructionism, religious liberalism, the polar (i.e., authority) motif and esotericism.³ He mentions the expectation, in the American Bahai community of 1900-1920, of an imminent end to the existing world order.

Expectations were sufficiently vague, however, for no crisis of faith to be engendered when 1917 passed without the millennium having been established. Expectations were easily extended into the future. Whilst hopes that the millennium would soon be established were still voiced, as at the 1922 Convention, most Baha'is settled down to work patiently for the Most Great Peace, a peace which would be established in God's own time.

The progressive softening of the more immediate millennial expectations among the western Bahais is taken up again on pages 140-141, dealing with the period from 1922 to the present. During this period, Shoghi Effendi's multi-stage meta-

¹ Smith, *Babi and Bahai Religions* 98-99.

² *Op. cit.* 98-99.

³ *Op. cit.* 107ff.

history, in which progressive movements such as the establishment of the League of Nations and the United Nations provide a positive basis for more far-reaching changes, gradually supplanted apocalyptic views of history in the Bahai community. A model in which history goes forward indefinitely, with punctuated continuities, replaces expectations of the end of history. Historical models are not the topic here, but the change is worth noting because it may be that a willingness to see a certain degree of continuity in time between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of God has also made it easier for contemporary Bahais to consider the possibility of the two kingdoms co-existing, and to ask what the relationship between them would then be.

Juan Cole's article, 'Iranian Millenarianism and Democratic thought in the 19th Century' makes by far the most substantial contribution to the topic of all the literature reviewed thus far. He uses Turkish, Persian and Arabic documents relating to the history of the period and has evidently read very widely. Much of the secondary Bahai literature¹ already mentioned consists of no more than passing mentions of the church-state issue, which are of interest mainly as indicators confirming anecdotal evidence that theocratic ideas have had a wide but not exclusive currency in the Bahai community, and a variety of causes. Neither the Bahai secondary literature nor the anti-Bahai polemic writers tell us much about the ideas of Baha'u'llah. Cole's article, on the other hand, tells us a great deal about Baha'u'llah's political thought and activities and their relationship to the political milieu, while not seeking to describe the Bahai theological system or the community's current beliefs. The extensive and solidly researched historical material, detailing parallels and actual meetings and correspondence between Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha and contemporary political reformers such as the Young Ottomans, need not be summarized here, although it is certainly to be recommended for an interesting and enlightening read.² Cole then seeks to link Baha'u'llah's "precocious advocacy of democracy"

¹ By one definition, this paper is also 'Bahai literature,' since at the time Cole wrote it he was a Bahai (he has since withdrawn from membership of the community's administrative structure). I have considered it separately not because of any judgement about the beliefs of the author, but because the paper distinguishes itself from the Bahai literature I have considered by its quality and form (it was written for an academic journal).

² Momen's earlier paper, 'The Baha'i influence on the reform movements of the Islamic world in the 1860s and 1870s' is also to be recommended, since some of the information he gives in relation to Persian reforms and reformers, and Shaykh Muhammad Abduh, has not been included in Cole's article.

with his “millenarian ideas,”¹ but his approach is primarily historical rather than theological. Moreover, the religious ideas that he is interested in are broad and rather vaguely defined millenarian ideas, especially the expectation that the world will be turned upside-down with the coming of the Messiah. These are related to Baha’u’llah’s programme for the reform of the state, entailing democratic parliamentary government, disarmament and collective international security, lower taxes and what Cole calls ‘an option for the poor’ and an equal legal status for all. Cole supports his conclusions with short citations and references to particular books and tablets. His summaries of Baha’u’llah’s teachings on church and state are worth citing:

... a major theme of [Baha’u’llah’s] epistles to the Muslim rulers was the acceptance in the new Bahai religion of a separation of religion and state, the legitimacy of the secular state, and the abstention of Bahais from violent sedition.

In the Chapter of the Kings [1866] Bahauallah declared that he had not come to destroy Ottoman lands, but to elevate the cause of the sultan by giving him good counsel ... Bahauallah here made public his complete break with Babi radicalism and violent agitation. Still, he did not offer to give way on any matters of principle and continued to advocate reforms at variance with state policy. He desired, by recognizing the legitimacy of the secular state, to achieve the position of spiritual counsellor for it.²

[Baha’u’llah] clearly envisioned the Bahai houses of justice as coexisting alongside secular parliaments and rulers, since he praised the retention of monarchy and praised the British parliamentary system.³

The word ‘secular’ in the first of these passages requires some explanation, because most of the states that are addressed in the Surat al-Muluk had not adopted secularism in the way that Turkey was later to do. It would be more precise to say that the new religion accepted the legitimacy of the state as such, the civil state. A state that is distinct and separate from organized religion may or may not have an established church, and may be formally religious or not. There are three distinct issues: the differentiation of church and state, whether the constitutional settlement establishes the status one or more religious organisations or forbids this, and the religiosity or secularism of the state itself.

¹ ‘Iranian Millenarianism’ 3.

² *Op. cit.* 5.

³ *Op. cit.* 15.

Cole's article contains two weaknesses that are relevant to this study, and somewhat limit his success in relating Baha'u'llah's social teachings to His religious ones. The first is that Baha'u'llah's advocacy of constitutional rather than absolute monarchy has led Cole, in my opinion, to under-emphasize the importance of kingship in Baha'u'llah's vision of the human world, an importance that is as much symbolic and metaphysical as political. The question that concerns Baha'u'llah, as I see it, is not how particular middle-eastern countries can be reformed, but how this world can be made a mirror of the names and attributes of God. In discussing the sources of Baha'u'llah's constitutionalism Cole refers to political factors rather than the desire to create on earth a constitution corresponding to his metaphysics:

The first [source of Baha'u'llah's constitutionalism] derived from the threat of arbitrary dismissal, mulcting, or even execution faced by government officials in an absolutist system. Bahau'llah, of course, came from precisely the class that suffered most from this arbitrariness. The second source was the monarch's role in upholding the state religion, Shi'ite orthodoxy, which had led to state collusion in the persecution of the Bab and his followers. Only constitutional and parliamentary restraints on the ruler, Bahau'llah was convinced, could ensure security of life and property, and freedom of conscience.¹

An excessive concentration on forms of government, to the neglect of other dimensions of governance, can be seen in Cole's reading of a passage in one of the Tablets to Shaykh Salman which he cites:

One of the signs of the maturity of the world is that no one will accept to bear the weight of kingship. Kingship will remain with none willing to bear alone its weight. That day will be the day whereon wisdom (*'aql*) will be manifested among mankind. Only in order to proclaim the Cause of God and spread abroad his faith will anyone be willing to bear this grievous weight.²

Cole interprets this as follows:

This passage shows that Bahau'llah unequivocally thought royal absolutism would completely die out, and he here gave only two conditions for the survival of monarchy in any form. The first was that the monarch share the burden of governing with others rather than attempting

¹ 'Iranian Millenarianism' 17.

² Translated in Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come* 72.

it all alone; the other was that the monarch become a Bahai and employ his or her office to spread the new religion. Like the epistle to Queen Victoria, this passage assumes that the only good monarchy is a constitutional one.¹

In Baha'u'llah's tablet, the continuation of kingship is not conditional on anything: "Kingship will remain," he says. It is "the maturity of the world" that will not be achieved until kingship is not exercised by one person alone. Cole also supposes that the 'kingship' (*sultanat*) referred to here is equivalent to monarchy, and reads a *sultanat* that is not exercised by one person alone as meaning a constitutional monarchy. It could equally well refer to rule by a monarch and an appointed cabinet, without a democratic or parliamentary component, a configuration that was in fact attempted in the Ottoman empire under the Tanzimat reforms. Moreover *sultanat* in Persian has a wider range of meanings than in Arabic. A dictionary from the time of Baha'u'llah² gives the meanings "Making emperor; power, authority, dominion; magnificence, majesty; an empire, reign, kingdom." The month of Sultan in the Bahai calendar is usually translated as Sovereignty. The combination *sultanat-e jamhúri* (dominion of the people) at that time meant a republic. Thus Baha'u'llah might conceivably be referring in this tablet to the continuation of the sovereignty of nations, even under a republican government – which, as Cole points out,³ is one of the forms of government that Baha'u'llah endorses. In short, the verse that Cole cites is not as specific regarding forms of government as Cole has interpreted it, although the rejection of one-person rule is clear. Its intent is not to specify a form of government but to call for a change of attitude on the part of the governors. Nor is it clear that "to proclaim the Cause of God and spread abroad his faith" can be equated with joining and propagating the Bahai Faith in particular, though that is a possible reading. But *‘aql* means sense, reason, understanding, discernment, insight, etc.. The deprivative form (without-*‘aql*) refers to dementia and derangement. In the light of Baha'u'llah's teaching that the religions of the world should be seen as manifestations of one religious impetus, would it not be equally reasonable to understand Baha'u'llah as saying that, in the maturity of the world, when wisdom (or understanding, or rationality) has been restored to the world, political authority will not be regarded as a prize to be fought for but as a burden that provides opportunities to serve the Good, which is the ancient Faith of God? Once again Cole's reading seem overly specific.

¹ 'Iranian Millenarianism' 9-10.

² Steingass, 1892.

³ 'Iranian Millenarianism' 17-18.

The second weakness I see is that Cole shows that the Bahai Faith grows out of millennialist expectations of the coming of the Messiah, and that Baha'u'llah claimed to fulfill these expectations, yet much of what he tells us about Baha'u'llah's social programme shows that Baha'u'llah does not fit easily into the millennialist pattern. It would be truer to say that he reacts against millennialism, and reshapes the community's expectations so as to steer it in another direction. Of the themes in the letters to the kings which Cole lists,¹ the element of millennial hopes fulfilled and the world-embracing scale of the redemption to follow, as well as the care for the poor, are typically millennialist. However it is hardly in the millennialist mould to call upon the world's rulers to establish peace. Millennialists usually expect the 'rulers of this world' and the 'powers that be' to be overturned, whereas Baha'u'llah tries to enlist them. The last theme Cole identifies here is advocacy of political democracy, which in Baha'u'llah's case is combined with "the equality of all religious communities under the state."² While many millenarian communities have a 'flat' structure with broad possibilities for participation in community affairs, they are a 'polity of the chosen' rather than a political democracy. The historical examples Cole uses to show there is a "link between millenarianism and democratic or populist thought" show these developments to have been consecutive rather than simultaneous. One first sees a community of the chosen who think they detect the coming of the chosen one, whom they expect to rule in place of the established order, and later we see this community learning to live in and with the world, and contributing to it some of the values which it has established. The causative link between the two is that any such movement that has been able to mobilize large numbers of people and have a substantial influence is likely to include populist, and in recent history, democratic elements. Thus greater social democracy is often the post-millennial result of a millennial fervour that has lost its ardour, or matured, depending on one's point of view.

For Cole, who is after all writing about Baha'u'llah and democratic thought, the decisive 'turn' in his thought³ comes with his open advocacy of representative parliamentary democracy as early as 1868. But it is not clear that this is a decisive moment if we are interested in Baha'u'llah's theological ideas. If the usual historical relationship between millennialist and democratic tendencies is as I have suggested, Baha'u'llah's advocacy of democracy is an indication that he has passed millennialism by. Where other millennialist movements reach this stage only following disappointment with the literal fulfilment of the descent of the

¹ 'Iranian Millenarianism' 7.

² *Op. cit.* 6.

³ *Ibid.*

new Jerusalem from heaven, Baha'u'llah (and perhaps the Bab and Jesus before him), claim the authority and have the necessary stature to redefine the promise for himself, proactively rather than in reaction to disappointment, and to lead a community towards a new understanding. If we locate the crucial difference between a millennialist movement and the post-millennialist stage in the decision to get along with and in the world, then the decisive 'turn' in Baha'u'llah's thought is already evident in the doctrine of the two sovereignties explained by Baha'u'llah in the *Kitab-e Iqan* in 1860-61.

However these are criticisms of the usefulness of Cole's paper for the purposes of this study, not of its value as history. It remains the only substantial academic study that has examined the church-state question in the Bahai Faith on the basis of the primary historical and scriptural sources. His work is indispensable for an understanding of the topic, and enables me to largely pass over the Ottoman political context of Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha's writing by referring the reader to Cole for further details.

Cole's paper has been extensively rewritten and republished as Chapters two and three of his *Modernity and the Millennium* (1998). This contains some striking new material on other aspects of modernity in the thought of Baha'u'llah, notably regarding the status of women. On the topic of church and state, however, it adds to the earlier paper only in having considerably more detail, and in extending its scope to include constitutional reform in Iran. Since I have published a review of the book elsewhere, I will pass over it here. The difference between Cole's book and earlier paper and the aims of the present study are differences between the disciplines of history and theology. I have concentrated on metaphysics and cosmology, seeking what Abdu'l-Baha calls "those inherent properties and necessary relations derived from the realities of things,"¹ rather than on the historical development of the religion, and on the question of church and state rather than the political programme as a whole.

One other study, **Chris Buck's** 'Introduction to the Kitab-i Iqan,' has a brief mention of Baha'u'llah's endorsement of the civil state, which has already been cited (page 151). The bibliography of that article refers to Buck's forthcoming book on the theme of Baha'u'llah's "sacralising of the secular," specifically mentioning the question of religion and politics. It would appear that, at least in academic studies, the 1990s have marked a watershed moment, after which Baha'u'llah's actual teachings on politics have to be taken seriously, and his stature as a political thinker has been recognized by authors outside the field of Bahai Studies.

¹ *Tablet to August Forel* 13.

Kathryn Babayan's *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs* (2002) deals with Persianate themes in Iranian religion, particularly in the Safavid period, but touches on the Babi and Bahai Faiths in the Epilogue. She writes:

Baha'ullah imagined a utopia where religious liberty and human equality fostered heteroglossia. What distinguished Baha'ullah from other like-minded Iranian reformists was that he was speaking as the spokesman of God. Baha'ullah's ideal society was not secular, for he lamented the spiritual and ethical decay in the West, associating it with the erosion of religion and its replacement with reason. Instead, Baha'ullah legitimized the sovereignty of monarchs but independently of clerical authority. These two bodies were to remain separate but joined, a tradition he recalled back to the "Covenant of Ardashir," locating it within a Persian genealogy of sovereignty ... The advent of technicalism and European world hegemony ushered in an era in which localisms ... were now intimately connected to a global society. The late antique language of apocalypics ... were indeed a unifying system. It took a consciousness like that of Baha'ullah to recognize this and to creatively reinterpret eschatology as a spiritual revolution that promised the integrity and freedom of all citizens of the world.¹

In conclusion

I have shown that much of the Bahai secondary literature either states or implies that the Bahai Faith supports a theocratic state in which, to quote John Robarts again, "the Baha'i spiritual assemblies will be the local government and the national spiritual assemblies the national government." To this one could add that informal sources, such as experience at summer-schools and participation in email discussion groups, and McMullen's study of the Bahais of Atlanta, confirm the view that a significant proportion of the Bahai community today lean towards similar views. I have also shown that much of the commentary by non-Bahai observers, including overtly anti-Bahai polemic, echoes the same theme. The most recent academic studies, however, recognise that Baha'u'llah was a prophet of post-modernity and an advocate of the separation of church and state. A

¹ Pages 487-489. The use of language that refers back to the Iranian political tradition is undeniable, and some instances will be noted in the translation of the *Sermon on the Art of Governance* in Appendix 1. The social vision however is modern at least, if not postmodern. There is an old Persian saying (probably pre-Islamic), "Religion and kingship are two rings on one finger." For the Sasanian kings, that finger was their own. For Baha'u'llah, it is the finger of God. And that makes all the difference.

considerable gap has opened up between the popular religion and informed views of what Baha'u'llah thought and hoped to achieve.

Looking beyond the Bahai Faith, the Introduction referred to the contemporary questioning of the separation of church and state by Islamists and the Christian right, and alluded to more extreme theocratic views. A word should be said now to counter the impression that we can consider under one heading the Bahai authors cited, hostile writers who aim to undermine tolerance of the Bahai community by arguing that it aims at establishing a theocracy, and religious parties such as some Shiah groups or the Muslim Brotherhood with their own explicit and even murderous rejection of the separate legitimacy of the state.

In the first place, it must be said that some of the literature that appears to reflect a theocratic political theory does not do so. When we examine ideas that are called theocratic, it often appears that the main concern is not to establish a particular religious order as the power in the state, but rather to counter the exclusion of religion from the public sphere and the desacralization of the world (as in the text from Dreyfus discussed above). In other cases writers may in fact be arguing only for the establishment of a religion, and the two issues have been confused. The formal separation of the institutions of organized religion from those of organized political activity does not exclude establishment.

In other cases there is no political philosophy worthy of the name, theocratic or otherwise. I do not have the impression that the level of political understanding in the Bahai community is much higher or lower than in society as a whole. One of the candidates in the 1997 presidential elections in the Republic of Ireland is quoted by the *Independent on Sunday* newspaper¹ as saying in an interview "there are only two ultimate controls in any country. There is either God or there is government," and then arguing that the former should take precedence. So far as one can tell from this interview, no political theory underlies these words, and the same charity can be extended to many of the Bahai writers. Their views express an extremely simple *social* theory, as if society was not a complex or organic system but an organization having a single centre exercising ultimate control. Clearly this is not the case in any modern society, and one must suspect that it fails to capture a great deal of the reality of even the most rudimentary society. Societies are multi-centred, since people come together to form them not just out of kinship, or for economic reasons, for self-defence or because their culture or religion provides a collective centre, but for all of these reasons together. The centres that correspond to these various aspects of society, such as the government, the market, the military, organized religion and educational and cultural institutions, need one-another. Where government has attempted to exert

¹ 17 August 1996, page 10.

ultimate control over markets, the arts and other projects within the society, as was the case in Eastern Europe, the society itself has become crippled. The same has occurred even more dramatically where organized religion has been granted a hegemony over other human projects, as in Iran in the decade following the revolution of 1979.

If one separates out those who are simply objecting to the desacralization of the world, those arguing for an institutional role for religion and mistakenly thinking that this is called theocracy, and those whose concept of society is so simple that the results cannot be dignified with the name of a political theory at all, it will be found that the genuine theocratic political theory is a rare animal indeed. It would be neither useful nor charitable to treat all such views as if they were evidence of the sort of explicitly theocratic political philosophy proclaimed by the Muslim Brotherhood. What they express as ‘theocratic views’ should rather be understood primarily as opposition to the functional differentiation of society, not as an expression of a particular interpretation of Bahai teaching, but rather as part of a larger world-view (religion being part of our world-view, and not *vice-versa*). On the dust cover of Huddleston’s book, his view of ‘the just society’ is appropriately represented by Voltaire meeting a group of peasants in a pastoral landscape.

Outside observers of the Bahai Faith – and for that matter of other religions grappling to define a position vis-a-vis politics – tend to suppose that any religious language concerning political theory is necessarily a claim to religious dominance over politics. For instance, if one says that true sovereignty belongs to God, and God’s lordship extends over every field of life, this could be a way of saying that politicians and princes are only ‘sons of the church’ (to use Dante’s formula). That would mean that religion is an umbrella for all other human projects, and that the institutions of religion ultimately hold the keys to human happiness. But the same language about God’s sovereignty over all areas could also be a full recognition – in religious terms – that the political process is just as much an expression of God’s will as the religious life, that politics does not need to creep under the skirt of religion to be acceptable to God. It can mean “we are giving the state the highest value available within a theological language, by saying it too expresses the will of God.” In reading religious language about politics, the question is not whether God’s lordship is asserted, but whether there is one lordship flowing only through the channel of religion, or a grace that flows to politics, sciences and arts, to marriage and family, work and service, as well as to worship and the institutions of religion.

This survey has shown a startling gap between Baha’u’llah’s teachings and the views of the majority of the Bahais. Clearly I write in the hope that it will

contribute to a change in the latter. In exploring this question within the Bahai community, however, polarisation for polemic purposes would be harmful and unnecessary. The survey has revealed a general ignorance of the Bahai political teachings, a lack of effort to develop a coherent political theory, a good deal of inertia, with views being passed from author to author and generation to generation, and a variety of influences from the social backgrounds of the Bahais. What this survey has *not* revealed is anything resembling a ‘party’ with an explicated theocratic programme that might need to be ‘defeated.’ Whatever details may be obscure or under debate, the broad lines of Baha’u’llah’s solution to the ancient quandary of church and state are clear. What is needed is not a crusade to win acceptance of those principles among his followers but a patient effort to understand the principles and their underlying logic and to find ways to help people to visualize the complex but harmonious society in which they are intended to apply.

Challenges for the future

The lack of scriptural foundations, and of clear argumentation, in the Bahai secondary literature points to several challenges for the Bahai community. The simplest is to draw out the reasonings that have led many Bahais over several generations to champion an idea that is not supported by their own scriptures, and to lay these arguments to rest. We must also suppose that there may be other substantial areas of the Bahai teachings that we are still misinterpreting. This calls for a sustained and critical review of all that we think we know, as a community, about the Bahai Faith and the shape of the Bahai community. We need to develop a habit of relating every claim about the Bahai teachings to authentic scriptural sources.

A second challenge is to revise our attitudes to politics and to government institutions in the light of Baha’u’llah’s unequivocal endorsement of the claims of human governance. We are called to full citizenship of this world and the next. We are not only to “know and worship” God, but also to “carry forward an ever advancing civilization.”¹ Citizenship of this world involves duties that we cannot ethically leave to others. Abdu’l-Baha’s words requiring us to “take part in the affairs of the republic” have already been cited.² Their implications should be emphasised.

We are called to be genuine well-wishers of government.³ This requires much more than simply not disobeying its laws. It demands active, responsible, and

¹ Baha’u’llah, *Gleanings*, CIX.

² *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas* 343.

³ *Gleanings* XLIII, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 122 137; etc.

spiritual participation. We cannot indulge in sneering at politics from the sidelines. Since democracies depend on broad participation for survival, a consistent refusal to participate is a passive subversion of the governing system. But participation presents a real challenge: how can we participate as believing individuals, while respecting the separation of the religious and political orders? Where can we participate without becoming involved in divisive partisanship that might do more harm than good?

For that matter, is the party-based approach to politics always unhealthy? Perhaps there is an analogy to healthy competition in the economic sphere: neither a partisan nor a competitive approach would be healthy in the religious sphere, but religion – as we have seen – is not all. Since they are separate spheres, politics, commerce, science, and religion may function according to different principles, and the system of political parties may be appropriate in the political sphere, as a means of institutionalizing input from various interests in society. We have learned as Bahais to participate in a competitive entrepreneurial economy, while being cautious to keep the commercial affairs of individuals separate from our Bahai community life. We do not use the Feast to promote our sales schemes or careers, or at least we should not. We should also be able to keep our individual political involvement distinct from Bahai community life.

Fortunately, we know that a democratic system depends at least as much on broad public participation in the institutions of civil society and non-partisan governmental institutions (quasi-non-governmental organisations and NGOs) as on participation in its party electoral system. We may concentrate for now on “civil society” politics, but these challenging questions will one day have to be addressed.

The Moral Weight of Theocratic Ideals

Thus far, I have treated Bahai theocracy as if it were simply a structure of incorrect ideas or bad readings of particular texts, as if it were part of the conceptual structure of the Faith and did not affect our experience of Faith. But a greater challenge is, I think, for the Bahai community to examine itself – for example in the mirror of the secondary Bahai literature – and ask whether its adherence to these ideas does not have a moral weight as well. For instance, when we read John Robarts’ words: “the Baha’i spiritual assemblies will be the local government and the national spiritual assemblies the national government,”¹ what sort of emotional picture do we form of the future? Is there not a certain satisfaction in contemplating our own eventual triumph? A bolstering of our sense of self-importance? And the possibility, perhaps, of indulging in survivalist

¹ In *The Vision of Shoghi Effendi* 172.

fantasies, in which Bahais reconstruct a ruined world and start anew? The ideas that we have, even in our daydreams, help to shape the people we become: ideas have a moral significance.

The contemporary world is hard to understand: globalization, individualisation, and the differentiation of social spheres (politics, economics, science, religion) mean that more is demanded of each of us. There are conflicting claims, and the only place they can be resolved is within “the spirit of the true believer,” as Shoghi Effendi said.¹ Is the hope of an ultimate reversion to a simpler, undifferentiated, pre-modern society a psychological crutch? Has the Bahai Faith, which should be a path leading the peoples of the world into the postmodern era, been made instead into a refuge where the Bahais can shelter themselves from the world’s demands?

Church and state in contemporary crises

Finally, and supposing that the other challenges can be met, the Bahais face the challenge of bringing the Bahai teachings to the world. The relationship between the religious and political institutions of society is one of the oldest questions in human society. Yet it has taken particular and pressing forms in recent years, becoming an emblem for deeper anxieties and wider hopes, a touchstone for how we see ourselves and how we view the world. It has often taken the form of a struggle between parties with differing visions of the nation and its future: Islamists versus the governments of Islamic countries, or Nativists versus globalizing elites. But this is not primarily a struggle between parties and factions, it is an historic struggle for an understanding wide enough to embrace the religious and the political aspects of our own natures.

For those who consider religion a superstitious vestigial organ, the problem of church and state is external. But for the believer, it is an intimate dilemma and, if it is not resolved, a pain in the heart. How can we say, as we must: “Sovereignty is God’s,” and *not* say: “Therefore politics, science, and economics fall under the control of religion”? The solution that I have found in the Bahai writings appears to be generally applicable, for it shows that adherence to fundamental values derived from religion and faith does not entail any relativization of the prerogatives of the state, of the dignity of statecraft, or of our duties and participation as citizens. It is indeed possible to be a wholehearted citizen of the city of God and of a modern nation too, providing one can establish that God so wills it, not provisionally but as part of the fundamental order. The question is how we can take this gift of Baha’u’llah to the world.

¹ *Baha’i Administration* 63-4.

One of the attractions of Baha'u'llah's model to me is that it is beautiful – a dance of complementary pairs, rather than the ugly totalitarianism of monist models or the austerity of those secular models that seek to rule religion and culture out of the public sphere. If aesthetics is a valid argument in mathematics, it may certainly be admitted in theology. And if Bahais were really to teach and explain this model to the world, perhaps its beauty would attract those who are torn between the unattractive option of a state that denies a role for faith, on the one hand, and the fear of a decline into theocracy on the other. Religion and the state can only be reconciled if they recognize and respect one another. While many states appear willing to enter into a partnership with organized religion where they consider it safe to do so, the Bahai Faith is the only religion I know of that has the unambiguous theological underpinnings that would enable religion to recognize the state as an expression of its own fundamental and unchangeable religious principles.



This diversity, this difference is like the naturally created dissimilarity and variety of the limbs and organs of the human body, for each one contributeth to the beauty, efficiency and perfection of the whole.

When these different limbs and organs come under the influence of man's sovereign soul, and the soul's power pervadeth the limbs and members, veins and arteries of the body, then difference reinforceth harmony, diversity strengtheneth love, and multiplicity is the greatest factor for co-ordination.

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Appendix 1: Abdu'l-Baha's *Sermon on the Art of Governance*

Translator's foreword

This translation was prepared under the supervision of Professor J. ter Haar, and with the assistance of Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, both of the Department of Persian at the University of Leiden, the Netherlands. I have drawn heavily on an English translation by Juan Cole that has been published electronically in *Translations of Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Texts*, vol. 2, no. 2 (May, 1998) and on an unpublished translation into French by H. Dreyfus. The present provisional translation is intended for general use in the Bahai community. I have used the typeset Persian text printed in Tehran by Muhammad Labib in 1935, which has been checked against the 1893 or 1896 Bombay lithograph edition in the hand of Mushkin-Qalam.¹ An electronic edition in Persian published by the Bahai World Centre has also been consulted.² Both published versions are divided into sections, which have been indicated in the translation.³

Cole's English title for the work is *Abdu'l-Baha's "Treatise on Leadership,"* while Dreyfus has chosen *La Politique*. I have chosen the title *A Sermon on the Art of Governance*,⁴ where 'governance' is in the first place God's leading and guiding of the human race, the Divine governance, which operates through two 'powers,' the religious and the political. But it is also governance in the conventional sense, since much of the book is devoted to the relations between the government and the people.

The Persian original is certainly best appreciated when read out loud. Many sections of the *Resale-ye Siyasiyyah* are written in exhortatory style, in rhyming Persian prose with a declamatory rhythm. Sections with a strong cadence and rhyme alternate with prose, while analysis and scriptural quotations alternate with historical illustrations. The overall effect of the original is of a persuasive Persian

¹ Not every minor difference is mentioned in the footnotes: a more complete list of differences is available from the author. In general, the Tehran edition is faithful to the Bombay edition on which it is based.

² <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/>

³ The long citation from the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* is incorrectly divided into three sections in the Tehran edition.

⁴ This is a chosen title, not a translation of *Risalih-ye Siyasiyyah*. Likewise, Abdu'l-Baha's *Risalih-ye Madiniyyah* is published in English not as the *Treatise on Civilization* but as *The Mysterious Forces of Civilization* and later as *The Secret of Divine Civilization*.

sermon in high rhetorical style.¹

Two sentence structures dominate the more rhetorical sections. The first is a simple pair of rhymed phrases, the rhyme usually falling on the verbs which typically come at the end of each phrase:

chún be-maqsúd-e khísh muvafaq shodand
rasm-e degar písh gereftand

And when their strategy was succeeding
they presented another plan.

The second consists of two phrases that share a single simple verb, placed between them rather than in its usual place at the end of the sentence. The verb has to be read implicitly in the second phrase, and so links the two elements:

má'amúra-ye írán virán shod
wa díhím-e jahánbání maqar o sirír-e díván

The cultivated lands of Persia were laid to waste:
demons reclined on the throne of the kings.

The structure of the language, with the sustained use of two-part sentences and the frequent use of paired synonyms, reflects Abdu'l-Baha's theme: that God's guidance for the world acts through a two-fold order, religious and political. In his words, "This prohibition and prevention, rules and restraints, leading and impelling, is divided into two types." What may appear to be a repetitious structure should be heard rather as an emphatic refrain: "two, two, two ..."

In the hope of giving the reader at least an impression of the literary quality of the original, parts of the translation have been presented as free verse, usually in pairs of short lines. This is not to say that the verse sections of the translation correspond exactly to those in the original: at some points where Abdu'l-Baha continues in high poetry, his translator has been obliged to descend into prose. I have not found any way of reflecting the alternation of Arabic and Persian terms in some of the synonym pairs, or the fact that some sections draw on the Persian ideal of kingship, while others draw their terminology from Islamic thought on

¹ I owe this insight to an anonymous aged Mulla heard at sunrise, preaching in a courtyard of the bazaar in Shiraz, to an audience of shopkeepers. In contemporary Iran, the arts and piety of traditional Shiah practice have been pushed into the private sphere. The Friday sermons given by political clerics in the main mosque of Tehran (which are broadcast) do not contain any trace of either the eloquence or the piety of this Mulla. It is to be feared that the art of the sermon is not doing well in the Islamic Republic.

governance. The reader must imagine a more subtle theme of twoness and difference sounding underneath the surface structure.

Abdu'l-Baha employs many quotations and allusions from the Quran and Islamic traditions, and from Persian and Arabic poetry. Some of these have been identified, with the aid of many friends, and further assistance with this would be greatly appreciated.

The background and audience of the *Sermon on the Art of Governance*

Abdu'l-Baha wrote his *Sermon on the Art of Governance* in 1892, had it copied in a fine hand by Mushkin-Qalam, and sent it to Bombay where it was published in 1893, according to Ishraq-Khavari, or in 1896, according to the colophon in my copy.¹ This is just after the period of the Tobacco Protest, which had demonstrated the political power of the ulama. From a letter from Abdu'l-Baha which is included below as a preface to the main text, it is evident that Abdu'l-Baha sought to have it published again in 1907, when the course of Iran's Constitutional Revolution was beginning to show that the price paid for using the ulama to mobilise mass support was a fatal compromise of the separation of the religious and political spheres. However the *Sermon on the Art of Governance* does not contain specific references to the events or personalities of the time. Abdu'l-Baha seeks rather "to briefly clarify the most basic fundamentals of the divine teachings," setting out the principles underlying the relationship between religion and politics (in the broad sense) and between the government and the people. These teachings are as relevant today as they were when the text was written, certainly in Iran, but also elsewhere. As Ishraq-Khavari has noted (*loc cit.*), one of its main purposes is to explain "the separation (*infikák*) of politics from the clergy and religion."

It is not necessary to consider the history of the Tobacco Protest extensively here: the details are available for example in Nikki Keddie's *Religion and Rebellion in Iran*. They will be outlined only so far as they help to explain the audience for whom Abdu'l-Baha wrote. The reader will note that Abdu'l-Baha addresses his treatise to 'the Friends of God,' and cites texts from Baha'u'llah as

¹ See Ishraq-Khavari, *Da'irat al-Ma'arif-e Baha'i* under 'Risalih' (volume 9, gif 100). A more extensive introduction to *The Sermon on the Art of Governance* by Juan Cole has been published online in *Translations of Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Texts*, vol. 2, no. 2 (May, 1998). The colophon to the Bombay edition of which I have a copy states that it was published on 1 Muharram 1314, or 13 June 1896, which may indicate that this is a second printing, but there could also be reasons for a publisher to claim that a book was printed earlier or later than was in fact the case.

evidence that religious leaders should not be directly involved in politics, but also that his argument draws on texts from the Quran and from Islamic traditions, and much of it seems to be addressed also to the ulama of Iran and the court. So the question of audience needs to be addressed.

The background to the Tobacco Protest was an Iranian state that suffered from chronic disorganisation, a shortage of funds, and inflation due to financial mismanagement. In 1890 the Mullas in Tehran had begun to preach publicly against the Shah. At the same time, reformers in Iran and in exile were publishing newspapers and distributing pamphlets calling for the end of the absolute monarchy. The immediate cause of unrest was the ‘tobacco concession’ which Nasir ad-Din Shah granted to a British entrepreneur, Major Talbot, in March 1890, in return for royalties to be paid to the Shah. This was only one of many such concessions granted mainly to Russian and British interests, including one to run the state bank. The tobacco concession gave Major Talbot a complete monopoly over the production, sale and export of tobacco. As the details of the agreement became public, and particularly as the company’s agents began their work in Iran the spring of 1891, a storm of protest arose. One centre of opposition was Shiraz, where a leading Mulla, Sayyid Ali Akbar, preached against the sale of the tobacco monopoly to foreigners. He was expelled from Iran and went to Iraq to see a prominent reformer, known as Afghani. Sayyid Ali Akbar was a close relative of the most prominent Shiah cleric of the time, Mirza Muhammad Hasan Shirazi (*Shirāzī*, 1815-1895), the sole *Marja’-ye taqlid*, or exemplary guide in matters of religious practice, for all of twelver Shi’ism.¹ At Sayyid Ali Akbar’s urging, Afghani wrote a long letter to Shirazi² condemning the Shah in the most biting terms, and saying that the Persians were being made desperate by oppression but lacked a leader. He tells Shirazi that the people and ulama of Iran were waiting only for a word from him to act:

God hath set thee apart for this supreme vicegerency, to represent the Most Great Proof, and hath chosen thee out of the true communion, and hath committed to thy hands the reins to control the people conformable to the most luminous Law ... He hath entrusted to thee the care of those weighty interests whereby the people shall prosper in this world and attain happiness hereafter. ... He hath assigned to thee the throne of authority ...”
 “How then can it beseem one on whom God hath bestowed such power as this to be so chary of using it ...

¹ Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion* 73. Hairi, *Shi’ism and Constitutionalism* 64. The process by which Shirazi gained this universal recognition, and the events of the tobacco concession, are described by Amanat in ‘Clerical Leadership’ 115-121.

² Partial translation by E.G. Brown in *The Persian Revolution* 15-21.

In this letter, Shirazi is addressed in the most laudatory terms, as the “most mighty Pontiff.” Afghani also wrote a similar letter addressed to the ulama of Iran, and both letters were printed and distributed from London.¹ Another letter in Arabic, in which he asks Shirazi to order the Iranian people to depose the Shah, was published in Istanbul.²

There appears to have been a decided policy among the reformers to seek the involvement of the ulama in order to mobilise popular support for their programme. Another of the reformers, Malkum Khan, wrote in the newspaper *Qánún*, “Why should the spiritual leader of sixty million Shi’is [i.e., Shirazi] sit trembling and hidden in the corner of some outlandish village? Why should not the legitimate head of the community of God be superior to all worldly princes?”³

In Tabriz, wall-posters made threats against any of the ulama who might refuse to cooperate with the protest against the tobacco concession, and threatened Europeans and the Armenian Christian minority with death. The Mujtahid of Tabriz is said to have threatened to launch a jihad.⁴ At the same time, the Tobacco Corporation was giving large bribes to some of the leading ulama to persuade them not to join the protest.⁵

At this point, a telegram was received in Iran, purportedly from Shirazi, which condemned the interference of foreigners, concessions such as the bank, tobacco and railroad concessions, and the expulsion of Sayyid Ali Akbar.⁶ In Isfahan, two of the leading Mullas organised demonstrations, and preached that all tobacco was religiously unclean. One of these was Muhammad Taqi Isfahani (*Áqá Muhammad Taqi Najafí Isfahání*), whom Baha’u’llah had addressed in a book called “*The Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*.” With a fine irony, Abdu’l-Baha quotes from this book in section 9 of the *Sermon on the Art of Governance*, without saying to whom it was addressed. At one of the demonstrations in Isfahan, those present swore that they would stop smoking. The Isfahan ulama apparently wrote to Shirazi for support, and rumours spread that he had ordered a consumer boycott. In December 1891 a fatwa, or legal opinion, purportedly from Shirazi,

¹ See Algar, *Mirza Malkum Khan* 211.

² Hairi, *Shi’ism and Constitutionalism* 80.

³ *Qanun*, no. 29, page 3, translated in Hamid Algar, *Mirza Malkum Khan* 212. Malkum Khan is a complex figure known both as one of the leading advocates and beneficiaries of granting concessions to foreign investors, but here seen mobilising opposition to them. It is a moot point whether he was a moderniser, or an opportunist exploiting Iran’s encounter with modernity.

⁴ Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion* 75, 76.

⁵ *Op. cit.* 79.

⁶ Translated in Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion* 89.

was circulated.¹ It directed all believers to abstain from smoking. As a result, the tobacco boycott quickly spread from Isfahan to the rest of the country. Doubts have been expressed about the authenticity of this *fatwa*: the evidence appears to be conflicting. Keddie suggests that it may have been written by Mírzá Hasan Áshtiyání, the leader of the ulama in Tehran, who was remarkably quick in distributing it.² A later *fatwa* in Shirazi's name, calling for a jihad, was certainly fraudulent, but some people responded by arming themselves.³ At the end of December, the Shah gave in, and cancelled the tobacco concession.

Afghani's machination did not stop, however. In 1892 he addressed appeals to the ulama, calling on them to depose the Shah, as a means of annulling all of the agreements that the Shah had made with foreign companies:

If you protectors of the faith oppose him with righteousness, and men know that to obey this (wicked man) is unlawful according to the religion of God ... they will all hasten and upset the throne of his deceit ... You are the protectors of the Nation and the supporters of the Faith ... to War! ... to War!⁴

Afghani was assisted in his attempts to mobilise the ulama to depose the Shah by Mírzá Áqá Khán Kirmání, a politically active Azali Babi, and by Malkum Khan.⁵

The *Sermon on the Art of Governance* may in part be read as an address by Abdu'l-Baha to the Bahais and Babis, warning them not to become involved in the continuing efforts of these figures to mount a revolution against the Shah. But it is also in part addressed to the ulama, and particularly to Shirazi, arguing that they should not accept the authority to direct the worldly affairs of the nation,

¹ Although all secondary sources agree the fatwa was issued early in December, Necati Alkan (private communication, January 2004) reports finding a document in the *Bashbakanlik* Archive in Istanbul (Yildiz Perakende Evraki Askeri Maruzat, no. 86/54) mentioning the fatwa, and dated 31 October 1892. This would allow time for it to reach Tehran and be printed by Ashtiyani.

² Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion* 95-96. Amanat points to more sources supporting Ashtiyani's role (in 'Clerical Leadership' 121), but appears to be not entirely convinced. Algar, *Religion and State* 212, reports claims that it was forged by the head of the merchant's guild.

³ Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion* 101-2.

⁴ Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion* 148 – 151. Afghani is said to have made an earlier call for the deposition of the Shah, in a newspaper called *Dhiyyá al-Kháfiqáin* that he published in London (see A.M. Goichon's preface to his translation of Afghani's *Réfutation des Matérialistes*, page 10n). In 1896, one of his followers was to assassinate the Shah.

⁵ For more details see Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion* 132.

which the ‘reformers’ were endeavouring to thrust upon them. Where Afghani had asked Shirazi to adopt a position analogous to the Pope, to become a prince of this world, Abdu’l-Baha presents an ideal model of the ulama as humble, disdainful of worldly pomp, and devoted to the spiritual welfare of the people. But this requires some further explanation, since Abdu’l-Baha rests this argument not only on the Quran and Islamic traditions, but also on Baha’u’llah’s *Kitab-e ‘Ahd* and *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*. One might well think that the use of texts by Baha’u’llah would rule out an audience among the Shiah ulama.

We have seen above that the efforts by reformers to enlist the ulama in a struggle against the concessions, and later against the Shah, focussed particularly on Ayatu’llah Muhammad Hasan Shirazi, the leading Shiah cleric of his day. Shirazi, however, was a secret Babi and later Bahai. He was a second cousin of the Bab,¹ and was converted to the new Faith in his youth, when he met the Bab in Isfahan.²

The situation facing Shirazi was even more complicated than this, for the Bab had made tobacco and all instruments connected with it *haram*, forbidden.³ This means that the trade in tobacco was already “forbidden to believers” – to Babis that is. On the other hand, Babi and Bahai teachings endorsed free trade, and the tobacco monopoly and other monopolies granted to European investors were restraints on free trade. Moreover, the boycott was at least a peaceful way of opposing the monopolies, and in a climate in which violence against Europeans and jihad were being threatened, it may have appeared the lesser evil.

On the side of the ‘reformers,’ while Afghani was certainly not a Babi, some of his followers were. In Nikkie Keddie’s words:

¹ Amanat, ‘Clerical Leadership’ 116.

² See H. M. Balyuzi, *Eminent Baha’is in the time of Baha’u’llah*, chapter 19, a fuller account is given in chapter 11 of Mirza Habib’s *Tarikh Amry Fars va Shiraz*, which I have in a manuscript translation by Ahang Rabbani.

Afghani himself was accused in Iran of being a Babi (Hairi, *Shi’ism and Constitutionalism* 77) and he complains of this accusation in his letter to Shirazi! (Browne, *The Persian Revolution* 21). Shirazi however knew that Afghani had previously sought to establish his own orthodox credentials and discredit the Bahais by interpolating iconoclastic and anti-Muslim sentiments into a Turkish translation of the *Kitab-e Aqdas*, but Afghani did not know that Shirazi knew this. (Balyuzi, *Eminent Baha’is* 259; also described in *Tarikh Amry Fars va Shiraz*, see above). In his *Refutation of the Materialists*, Afghani adopts a similar tactic: he presents himself as the orthodox Muslim and progressive Muslim thinkers as apostates. In these circumstances, there was not the slightest possibility that Shirazi would cooperate with the revolutionary plans of Afghani and Malkum Khan.

³ *Le Béyan Persan* 161.

An interesting, if obscure, footnote to the story of the tobacco protest is the role played by the Azali branch of the Babi sect, many of whose members engaged in oppositional political activity in this period and through the time of the Constitutional Revolution. Azali Babis were among the editors of *Akhtar* and among Sayyed Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani's followers, and there were also Babis among the group arrested for sedition in Tehran in the spring of 1891, though some at least of these were of the Baha'i branch. Already at this time there was a decisive political split between the oppositional Azalis and the quietist Baha'i branch of the Babis, which continued through the Constitutional Revolution. The concern of the Baha'is to dissociate themselves from the opposition is indicated by a report from Lascelles in February, 1892, saying that the Amin os-Soltan had stressed that:

... all the enemies of the Persian Government had taken the opportunity of the opposition to the Tobacco Corporation to join together in an attempt to overthrow the Government of the Shah. Among these enemies of the Government the sect of the Babis is not the least influential element.

The Amin-es-Sultan has been careful to explain to me that the Babis are divided into two branches, one of which, the Bahais, are inoffensive, and abstain from any interference in the affairs of State; whereas the other branch, known as the Azelis, seek for the destruction of all existing institutions, and are similar to the Nihilists in Russia.

His Highness has communicated to me a letter addressed to him by the exiled Babis belonging to the Baha branch, who are living at Bombay, expressing their loyalty to the Shah, and pointing to the Sayyid Jamal-ud-Din (*sic*) and his followers as the fomenters of trouble and disaffection.¹

From the above we can see that Shirazi, and other leading ulama, reformers and journalists who were Babis, Azalis or Bahais, found themselves in a complex web, in which various actors would be pulled in different directions by their attitudes to the Shah and political reform, to tobacco itself, free trade, and European dominance, to Azal and Baha'u'llah, and by their shared desire for progress and modernisation (however differently they may have conceived that).

¹ Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion* 107-8.

Finally, the *Sermon on the Art of Governance* is in part addressed to the Shah and his ministers, and was in fact presented to the Shah and leading notables.¹ An anonymous researcher has pointed out that Mirza Badi^c Bashrú'í, who visited Haifa in November 1915, records in his notes that Hájí Mirza Haydar ^cAlí told him that the book was written in response to a question addressed to Abdu'l-Baha by Mirza ^cAlí Asghar Khán, who was serving as the chancellor in 1893. The chancellor wanted to know “to what extent the interference of the ulama in politics is permitted and reasonable.”² There is no reason to doubt that the chancellor did ask Abdu'l-Baha for his opinion, given the publication of the letters from Afghani to Shirazi that were mentioned above. But from the contents of his reply, it is clear that this was not the primary audience Abdu'l-Baha had in mind.

In addressing the audience at court, Abdu'l-Baha's purpose was on the one hand to make it clear that the Bahais had nothing to do with those Azalis who were involved in attempts to mount a revolution, and on the other hand to point out that, although the ulama had for a generation been telling the Shah that the new religion was a threat and should be suppressed, it was actually other ‘parties’ that threatened the throne – implicitly referring not only to the reformers, but to some leading anti-Bahai ulama such as Aqa Muhammad Najafi Isfahani.

The complexity of the audience explains why Abdu'l-Baha sometimes addresses himself to the ‘Friends of God’ with references to Baha'u'llah's writings, and sometimes uses Quran and hadith references, and employs a style that would be not be out of place if read from the pulpit of the mosque on a Friday. We can also see why he is careful to distinguish the principle of the institutional separation of the religious and political spheres from anti-clericalism.



¹ Balyuzi, *Eminent Baha'is* 176.

² *Piyám-e Baha'i*, No. 275, October 2002, 22 and 27 note 2. The article supposes that Abdu'l-Baha's tablet of 1907 which is printed as a preface in the Tehran edition, and is translated below, is also addressed to Mirza ^cAli Asghar Khan, but this cannot be correct: it is addressed to Muhammad Labib himself or at any rate to a Bahai in or near Tehran who has asked permission to publish the *Sermon on the Art of Governance*.

[On a page preceding the main text in the 1935 (Tehran) edition, we find the following:]

In one of Abdu'l-Baha's tablets he states:

The *Sermon on the Art of Governance* was composed fourteen years ago, copied in the hand of Mushkín-Qalam, and printed and distributed in India. This treatise is certainly available in Tehran, but I am sending one copy. You may show it to the people at large, because the treatise describes the causes of harm, corruption and disorder in the clearest terms. The treatise outlines the sacred rights of government, and the rights of the people that are to be respected, as well as the relationship between the shepherd and the flock, the ties between the governor and the governed, and the necessary relations between the leader and the led. This is the method and course of these exiles, the path of these innocent victims. *Peace be on those who have followed the right path.*¹

Abdu'l-Baha Abbas, 11 Jumadi ul-awwal, 1325 [22 June 1907]

[The following publication details are given by Muhammad Labíb, in part below this tablet, in part at the bottom of the last page:]

In accordance with the permission of the Central Spiritual Assembly,
on the basis of an authentic copy printed in India.

BE 91 [1935].

Published (by Muhammad Labíb) in Tehran.



¹ Quran 20:47

The Sermon on the Art of Governance (Text)

*** 1 ***

He is God, the Exalted.¹

All praise and thanksgiving be to God, who has made the appearance of the sacred perfections of the human realm the foundation of his creation, so that the hidden Godhead may be manifested on the plane of perception, in the form of distinctions and signs, Decrees and Acts, essences and secrets. Thus the rays of the reality of the saying, *I was a hidden treasure and desired to be known*² may dawn on the horizon of the visible world.

And all praise and glorification are due to that exalted reality of grandeur who is the sun of truth in the divine world, the most great luminary of the human realm, the seat of the manifestation of the Merciful, and the dawning-place for the signs shining from the presence of the One Being. Through his appearance, the secret of *I created the creation, so that I might be known* has been confirmed on the plain of Witness.

*You see the earth lifeless: when we let rain descend upon it, it stirs and swells, and produces plants from all the pairs, causing rejoicing.*³

*** 2 ***

In these days and times, certain events that are contrary to all religious laws, things that destroy human institutions and undermine the divine edifice, have been brought about by some ignorant, foolish people and by rebels and those who love discord. They have taken God's clear Faith as a pretext, and have stirred up a seditious commotion. They have dishonoured the people of Iran in the eyes of all the nations of the world.

Gracious God! They claim to be shepherds, but have the characters of wolves; they recite the Quran, and wish to behave like wild animals. They have a human form, but they prefer the manners of beasts. *And when it is said to them, "Do no mischief on the earth" they say, "We only want to make peace" Truly, they are*

¹ The invocation at the head of the Bombay edition clearly reads "He is God, the Exalted" whereas the Tehran edition has only "He is God."

² Passages in italics are citations translated from the Arabic. Here Abdu'l-Baha cites a well-known Islamic tradition in which the words are supposed to be spoken by God. In B. Furúzánfar, *Ahádith-e Mathnaví*, Tehran, 1335 AH (1955), this is tradition 70.

³ Quran 22:5

*the ones who make mischief, but they do not realise it.*¹ Therefore it has become necessary to briefly clarify the most basic fundamentals of the divine teachings to remind the friends to be alert and watchful.

*** 3 ***

It is evident, and indisputable, that all beings, in their inherent disposition and natural created form, possess the power and capacity to manifest two kinds of perfections. One is inborn perfections: these are solely the divine creation, without any intermediary. The other kind is acquired perfections, which are dependant on the education of a true Master. Consider the things that exist in this world: the trees, flowers and fruits contain an inherent freshness and delicacy which is solely the gift of God. In addition to this, there is a vigour in growth and an indescribable sweetness of flavour that become evident through the attentions of a careful gardener. For, if left to itself, the garden would turn into jungle and undergrowth. The flowers and blossoms would not open, the tree would give no fruit and would be fit for burning. But when it comes under the training and care of a master, it becomes a garden, a rose-bower, or an orchard. Blossoms and fruit appear, and the face of the earth is adorned with flowers and fragrant herbs. It is the same with human societies and social structures: if left in their natural condition, people would swarm like vermin, and would be considered as beasts and predators. They would learn ferocity, cruelty and bloodthirstiness, and be consumed in the flames of disobedience and forbidden things.

*** 4 ***

Human beings are children, studying in the school of the world, but they fall ill and are enfeebled because of chronic defects. Those holy figures, the prophets and saints, are the professors in the academy of the Merciful and the doctors in the hospital of the Lord. They are messengers of grace, and suns in the highest sphere of guidance. Through them, the radiant flame of spiritual and outward perfection, that has cooled and died within the lamp of human reality, may be reignited from the blazing fire of God.² Chronic diseases become as nothing through the over-flowing grace of the All-Merciful and the spirit of the Messiah.

Thus it has been demonstrated with the clearest of proofs that human society requires training, cultivation, and³ a true master, and that human souls need a governor, one who binds and restrains, prohibits and encourages, one who impels

¹ Quran 2:11-12

² cf. Quran 104:6.

³ The Tehran edition omits a 'waw' ('and') which is clear in the Bombay edition.

and¹ leads. For the garden of his creation cannot attain beauty, delicacy and plenty except through the training of the kindly gardener, the overflowing bounty from the realm of unicity, and the just governance provided by the government.

*** 5 ***

Now this prohibition and prevention, rules and restraints, leading and impelling, is divided into two types. The first protector and restrainer is the power of governance in relation to the physical world, a power that guarantees happiness in the external aspects of human existence. It safeguards human life, property and honour, and the exalted quality and refined virtues of the social life of this illustrious race. Just monarchs, accomplished representatives, wise ministers, and intrepid military leaders constitute the executive centre in this power of governance, the axis of the wheel of these divine favours.

*** 6 ***

The second type of educator and governor of the human world is sacred and spiritual power: the heavenly Books that have been sent down, the Prophets of God, and spiritual souls and devout religious leaders. For those in whom revelation descends and divine inspiration arises are the educators of hearts and minds, the correctors of morals. They beautify conduct and encourage the faithful. That is, these holy souls are like spiritual powers. They have freed human souls from the disgrace² of an ignoble character, the darkness of wicked qualities, and the coarseness of the worlds of being. They illuminate the realities of human nature with the lights of the virtues of the human world, with divine distinctions and the virtues and excellencies of the Kingdom, so that the radiant reality of *Blessed be God, the best of creators*,³ and the virtue of *We have created man*

¹ The Tehran edition adds a ‘waw’ here, which is not in the Bombay edition but in my opinion is required by both the sense and the rhythm. The three pairs of terms here parallel the Arabic *Ahl al-hall wa al-‘aqd*, the looseners and binders, who in Islamic political theory are the ruling class with some function (differing in various theorists) in choosing, advising or supporting the ruler.

² The Bombay edition appears to read *shama’mat*, which the Tehran printing interprets as *sha’mat*, and the World Centre’s electronic text as *shámat*, an alternative spelling for *sha’mat*, both meaning a black spot or disgrace or, as on page 21 line 8 (Bombay edition page 15 line 11), a misfortune.

³ Quran 23:14.

*according to the best pattern*¹ might be realised in the hallowed human person. Thus, through the glorious effulgences of these dawning-places of the divine verses, the pure and subtle reality of humanity becomes a focus for manifestations of the holiness of the world of God.

These sacred duties are rooted in spiritual, divine matters, and in ethical considerations. They have not been linked with material honours, political affairs or worldly matters. On the contrary, the sacred power of these pure and excellent persons is at work within the reality of the soul and conscience, in the inner heart and spirit, and not in water and clay. The banners of the signs of these pure realities are raised in the open spaces of the soul, where the spirit takes wing, not in this world of dust. They have not had, and do not have, any role to play in questions of the government and the governed, of ruling and being ruled. They are ones chosen by the sweet-scented breezes of God, the ones closest to the overflowing waters of the spirit of eternity. They do not seek any role in other matters, and they do not urge the steed of ambition in the arena of greed and power. For matters of politics and government, of the kingdom and of subjects have a specified source and a respected place to which they refer, while guidance, religion, insight, education, and the promotion of the morals and virtues of humanity have a sacred centre and designated spring. These souls have nothing to do with political affairs, nor do they seek any involvement.

Now, in this most great cycle, when the world has reached the age of discretion and maturity, this matter has been made indisputable in the book of God: it is like a firm foundation. According to this incontrovertible text and this brilliant proof, all must be humble and submit to the commands of the government, all should be compliant and obedient before the throne of sovereignty. That is, in their obedience and servitude to rulers, they should be sincere subjects and willing servants. This is what the Beauty of God, whose decree is decisive, whose dawn is clear, and whose morn is true and shining, has commanded in the book of the covenant and the pledge, the eternal pact. The indisputable command is this:

*** 7 ***

O ye the loved ones and the trustees of God! Kings are the manifestations of the power, and the daysprings of the might and riches, of God. Pray ye on their behalf. He hath invested them with the rulership of the earth and hath singled out the hearts of men as His Own domain. Conflict and contention are categorically forbidden in His Book. This is a decree of

¹ Quran 95:4.

*God in this Most Great Revelation. It is divinely preserved from annulment and is invested by Him with the splendour of His confirmation. Verily He is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. It is incumbent upon everyone to aid those daysprings of authority and sources of command who are adorned with the ornament of equity and justice.*¹

*** 8 ***

The same is found in an unambiguous treatise that he addressed to one of the religious leaders. One choice citation from that blessed treatise is this:

*** 9 ***

It is now incumbent upon His Majesty the Shah – may God, exalted be He, protect him – to deal with this people with loving-kindness and mercy. This Wronged One pledgeth Himself, before the Divine Kaaba, that, apart from truthfulness and trustworthiness, this people will show forth nothing that can in any way conflict with the world-adorning views of His Majesty. Every nation must have a high regard for the position of its sovereign, must be submissive unto him, must carry out his behests, and hold fast his authority. The sovereigns of the earth have been and are the manifestations of the power, the grandeur and the majesty of God. This Wronged One hath at no time dealt deceitfully with anyone. Every one is well aware of this, and beareth witness unto it. Regard for the rank of sovereigns is divinely ordained, as is clearly attested by the words of the Prophets of God and His chosen ones. He Who is the Spirit (Jesus) – may peace be upon Him – was asked: “O Spirit of God! Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?” And He made reply: “Yea, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.”² He forbade it not. These two sayings are, in the estimation of men of insight, one and the same, for if that which belonged to Caesar had not come from God, He would have forbidden it. And likewise in the sacred verse: “Obey God and obey the Apostle, and those among you invested with authority.”³ By “those invested with authority” is meant primarily and more especially the Imams – the blessings of God rest upon them! They, verily, are the manifestations of the power of God, and the sources of His

¹ The citation is from Baha’u’llah’s Kitab-e ‘Ahd (The Book of the Covenant): the authorised Bahai translation quoted here is published in *Tablets of Baha’u’llah* 220-221.

² See Matt 22: 15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20: 20-26.

³ Quran 4: 62.

authority, and the repositories of His knowledge, and the daysprings of His commandments. Secondly these words refer unto the kings and rulers – those through the brightness of whose justice the horizons of the world are resplendent and luminous. We fain would hope that His Majesty the Shah will shine forth with a light of justice whose radiance will envelop all the kindreds of the earth. It is incumbent upon every one to beseech the one true God on his behalf for that which is meet and seemly in this day.

O God, my God, and my Master, and my Mainstay, and my Desire, and my Beloved! I ask Thee by the mysteries which were hid in Thy knowledge, and by the signs which have diffused the fragrance of Thy loving-kindness, and by the billows of the ocean of Thy bounty, and by the heaven of Thy grace and generosity, and by the blood spilt in Thy path, and by the hearts consumed in their love for Thee, to assist His Majesty the Shah with Thy power and Thy sovereignty, that from him may be manifested that which will everlastingly endure in Thy Books, and Thy Scriptures, and Thy Tablets. Hold Thou his hand, O my Lord, with the hand of Thine omnipotence, and illuminate him with the light of Thy knowledge, and adorn him with the adornment of Thy virtues. Potent art Thou to do what pleaseth Thee, and in Thy grasp are the reins of all created things. No God is there but Thee, the Ever-Forgiving, the All-Bounteous.

In the Epistle to the Romans Saint Paul hath written: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God.” And further: “For he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.”¹ He saith that the appearance of the kings, and their majesty and power are of God.

Moreover, in the traditions of old, references have been made which the divines have seen and heard. We beseech God – blessed and glorified be He – to aid thee, O Shaykh, to lay fast hold on that which hath been sent down from the heaven of the bounty of God, the Lord of the worlds.²

¹ See Romans 13:1-7.

² Abdu'l-Baha cites Baha'u'llah's *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, pages 89-91 in the authorised translation used here.

*** 10 ***

Therefore, O friends of God, strive with heart and soul. Show to the world the miraculous power of your pure and genuine intentions, in good will to the government and obedience to the state. This command is the most important of the duties of the manifest religion and the decisive texts of the Heavenly Book.

It is evident that the government, by nature, desires the security and ease of the subjects, and seeks the prosperity and happiness of the people. It is ready and willing to safeguard the just rights of the citizens and of subjects, it attempts by every means to repel the wicked intruder. For the honour and prosperity of the subjects is the dignity, grandeur and power of the glorious monarchy, and the triumphant state, the success and happiness of the people is the object of the attention of their royal highnesses. This is so, according to the nature of things.

When, on the contrary, the outcome is a decline in the security of the people or a deficiency in the prosperity and happiness of high and low, the cause is a lack of ability on the part of functionaries, or the extreme despotism and barbarity of ill-willed people, who appear in the robes of learning and are experts in the arts of ignorance, and from first to last are instigators of disorder. *Disorder was sleeping, may God curse the one who woke it.*

*** 11 ***

For fifty years, in the streets and from pulpits, and in councils and gatherings in the presence of government officials, this gaggle of imbeciles – that is, the clerical leaders – has been accusing this oppressed community of rebellion. They go so far as to falsely accuse them of revolt. They say,

“This community are destroyers of the world,
 they are debasing the morals of the children of Adam.
 They entice the regions to be disloyal
 and are pernicious in every respect.
 They are the flag of rebellion,
 and the standard of insurgency,
 Adversaries to religion and government,
 and enemies of the souls of the subjects.”

God’s justice demands that the truth about every community and group should become manifest and clear, so that it may be evident in the councils of the world who acts in the best interests of the people, and who is the corruptor. Who is stirring up sedition, and which group are the mischief makers? *And God*

*distinguishes the corruptor from the one who acts in the best interests of the people.*¹

How good it would be if a touchstone were found
that would blacken the face of every dissembler.²

Now, O friends of God, give thanks for His providence, because the true Just One has lifted the veil from the activities of every religious group, and the hidden secrets of souls have become as manifest as the gleaming star. Praise be to God! and again, thanks be to God!

*** 12 ***

The fact is, that the functions of religious leaders and the duties of experts in religious law are to keep watch over spiritual matters and to spread abroad the virtues of the Merciful. Whenever the leaders of the manifest religion, the pillars of religious law, have sought a role in the political sphere, have issued opinions and taken control, the unity of the believers in the one true God has been dissolved, and schisms have encompassed the community of the faithful.

The flames of sedition flare up,
the fires of revolt burn the world.
The kingdom is pillaged and plundered,
the people are as vassals, in bondage to the oppressors.

At the time of the last Safavid kings³ (may the Lord of Creation have mercy on them), the religious leaders sought authority in Iranian politics. They raised a flag and devised a plan, they showed the way and opened the door. The unfortunate outcome of that movement became the occasion of harm and the cause of ruin. The land of Iran became a jousting field for the Turkoman tribes and the arena for Afghan raiding and conquest.

¹ Quran 2:220

² From a ghazal by Hafez concerning a hypocritical sufi. 'Black-faced' is an idiom for infamy. The ghazal begins *Náqd-e súfí na hame sáfí báshad*.

³ The Safavid period extends from 1501 to 1722. Under Sultan-Husayn (r. 1694 – 1722) the Shiah ulama, led by Majlisi the younger had an unprecedented role in public life. They were able to enlist state support for action against Sunnis, Sufis and other religious minorities. One history writes that "the repression he [Majlisi] instituted can be counted as an important cause of the Afghan invasion and the overthrow of the Safavid dynasty." (Arjomand, *Shadow of God* 191)

The blessed earth of Iran was exploited by neighbouring peoples,
 the lands of glory were fallen into the hands of strangers.
 The triumphant state was erased,
 a brilliant dynasty passed into oblivion.
 Oppressors extended their tyrannous hands,
 malevolent people plotted, against property, honour and life itself.
 People were killed,
 properties plundered.
 Great men were seized by force,
 and great estates were stolen.
 The cultivated lands of Persia were laid to waste:
 demons reclined on the throne of the kings.
 The reins of government held in the talons of beasts,
 and the royal family enchained,
 or under the sword of bloodthirsty nomads,
 and the little children as captives.

These were the fruits, when the divines and experts in religious law became involved in political matters.

*** 13 ***

On another occasion, at the beginning of the reign of Aqa Muhammad Khan,¹ the religious leaders of the people again made a move in political matters, and scattered the ashes of humiliation over the heads of Iranians.

They issued opinions regarding the succession to the throne,
 they sang a siren song that confused the minds of the people.
 They incited turmoil and commotion,
 they raised the flag of revolt.
 A hurricane wind of rebellion sprang up,
 the ways of sedition and discord gained the upper hand.
 Anarchy and chaos ensued,
 a wave of unrest reached to the highest heavens.
 The chiefs of the tribes pretended to be kings,
 sowing the seeds of enmity in the rich soil of the kingdom,
 and one sought to kill another.
 Peace and security were forgotten,
 covenant and treaty had no effect.

¹ The first Qajar king, reigned 1785-1797.

Neither life nor property remained,
 there was no security, and no tranquillity.

At last, the decisive events at Kirman took place.¹ The dust of disorder and rebellion settled, and for the people of sin there was *cutting off at the root*,² that is, the root of the corruptors was pulled out.

*** 14 ***

A third such incident occurred during the reign of Fath Ali Shah:³

The leaders of religion once more stirred up a commotion.

They hoisted an ill-fated standard aloft,

They made ready for jihad, fighting the Russians.⁴

They set out on the roads,

with their drums and their tabors,

and thus they arrived at the border.

When they began their attack,

they fled from a hail of stones.

At a single volley of muskets,

they left their honour on the field of battle,

and chose to flee with disgrace.

Like *the locusts scattered abroad*⁵ and *the palm trunks rooted out*,⁶

they were confounded and strewn on the banks of the Aras,

and the desert plain of *Mughan*.⁷

Half of the province of Azerbaijan,

and three and a half million tumans were lost,

along with the Caspian Sea.⁸

¹ In 1794 the last Zand ruler, holding out in Kirman, was defeated. The ‘decisive events’ included betrayal, the slaughter of male Zand prisoners, and the killing of rivals to the Qajar throne.

² Quran 6:45.

³ Fath-Ali Shah, reigned 1797-1834.

⁴ The war of 1826-8.

⁵ Quran 54:7, “The day that the Caller will call to a terrible affair, they will come out, their eyes humbled, from (graves), like locusts scattered abroad.”

⁶ Quran 54:20, “We sent against them a furious wind, on a day of violent disaster, uprooting men as if they were the stumps of uprooted palm trees.”

⁷ *Mughán*, now in Azerbaijan, at that time on the Perso-Russian border.

⁸ The sea was surrendered in the sense that the Persians were not permitted to station

*** 15 ***

The best example of all is the sad case of the last days of the late Sultan Abdulaziz¹ (may his soul rest in peace), as follows:

The spiritual leaders of the Ottoman people began a rebellion,
 they raised the banner of enmity.
 In their madness, they started a movement
 they wanted a role and a share in running affairs.
 They stirred up unrest, and provoked a dispute with government officials.
 They took for their pretext the manifest Faith and the God-given Law,
 they spoke of “the good of the nation,”
 and demanded the dismissal of Ministers.
 They destroyed the foundations of fairness and chivalry.
 People of good will were sent into exile
 while they made the malicious ones happy.
 They made trustworthy people the object of public anger,
 and turned traitors into popular favourites.
 And when their strategy was succeeding
 they presented another plan.
 They challenged the throne of the sultanate,
 belittled the ruler and government.
 They issued a *fatwa* that spoke of ‘depose,’
 and sought to ‘extirpate’ and ‘suppress.’
 They disgraced the name of chivalry,
 and raised up the dust of tyranny.
 They approved of a violent deed that disgraced the perspicuous faith
 and the law of the Lord of the Messengers.
 Because of this movement, sorrow and grief
 burned in the breasts of the world’s inhabitants,
 and the hearts of the world and its peoples were seared,
 for the wrong done to that great ruler.

⁸(...continued)

warships on it.

¹ Reigned 1861-1876.

In the end, they insisted on combat,
 and practised with talon and claw.
 They strapped on their battle-gear,
 and war was declared.
 They persuaded the common people to say,
 “Russia is a state beyond hope,
 its armies and troops are a form without spirit,
 its commanders are cowardly, its men are as weaklings,
 its dynasty has no ferocity left,
 its government has neither power nor dignity.
 But we are the conquering nation, the glorious people:
 Let us wage jihad, and crush the roots of rebellion.
 So will we win renown around the world,
 and the absolute leadership¹ of peoples and nations.”
 When the results of this movement were out in the open,
 and the fruits of these notions were seen,
 they were vengeance incarnate and poison distilled,
 retribution personified, and the humiliation of the government and the people.
 The earth was stained with the blood of the innocent,
 the bodies of the dead made the field of battle a landscape of horror.
 The people as a whole tasted the cup of affliction.
 Three hundred thousand young men of the nation,
 three hundred thousand youth of the empire,
 tasted the poison of death.
 How many great monuments were razed to the ground,
 how many old families faced extinction or poverty!
 Of thousands of well-ordered villages, nothing remained but the cellars,
 the crop-growing regions were turned into wastelands.
 The contents of treasuries thrown to the winds,
 the wealth of the state and the people, plundered and gone.
 A million subjects were forced into exile, leaving the lands that they knew.

¹ Cole reads *surúr*, the delight of nations, Dreyfus reads *sarvar*, leadership. Both are possible, but the latter is in accordance with the preceding lines which refer to the belief that God has destined the Muslims to rule over other peoples. The position of *‘ila itláq* at the end of the sentence could mean that it modifies the whole preceding phrase: ‘over the peoples and nations, without exception,’ but since its position is determined by the demands of the rhyme, I have read it as applying particularly to *sarvar*.

A multitude of the chief men of the kingdom, the notables of these provinces, having been deprived of everything, fled the nest. Children of tender years, and old men bearing the weight of the years, wandered in the wild places and desert, utterly destitute. At the first setback, the quarrelsome religious leaders who had raised the cry of “War, to war!” and “*Come to the holy war!*” began to whimper “*Where can we hide, where can we flee?*” At the smallest encounter they forgot about great rewards and glorious recompense: they turned and they fled, and they harvested this colossal catastrophe.¹

Gracious God! Shall a people who are not able to manage their own little nests, or to instruct their own households, who are unaware of domestic and foreign affairs, shall these interfere in the weighty affairs of the kingdom and its subjects, and raise opposition in the complexities of political matters? If you refer to history, you would find countless examples of this sort, all based on the involvement of religious leaders in political matters. These souls are the fountainhead of the interpretation of God’s commandments, not of implementation. That is, when the government requests an explanation concerning the requirements of the Law of God and the realities of the divine ordinances, in principle or in a specific case, they must explain what has been deduced, of the commands of God, and what is in accordance with the law of God. Apart from this, what awareness do they have of questions of leadership and social development, the administration and control of weighty matters, the welfare and prosperity of the kingdom, the improvement of procedures and codes of law, or foreign affairs and domestic policy?

Moreover, in all previous ages and eras, the sources of opposition to the friends of God, and of disputation with those who believed in the divine verses, have been certain individuals who have been outwardly graced with the jewel of knowledge, but piety and the fear² of God have faded from their hearts. They are learned in form, and ignorant in truth, devout of speech but deniers at heart, devotees in the flesh, but lifeless in spirit.

¹ The reference was so recent that Abdu’l-Baha’s readers would have required no further explanation. The ‘Eastern Crisis’ of 1875-8 began with the revolt of Christian peasants in Bosnia-Herzegovina, followed by a rising in Bulgaria which was suppressed with great cruelty. Serbia entered the war with Russian backing. Initial Ottoman victories and a settlement under the auspices of the European powers was unsatisfactory to Russia, and in 1877 Russia launched a war on her own account. The war lasted some ten months, ending with the Ottomans forced to accept terms dictated by the Russians, which involved the loss of four provinces to the Russians and the independence of Romania, Serbia and Montenegro. This is the ‘catastrophe’ to which Abdu’l-Baha refers.

² The Bombay edition has *hashiya*, which must be a copyist’s error for *khashiya*, as found in the Tehran edition.

For example, in the days when the One who bestowed the spirit, the Messiah, was giving life to the body of the world, when the holy and fragrant Christ-spirit was granting the contingent world a soul, the religious leaders of the children of Israel such as Anas and Caiaphas voiced their opposition to that jewel of existence, that evident beauty and praiseworthy spirit. They turned their backs on him, declaring him to be no true believer, seeking to destroy him, and they persecuted him and issued a licence to harm him. They punished the apostles and inflicted the most severe punishment and vengeance. They issued *fatwas* of death, and imprisoned and exiled them. They used torture and pain, they martyred them with the worst afflictions and caused their pure blood to flow in the path of God. This opposition, harshness, punishment and torment were all due to the religious leaders of the community.

*** 16 ***

Similarly, consider the days of that mystery of existence, the promised beauty who has been confirmed in the dignity of ‘the praised one,’ Muhammad, *the Messenger of God, peace be upon him*. Those argumentative and proud people who opposed and rejected him were the learned among the Jews, intransigent Christian divines, and ignorant and envious soothsayers such as Abu ‘Ámir Ráhib, Ka‘b ibn Ashraf, Nadr ibn Hárith, Ás ibn Wá’il, Hayy ibn Akhtab, and Umayyah ibn Hilál.¹ These leaders of the community engaged in anathematising

¹ Abu ‘Ámir Ráhib fought against the Prophet, and became a ‘hypocrite,’ a believer of dubious sincerity. He is known for founding a mosque which seems to have been intended to be in competition with that of Muhammad (Surah 9:108-9).

Ka‘b ibn Ashraf was a Jewish opponent of Muhammad at Medina. A poem quoted by Ibn Hishám implies he was a scholar, and he is known to have been a poet.

Nadr ibn Hárith was a rich Meccan merchant, who is said to have brought back books from Persia and to have been an admirer of the Persian dynasty. He accused Muhammad of merely repeating stories he had heard from others. See Surahs 8:31 and 83:13.

Ás ibn Wá’il was one of the leaders of the Quraysh in Mecca. He is mentioned among those who offered Muhammad money or the crown, and is said to be the person referred to in Surah 19:77-80 and Surah 108, and one of those scoffers referred to in Surah 6:8-10 and 15: 89-99 (Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad* 133, 162, 180, 187).

Hayy (or Huyyay) ibn Akhtab seems to have been the Jewish leader of all or part of Khaybar (see index), since his daughter is described as ‘the daughter of their king’ (Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad*, 520).

and reviling, striking and killing, that shining¹ sun of prophethood. They were so fanatical in injuring the one who was the lamp in the assembly of humanity that he voiced a complaint, saying, “*No prophet has been persecuted as I have been persecuted.*”

Consider, then, that in every dispensation and age, the injustice, persecution and restrictions, the most severe cruelty and unprecedented oppression, have come from some faithless divines. Moreover, whenever the government has offered opposition or² has been biassed, it has all been as a result of the defamatory innuendos, signs and winks of these rebellious individuals. Likewise, in these days, if you look carefully, the things that have occurred have been due to the opposition of unjust religious leaders, who are shut out from the fear of God, and are far from the Law of God, and who seethe with the fire of envy and jealousy.

*** 17 ***

But as for the learned who are pure of heart and soul,
 each one is a mercy from the Lord and a gift of God.
 They are a candle for guidance and a lantern of God’s grace,
 the lightning bolt of truth and the guardians of the Law.
 They are the scales of justice and the sovereigns of trustworthiness.
 They are the true dawn and the towering palm,
 the bright star, and a planet clearly seen.
 They are the fountainhead of mystical insight,
 the spreading of the sweet waters of life.
 They are the educators of souls
 they bring glad tidings to the hearts.
 They are a guide to the nations,
 the heralds of God among the children of Adam.
 They are the greatest sign and the loftiest banner,
 the jewels of being and the Graces of existence.
 They are the manifestations of detachment,
 the dawning place of the sun of sanctity.
 This ephemeral mortal existence has no attractions for them,
 they hold themselves apart from the lusts and passion of the human world.

¹ The text can be read *mashriq*, rising, or *mushriq*, shining.

² The Tehran edition inserts a *wa* before the *yá*, for no apparent reason (cf. Bombay edition, page 24 line 1).

In gatherings in the world, they are drunk
 with the virtues and praises of their Lord and Beloved,
 but in that Court where God is manifest and seen,
 they are performing the rites of prayer.
 They are firm pillars of the divine edifice,
 an impregnable fortress for the manifest religion.
 They are the sweet waters of the Euphrates for the thirsty,
 and the path of salvation for those who have lost the way.
 They are birds giving thanks in the gardens of “God is One,”
 and candles giving light in the councils of “I renounce all else.”
 They are God’s scholars,¹ and the heirs of the prophets,²
 the initiates of mysteries, and the commanders of the company of the pious.
 They turn the private chapel, where *dhikr* is chanted,
 into a cloister in the Kingdom of heaven.
 They consider withdrawal from all that is other,
 as gaining the threshold of Godhead itself.

Those who are not like this, are lifeless bodies and images on walls. As it is written in the authoritative text of the Quran, “*God has led him astray by means of some knowledge.*”³

*** 18 ***

Human collective life naturally entails a need for binding rules and relationships, for without these ties, no peace or protection can be attained,⁴ there can be no security or happiness. The sacred dignity of human beings would not be unveiled, the face of the desire of all hearts would remain concealed. The country and regions would not be cultivated, there could be no structure⁵ and system in cities and villages. The world could not be set in order, and the human race would not be able to wax and mature. Repose for the soul and tranquillity of conscience would not be possible. The distinctive human attributes would not shine, and the

¹ The Bombay edition has *rabbáyand*: the Tehran edition *rabbáníand*, which seems more likely.

² A famous Islamic tradition: “The ulama are the heirs to the prophets.”

³ Quran 45:23.

⁴ The Tehran edition’s *niyábad* appears to be a simple error: the Bombay edition has *niyáyad*, rhyming thus with the following *nanemáyad*.

⁵ The Bombay edition is unclear: the last letter bears both the double points of the ‘t’ and the single point of the ‘b’. The reading of *tartíb*, in the Tehran edition, seems as probable as any other.

candle of God's bestowals would give no light. The human essence would not discover the reality of the contingent world, or become aware of God's universal wisdom. The glorious arts would not be spread abroad, and great discoveries would not yield their benefits. This house of clay would not be the observatory of the heavens, and industry and inventions would not amaze the mind. The east and west of the world could not be drawn together, and the power of steam could not connect the continents.

These rules and relationships that comprise the foundation for the edifice of happiness, and are the medium of grace, are the religious law and a social system. These are the guardian of prosperity, the guarantor of good repute, the preserver of the humane quality of life. If you study the matter in detail, and look with a keen eye, it will be evident that the religious law and social system are necessary relationships that derive from the realities of things. If it was not so, there could be no order in collective life, no reason for tranquillity, and no happiness for human society. For the collective condition is analogous to a human person. Because it has been composed from individual substances and diverse opposing and contradictory elements, it is inevitably subject to accidents and illnesses. Whenever it is thrown into disorder because of deficiencies, a skilful doctor and superior physician must diagnose the disease, and then explain its cause. The doctor must consider the essentials and the details of the illness and the requirements of Nature, giving attention to causes and consequences, and to the means and necessities, and distinguishing between particulars and universals. Then the doctor considers what the exigencies and requirements of this disease are, and he begins treatment and effects a cure.

From this it is clear that the effective treatment and medication comes from the real essence of Nature, of the patient's constitution and of the illness. In the same way, social life and the body of the world are subject to systemic disorders, and are under the sway of various illnesses. The religious law, the social order, and commandments are like a powerful remedy and a cure for the creatures.

Could any knowledgeable person imagine that he, by himself, has discovered the chronic diseases of the world and is aware of the various disorders and accidents of contingent existence, that he can diagnose the infirmities of the people of the earth and can explain the painful condition of human society, or that he can uncover the hidden secrets of the ages, to such an extent that he penetrates to the necessary connections originating in the realities of things,¹ and so can establish that system and those regulations that constitute a swift remedy and a complete cure? There is no doubt that this is absurd and impossible. Now, it is

¹ The Tehran edition has a printing fault here: the Bombay edition clearly has '*ashyá pey bord*'.

evident and proven that the founder of the commandments, system, religious law and regulations among humans is God, the Mighty, the Knowing. For none but the exalted Lord is aware and informed of the realities of existence, the particularities of every being, and the hidden mysteries and guarded enigmas of ages and centuries. This is why the laws of European countries, which are in fact the product of several thousand years of thought on the part of experts in administration and law, nevertheless remain incomplete and imperfect, and subject to change, repeal and correction, because the learned men of the past had not discovered the unsuitability of some regulations, whereas later scholars became aware of it. Therefore, they have corrected some laws, reaffirmed some, and replaced a few, and this continues.

Let us return to the main topic:

The religious law is like the spirit of life,
the government is the locus of the force of deliverance.
The religious law is the shining sun,
and government is the clouds of April.
These two bright stars are like twin lights in the heavens of the contingent world,
they have cast their rays upon the people of the world.
One has illuminated the world of the soul,
the other caused the earth to flower.
One sowed pearls in the oceans of conscience,
while the other has made the surface of the earth a garden of paradise.
It has turned this mound of dust into the envy of the heavens,
and made this dark house of shadows the cynosure of the world of lights.
The cloud of mercy rose, the gentle rain of benevolence came down,
the fragrant breeze of grace diffused musk and ambergris.
The dawn breeze blows, wafting the perfume that quickens the soul.
The face of the earth has become like heaven on high,
the agreeable season of spring has arrived.
The showers of the heavenly spring have conferred
a wondrous freshness on the garden of the world.
The sun of ancient grandeur has lavished new radiance
on the horizon of the contingent world.
The tawny dust has been turned into sandalwood and ambergris.
The blackened furnace has become
the rose arbour of the Merciful,
the flowering garden of illumination.

The point is this, that each of these two signs of grandeur is the aid and assistant of the other, like milk and honey, or the twins of Gemini in the sky. Thus, contempt for one is betrayal of the other, and any negligence in obedience to one is sinful rebellion against the other.

*** 19 ***

The divine Law (which is the life of existence, the light of the visible world, and is consistent with the purpose of creation) needs an effective power and decisive means. A clearly identifiable champion is required, a resolute propagator is needed. There is no doubt that the institutions of government and the sword of sovereignty are the source of this mighty power. When the one has been strong and victorious, the other was manifest and refulgent. Whenever the first is elevated and radiant, the second has been resplendent and widely diffused. Thus, a just government is government in accordance with the divine law, and a well-ordered realm is a universal blessing. The royal throne is encompassed with divine confirmations, and the royal crown is adorned with the gems of heavenly bounty. In the Quran it is clearly written, “*Say: O God, Lord of sovereignty, you grant sovereignty to whoever you will, and you take it from whoever you please.*”¹ Therefore, it is clear and evident that this bestowal is a divine gift and a favour from the Lord. Likewise, it is clearly said in an authentic tradition that “*The king is the shadow of God on earth.*”² Given the existence of these texts, which are like a solid foundation,³ any other talk, of the king being “an usurper who imposes” is obviously futile speculation and sheer imagination without argument or proof.

Note that in the scriptural verse and the clear tradition, the statements are absolute and not bounded: it is a general reference and not a specific matter.

However, the dignity of the Imams of guidance, the station of those close to the court of grandeur, is the honour and respect due to holiness.

¹ Quran 3:26.

² The saying is old and well known: see ‘Ae’ Al Muttaq, *Kanz al-ummal*, vol. 6; no. 14580, 14581, 14584 etc, pages 4-5 in the 1985 edition. It is cited for instance by Najm al Dín Rází, in the second chapter of his *Mersád al-‘ebád men al mabdá’ elá’l ma‘ád*, in 1221, and by Badr al-din ibn Jama’a (1241 B 1333) in *Tahrír al ahkam fí tadbír ahl al-Islám*, (ed. Kofler) in *Islamica* vi (1934) 355. Al-Beyhaqí, in his *Sho‘ab al-ímán*, says that the tradition is weak. The title was used by Persian kings in pre-Islamic times.

³ *Bunyán-e marsús*, an echo of Quran 61:4: “Truly, God loves those who fight in his path, in ranks, as if they were a cemented building (*bunyánun marsús*).

Their prerogative is the patronage of the All-Merciful,
 their garland of glory is the dust in the path of the Merciful,
 their gleaming crown is the lights of the bounty of God.
 Their seat of justice is the throne-room of the hearts,
 their sublime and glorious throne is this,
 that they are faithful to the world of the Kingdom.
 They are lords of the worlds of life and soul,
 and not of water and clay.
 They are kings of the realms of immeasurable space,
 not of the straight places of this contingent world.
 No-one can usurp or plunder
 this glorious station, this ancient honour.

Yet in the human world their throne is the mat, their seat of high honour is the row of shoes.¹ The pinnacle of prestige for them is the lowest rank of servitude, and the court of their sovereignty is some secluded corner. They see well-furnished palaces as graves underground, and worldly pomp as an intolerable nuisance. They know that wealth and riches are toil and sorrow, and a great entourage is a burden to the soul. Like grateful birds in this house of vanity, they are satisfied with a few grains. In the arbour of “God is One,” at the tip of the branch of detachment, they busy themselves with singing the virtues and praises of the Ancient and the Living in an eloquent tongue.

In short, the point of that which has been expressed in the clear verse and sound tradition is that kingship is the gift of the Lord of grandeur, and government is a mercy from the Lord of divinity.² The object of such gradations is that perfect rulers and just kings, out of gratitude for this gift of God and these glorious marks of favour, should be justice incarnate and wisdom personified. They should be bounty unalloyed and the very picture of generosity, the sun of loving kindness and the clouds of compassion, the banner of the Lord, and the sign of the All-Merciful.

¹ That is, the seat nearest to the door, the seat furthest from the door being the seat of honour.

² The Tehran edition has this in bold text, as if the phrase from ‘kingship’ were a citation from Persian poetry.

*** 20 ***

The government, the defender of the people, is worthy of obedience, and obedience to it leads to nearness to God.¹ The justice of God requires the observation of mutual rights, and the divine law is the preservation of distinct ranks. The governed have the right to protection and consideration from the governor, the ruled have a right to security and kind treatment from the ruler. Subjects are under the protective guardianship of kings, and the common folk are under the protective shadow of the monarch, who dispenses justice. *Every shepherd is responsible for his flock.*² This, so that government might be a sure fortress for the people, and a cave of assurance, an inviolable sanctuary and a refuge in a high place, preserving and protecting the rights of subjects and of all creatures with all its powers, observing and promoting the dignity and happiness of subjects and subordinates, for the people are a trust from God, and the poor are a charge from the Lord of unicity.

*** 21 ***

In the same way, obedience and loyalty have been decreed for subjects. They must be upright in their duties as subordinates, and sincere in their service. Good intentions and gratitude are obligatory, to the extent that they pay their property taxes with unmixed gratitude, and bear the annual levies willingly. They must exert themselves to increase the loftiness of the dignity of kings, and give generously of their wealth and lives in support of the power of government and to increase the glory of the royal throne.

For the benefit from this bargain, the fruits of this obedience
are enjoyed by every citizen.

All are partners and equals in the profits from this great boon,
and the benefits of this noble station.

Rights are mutual, dignities are reciprocal,
and all are under the protection of the just Lord.³

¹ “Obedience to it leads to nearness” (implicitly, ‘to God’) is a quotation from the opening lines of Sa[°]dí’s *Gulistán*.

² Part of a well-know Islamic tradition (‘Ae’ Al Muttaq, *Kanz al-ummal*, vol. 6; no. 14668 page 22 in the 1985 edition), translated in full in Khan, *Political thought of Ibn Taymiyah* 146.

³ The Bombay edition reads *parvardegár wa ‘ádel*: I have followed the Tehran edition in reading *parvardegár-e ‘ádel*.

*** 22 ***

The state and the government are like the head and the brain. The people and subjects are like limbs, hands and feet, the members and parts of the body. When the head and the brain (which are the centre of the senses and faculties, the managers of the whole body and all of its limbs), when these have effective power and complete authority, they make guardianship their motto and provide for the means of security. They organise the necessary pre-requisites and ensure the desired results and consequences. All the organs and limbs enjoy complete well-being, resting in the bed of ease and in the greatest peace.

But if there is any slackening in their effective control,
any deficiency in their power,

the kingdom of the body becomes a wasteland

the corporeal realm knows neither safety nor security.

A thousand ills of various sorts attain the ascendant,

the well-being and repose of all of its parts are broken.

Likewise, when the government's power is effective and its orders prevail,

the kingdom will be embellished, the people will be at peace.

But if its power slackens, an earthquake shakes

the structures of the people's well-being and comfort,
and down they come.

For the required constraint and restraint, the harness and reins,

the night watchman and sentinel, is government.

When the government is a shepherd to the people,

and the people take on the duties of citizens,

the ties that bind them are put in order,

the links of solidarity are strengthened.

The powers of one kingdom and the capacities of all of the people are brought together and anchored in one point, one eminent individual, and there is no doubt that it attains the greatest possible potency. When the rays of the sun fall on the surface of a magnifying¹ glass, all the heat is concentrated at the focal point of that glass, and such efficacy, penetration and combustive power result that any obdurately solid body placed before this point must melt, even if it can endure fire.

¹ The Bombay editions reads *mu^caqqir* or *mu^caqqar*, the Tehran edition has *muqa^{cc}ar*, concave, which is also possible, if the 'glass' here is a mirror.

Consider: the subjects of every resplendent government and victorious empire enjoy the utmost honour and well-being. The dependents and ordinary folk in every great and respected country are extremely well treated. They advance rapidly in every respect, they progress steadily in learning and wealth, in commerce and in industry. This is evident and accepted, beyond any doubt or ambiguity, among all the wise and learned.

O friends of God! Open the ears of wisdom, shun those who love discord. If you detect the odour of villainy from any person, even from an outwardly important person or a peerless scholar, know that he sets out to deceive powerful men, and opposes the order of the possessor of Majesty. He is an enemy of God, a destroyer of foundations, a breaker of the covenant and treaty, an outcast from the court of the Merciful.

A person who is knowledgeable and intelligent is like a radiant lamp, a cause of happiness and virtue in the greater and lesser world. Such a person works for the well-being and peace of the people of the world, in accordance with the doctrine and covenant.

O Friends of God, the divine order is in the epoch of youth,
the wondrous Cause in the season of spring.
The modern age is the first sign of growth.
This age is the chosen age of the one true God.
The horizons of the contingent world are radiant, resplendent,
lit by the sun of mystical knowledge.
The east and the west of the world,
in the fragrant breezes of holiness,
are as attar and ambergris.
The face of the new creation is most comely and fair,
the body of the wonderful Cause is flexible and strong.

Listen with understanding to the counsels and precepts of God, and then, in all sincerity, demonstrate your high calling through a natural¹ genuineness, an upright disposition, and good will to the authorities.² In this way it will become clear and established in world society and in the council of nations that you are the shining candle of the world of humanity and the rose in the garden of the divine realm. Mere speech yields no harvest, and the sapling of hope has no fruit.

¹ The Tehran edition has *ikhlás*, the Bombay edition *ikhlás* here.

² The Bombay edition reads *khayr-khwah-ye daulat*, the Tehran edition has just *khayr-ye daulat*.

It is necessary to arise and set to work. Potentially, all things are laid ready, all things are completed. Some are easy to accomplish and others are difficult. But what is this worth? The human person must, in actuality, become the sign of the All-Merciful and the banner of the generosity¹ of the Lord.

*Peace be on those who have followed the right path.*²



By nature is meant those inherent properties and necessary relations derived from the realities of things. And these realities of things, though in the utmost diversity, are yet intimately connected one with the other. For these diverse realities an all-unifying agency is needed that shall link them all one to the other. For instance, the various organs and members, the parts and elements, that constitute the body of man, though at variance, are yet all connected one with the other by that all-unifying agency known as the human soul, that causeth them to function in perfect harmony and with absolute regularity, thus making the continuation of life possible. The human body, however, is utterly unconscious of that all-unifying agency, and yet acteth with regularity and dischargeth its functions according to its will.

Abdu'l-Baha, *Tablet to August Forel* 13



¹ The Tehran edition omits *mauhibat*.

² Quran 20:47.

Appendix 2: J.E. Esslemont's conversation with Abdu'l-Baha

In *Baha'u'llah and the New Era* (1923), Esslemont reports a conversation between himself and Abdu'l-Baha. The notes are interesting in themselves, enlarging slightly on what we have seen in the Writings of Baha'u'llah. Because they have been removed from the editions of the book currently available, they are worth citing in full:

In discussing the subject [of government] on one occasion, when the writer was present, 'Abdu'l-Baha spoke, in substance, as follows:

Despotic government is bad. A republican form of government, as in the United States, is good, but a constitutional form of monarchy is better, because it combines the virtues of both republic and kingdom. A king has a distinction that a president, elected for a period of years, has not. The kingship should pass from father to son. This gives a continuity and stability to the government that is lacking in a republic. When the head of the government is elected every few years, the whole country at the time of the presidential election becomes immersed in political contests and agitation. When the country is in such a state justice will not prevail.

Q. – If the king proves unworthy will the parliament have power to dethrone him?

A. – The parliament can dethrone him certainly, and can appoint a new one. In a constitutional monarchy the king has no legislative power. All affairs are settled by the cabinet and the parliament.

Q. – If there is a hereditary monarchy should there be a hereditary nobility, too?

A. – One who serves his country well should be rewarded by fitting honours, but no one should be able to claim that he must be honoured because his father was, for example, a great general. A person who does not serve the nation will have no distinction conferred upon him. He may be respected because of his father's services but, so far as offices are concerned, he will have no preference.

Appendix 3: *Paris Talks* p. 157 ff and earlier versions

<p>Persian notes in <i>Khitabat-e Abdu'l-Baha</i> page 180 (roman numerals) <i>et seq.</i></p>	<p>English notes, in <i>Star of the West</i> 3:2 page 7, April 9 1912</p>	<p>Edited version, published as <i>The Wisdom of Abdul Baha</i> in 1924 and as <i>Paris Talks</i>. The 11th edition of <i>Paris Talks</i> in 1972 is identical to the 1924 edition except for capitalisation.</p>
<p>A blessed talk on the evening of Saturday 26 Dhu'l-Qa'dah 1329 in the house of Monsieur Dreyfus, Paris (17 November 1911).</p> <p>He is God.</p>	<p>The eighth principle</p>	<p>Ninth principle: the non-interference of religion with politics</p> <p>4 Avenue de Camoens, Paris, November 17th</p>
<p>In the world of existence, a human being should have the hope of reward and the fear of punishment,</p>	<p>In life man should hope for reward and fear punishment</p>	<p>In the conduct of life, man is actuated by two main motives: 'The Hope for Reward' and 'The Fear of Punishment.'</p>
<p>particularly those souls who serve in the government, and have the affairs of the state and the people in their grasp. If the officials of the government do not have such a hope of reward and fear of retribution, they will certainly not behave with justice.</p>	<p>It is necessary that this hope and this fear should be considered by those in authority and those who have important posts in the government. If the officials are not guided by these sentiments, it is to be feared that they will not act as they ought to.</p>	<p>This hope and this fear must consequently be greatly taken into account by those in authority who have important posts under Government. Their business in life is to consult together for the framing of laws, and to provide for their just administration.</p>

<p>Rewards and punishments are the two poles on which the tent of the world is raised. Thus government officials are held back from committing injustice by the fear of punishment and eager hope for reward.</p>	<p>This hope and fear are like pillars that support the altitude of the world. There is no better prevention of tyranny than these two sentiments, hope and fear.</p>	<p>The tent of the order of the world is raised and established on the two pillars of ‘Reward and Retribution.’</p>
<p>Consider despotic governments in which there is neither fear of punishment nor hope for rewards. As a result, the affairs of such governments do not pivot upon justice and fairness.</p>	<p>In reactionary governments where fear does not exist the administration is badly managed.</p>	<p>In despotic Governments carried on by men without Divine faith, where no fear of spiritual retribution exists, the execution of the laws is tyrannical and unjust. There is no greater prevention of oppression than these two sentiments, hope and fear.</p>
<p>Rewards and punishments are of two sorts. One is political rewards and punishments, and the other is divine rewards and punishments.</p>	<p>There are both political and spiritual consequences.</p>	<p>They have both political and spiritual consequences.</p>

<p>It is certain that, if some souls are firmly persuaded of divine rewards and punishments, and they are under the constraints of political rewards and punishments as well, those persons are more perfect, for they will be constrained and deterred from practising oppression. If both the fear of God and the fear of retribution are present, that is, if there is both spiritual and political deterrence, of course this is more perfect.</p>	<p>A man who takes into consideration spiritual consequences is a perfect government official. If a man is guided by religious feeling and by the respect of the law, he will act in a perfect manner.</p>	<p>If administrators of the law would take into consideration the spiritual consequences of their decisions, and follow the guidance of religion, they would be Divine agents in the world of action, the representatives of God for those who are on earth, and they would defend, for the love of God, the interests of His servants as they would defend their own.</p>
<p>Some government officials, who both fear the chastisement of the state and dread divine torment, naturally observe justice to a greater extent. In particular, those who fear eternal punishment and have hope of everlasting reward: such souls make the greatest possible efforts in thinking how to implement justice, and they are averse to oppression.</p>	<p>A minister of government, if he is guided by Divine faith, will always act for the good, above all if he knows that the consequences of his act are without limit. Such a man will detach himself from tyranny and will work for Justice.</p>	<p>If a governor realizes his responsibility, and fears to defy the Divine Law, his judgments will be just. Above all, if he believes that the consequences of his actions will follow him beyond his earthly life, and that 'as he sows so must he reap,' such a man will surely avoid injustice and tyranny.</p>

<p>For, for those who are firm believers, to commit tyranny is to be visited by divine punishment in the eternal world. Naturally, they will shun oppression and wrongdoing, especially as firm believers, if they dispense justice, will draw near to the threshold of grandeur, gain eternal life, enter into the Kingdom of God, and their faces will be illumined by the lights of divine grace and loving-kindness.</p>		<p>Should an official, on the contrary, think that all responsibility for his actions must end with his earthly life, knowing and believing nothing of Divine favours and a spiritual kingdom of joy, he will lack the incentive to just dealing, and the inspiration to destroy oppression and unrighteousness.</p>
<p>Thus, if government officials are religious, naturally that is better, for they are the manifestations of the fear of God.</p>	<p>If men believed that they will reap the consequences of their actions in the next world, they would never act contrary to Justice. You see then how important it is that a minister of state should be religious.</p>	<p>When a ruler knows that his judgments will be weighed in a balance by the Divine Judge, and that if he be not found wanting he will come into the Celestial Kingdom and that the light of the Heavenly Bounty will shine upon him, then will he surely act with justice and equity. Behold how important it is that Ministers of State should be enlightened by religion!</p>

<p>My intent with these words is not that religion should have any business in politics. Religion has absolutely no jurisdiction or involvement in politics. For religion is related to spirits and the conscience</p>	<p>At the same time religious interests should not be brought into politics. Religions should treat of morals;</p>	<p>With political questions the clergy, however, have nothing to do! Religious matters should not be confused with politics in the present state of the world (for their interests are not identical). Religion concerns matters of the heart, of the spirit, and of morals.</p>
<p>while politics is related to the body.</p>	<p>politics of material circumstances.</p>	<p>Politics are occupied with the material things of life.</p>
<p>Therefore the leaders of religions should not be involved in political matters, but should devote themselves to rectifying the morals of the people. They admonish and excite the desire and appetite for piety. They sustain the morals of the community, they impart spiritual understandings to the souls, and teach the [religious] sciences, but never get involved in political matters.</p>	<p>Those in authority should occupy themselves with the lives of men. They should teach ideas of service, good morals and develop the habit of Justice.</p>	<p>Religious teachers should not invade the realm of politics; they should concern themselves with the spiritual education of the people; they should ever give good counsel to men, trying to serve God and human kind; they should endeavour to awaken spiritual aspiration, and strive to enlarge the understanding and knowledge of humanity, to improve morals, and to increase the love for justice.</p>

<p>Baha'u'llah commands this. In the Gospels, it is written that you should give Caesar what is Caesar's, and God what is God's.</p>	<p>“Render unto Cesar the things that are Cesar's, and unto God the things that are God's.”</p>	<p>This is in accordance with the Teaching of Baha'u'llah. In the Gospel also it is written, ‘Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things which are God's.’</p>
<p>The essence of the matter is this: in Iran the righteous Bahai government officials observe the utmost justice, because they fear the wrath of God and hope for the mercy of God.</p>	<p>In Persia there are among the most important ministers of state religious men who fear divine punishment;</p>	<p>In Persia there are some amongst the important Ministers of State who are religious, who are exemplary, who worship God, and who fear to disobey His Laws, who judge justly and rule their people with Equity.</p>
<p>However there are others who do have no scruples at all. However capable they may be, they never cease their oppressive and negligent acts. This is why Iran is in such difficulties. ...</p>	<p>the others, however, do not think of the consequences of their acts. This is the reason why they have great difficulties in Persia. ...</p>	<p>Other Governors there are in this land who have no fear of God before their eyes, who think not of the consequences of their actions, working for their own desires, and these have brought Persia into great trouble and difficulty. ...</p>

Appendix 4: Standard spellings, pronunciations and original spellings

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*And now the hand can write no more,
and pleadeth that this is enough.*

Wherefore do I say,

*“Far be the glory of thy Lord, the Lord of all greatness,
from what they affirm of Him.”*

Baha'u'llah, *The Four Valleys* 64; Quran 37:180

