

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Social Justice, Wealth Equity and Gender Equality:

Baha'is and non-Baha'is of Alberta

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

RESOURCES AND THE ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM

CALGARY, ALBERTA

AUGUST, 2003

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY  
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled “Social Justice, Wealth Equity and Gender Equality: Baha’is and non-Baha’is of Alberta” submitted by Leslie William Kuzyk in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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### **Abstract**

Baha'i theology takes distinctive positions on wealth distribution and gender equality in society: serious imbalances are seen as causes of social disharmony. Fostering of equitable wealth distribution and gender equality are seen as causal factors bringing about a more just model of society. Baha'i social thought is premised on a future "Baha'i world order", and progress towards that idealized future society continues. This thesis reports results of a social survey that sought to establish empirically, whether *in the present*, an actual Baha'i population differed in any measurable way from the general population of which they were a part with respect to these social justice issues. Do Baha'is behave in ways that reflect Baha'i ideals in contrast with the dominant non-Baha'i society? The thesis concludes that the Baha'is of Alberta do appear to differ in measurable ways in their economic and charitable behavior and their pattern of gender roles.

## Preface

I am a person who has experienced a spiritual awakening – what William James would call a “twice born”<sup>1</sup> individual. This experience occurred through a spiritual process designed by the founders of the “Twelve Step” programs, based on Alcoholics Anonymous, independent of any religion, but resulting in a personal belief in a Higher Power or God. I have since become very interested in subjects dealing with spiritual influences on people’s beliefs and behaviors, including those within the frameworks of organized religions, having personally investigated several religious movements over the last decade. It is my experience that religions provide direction very similar to the Twelve Step teachings with regards to service to others. This study is, in itself, an attempt on my part to be of service to others.. With humanity as a whole in mind, I feel motivated to search for a more socially just model of society for humankind to emulate if it so chooses. It is my own personal life experience, where spiritual beliefs have come to influence behavior, that I seek to find a pattern of, in a broad, community context.

On reading about the Baha'i Faith, I noticed that it promotes the importance of religion and science to be mutually supportive, so I investigated this religion – personal investigation of the truth being an activity explicitly promoted by the religion itself – in the academic setting of social science. I noticed that it also promotes social justice including the elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth, an issue of great interest to myself.

I feel it worth mentioning that, before being formally accepted into this program of study, I had also carried out a self-observational analysis, in association with the theme of this investigation. Motivated by idealistic curiosity, perhaps in parallel with the ideals of the Baha'i teachings, I created a control model of one person, myself, who’s ideal was to share material wealth equitably on a global scale. It is reasoned that this activity

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<sup>1</sup> James, William (2003:143) *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

directly addresses the teachings of the Baha'i Faith, where benevolence of the wealthy is a possible spiritually motivated answer to disparity of wealth.

So, in this early evaluation of social justice and the potential benevolence has to contribute to wealth equity, I participated in a simple model of global wealth redistribution for a six month time period in the year 2000. This process involved the calculation of a world average income, using Gross Domestic Product adjusted for purchasing power parity for each country and each country's population. As the global average income calculated, approximately \$6400US annually or \$750CAN monthly, was well below my income level, it was apparent that I had the choice, as an above-average-income person, or what could be considered to be a wealthy person, to live at a lower or average income, by choice, and redistribute the excess wealth available to charitable causes, those oriented towards helping people globally who live with below-average-income wealth.

With not just wealth equity but wealth equality in mind, I investigated the practical possibility of living at the global average income. Results of this investigation showed that it was possible to live at this level of income for a six month period, suggesting it possible to live at this income level indefinitely if desired. The excess income accumulated over these six months (\$3000CAN) was donated to non-profit causes. The percentage of gross household income, that being \$11,700CAN for the six months or \$1950CAN per month, donated for this period of time was 30.8% of gross income. This information is made available for general comparison with the data collected in this study of the Baha'is of Alberta.

A problem with this personal model is the lack of participation of an entire community, which spawned the idea that a community of Baha'is with similar ideals might represent this ideal entire community. It is recognized that the Baha'i teachings ask for the elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth, not the equalization of incomes of

all persons. Acknowledging this limitation, the data collected from this experiment is considered valuable for comparison in this study of the Baha'i community model.

This personal investigation showed that it *is* possible for wealth to be redistributed with a global outlook in mind, through individual choice, using a process that would eliminate not only extremes, but all disparity of wealth. I concluded from this self-observational analysis that it is in fact possible for a person to live relatively comfortably on average world income for those who have the choice to do so. The greatest barrier to this way of living was found to be fear of society's judgment of it, as it constituted a move against the materialistic cultural forces in Alberta. It appears that what I would term as a responsible globally focused attitude, and what the Baha'i teachings may refer to as a maturing spiritual outlook, can in fact contribute to eliminating extremes of poverty and wealth.

I hope this personal information helps to address the objectivity issues McMullen<sup>2</sup> discusses of the biases that may influence the views of a participant observer actively engaged in a religion being studied. I would like to add that at the time of this writing, I am essentially inactive in the Baha'i community, having again realized how well the Twelve Step programs continue to serve me as my basis of personal spiritual operation. I greatly appreciate the Baha'i Faith being available for investigation, allowing me, from my own perspective, to be of some service to other people and humanity in general through this research.

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<sup>2</sup> McMullen, Michael (2000:xii) *The Baha'i: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity*

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge my supervisor, Professor Doyle Hatt, Department of Anthropology, at the University of Calgary for his assistance and direction through the process of a multi-disciplinary masters study, including his help in familiarizing me with the disciplines of anthropology and sociology. I would also like to thank the other members of my supervisory committee from the University of Calgary, Professor Pierre-Yves Mocquais, Dean of Humanities, and Professor Nigel Waters, Department of Geography, for their participation. Another academic, Professor Will C. van den Hoonaard, Professor of Sociology at the University of New Brunswick, was very helpful in questionnaire review and feedback as well as comments on the questionnaire results. One University of Calgary graduate student, Carmen Tyme, was also of great help in reviewing and giving feedback on my survey questionnaire. Another graduate student, Bruce Freeman, was very helpful in his feedback on statistics. I am also deeply thankful to the members of the Baha'i community of Alberta who contributed as subjects of observation, in interviews, questionnaire surveys and sources of general information and participation in this research project.

## Dedication

To the Baha'is of Alberta and the World,  
as well as to all people with similar values.





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## Epigraph

Thou dost wish for gold and I desire thy freedom from it. Thou thinkest thyself rich in its possession, and I recognize thy wealth in thy sanctity therefrom. By My life! This is My knowledge and that is thy fancy; how can My way accord with thine?

Bestow My wealth upon My poor, that in heaven thou mayest draw from stores of unfading splendor and treasures of imperishable glory.

Tell the rich of the midnight sighing of the poor, lest heedlessness lead them into the path of destruction, and deprive them of the Tree of Wealth. To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues.

Baha'u'llah, The Hidden Words

## Chapter 1 - The Baha'i Faith

I will present here a brief historical overview of the origin of the Baha'i religion, followed by a discussion of its organization and present state of development in the world, and in Alberta.

### *Historical Development of the Baha'i Faith*

As with many other world religions, the Baha'i Faith has its roots in the Middle East, in Iran. Zoroastrianism, generally considered the first major monotheistic religion, was succeeded following a short period of "orthodox" or Sunni Muslim rule, by the development of Shi'i Islam, the current predominant religion of Iran and adjacent parts of Iraq and Afghanistan. Shi'ism is itself divided into several rival sects, the most important one in Iran being the Itna'ashari or "Twelver"<sup>3</sup> sect. The key belief which distinguishes Itha'asharis from other Shi'ites is their doctrine that twelve legitimate caliphs or Imams ruled following the death of the Prophet, the twelfth finally going into a state of occultation (a spiritual state of invisibility) during a period of earthly political crises, with the belief that he will reappear someday in the form of the Mahdi, or "expected one".

One teaching in early nineteenth century Iran, says that a "Perfect Shi'i" remains in direct spiritual contact with the Hidden Imam who disappeared. This teaching developed into the Shaikhi school, the followers of which set out in search of the Perfect Shi'i. One of them is said to have encountered a young merchant named Sayyed 'Ali Mohammad, who, "on the night of 22-23 May 1844 (the first year of the Baha'i calendar) ... declared ... that He (Sayyed) was the Forerunner of the Promised One of all ages"<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Smith, Peter (1987) *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*, See this publication for a detailed description of the history of the Baha'i Faith.

<sup>4</sup> Huddleston, John (1998:451) *The Search for a Just Society*



Sayyed ‘Ali Mohammad came to be known as the Bab – the Gate – reopening an avenue of communication with the twelfth Imam.

Attracting many followers in the Shi’ite community, the Bab was quickly recognized by the religious authorities as a heretic and he was executed on 9 July 1850 in front of a large crowd of people in the city of Tabriz. The crowd is said to have witnessed a remarkable sight, wherein “the first attempt at execution by a regiment of 50 men failed because every single bullet missed its target”<sup>5</sup>. The Bab had proclaimed, however, that another divine manifestation would follow after his death, similar to the Christian tradition’s foretelling of the coming of the Promised One. “Many Baha’is compare the Bab to John the Baptist, who heralded the coming of Christ”<sup>6</sup>.

Mirza Hosain ‘Ali Nuri, born in Tehran, though the son of a powerful minister of the crown, showed little interest in politics, but instead had leanings toward spirituality. He worked with needy people and became known as the ‘Father of the Poor’ in his province. He became a follower of the Babi religion and, while imprisoned for his involvement with the Babis, had a dream in the Black Dungeon of Tehran that he was ‘He Whom God Will Make Manifest’ – the one predicted by the Bab. He later became known as Baha’u’llah (Glory of God), the central figure of the Baha’i Faith. Continuing to be persecuted, Baha’u’llah and his family were exiled from place to place, and the next ten years, except for a two year interlude in the mountains of Kurdistan, were spent in the city of Baghdad. It was in Baghdad that Baha’u’llah wrote His first three books to the world and it was here that the small Baha’i community became known for “the material detachment of its members who shared their few possessions”<sup>7</sup>. It was in 1863, just as he

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<sup>5</sup> Huddleston, John (1998: 452) *The Search for a Just Society*

<sup>6</sup> McMullen, Michael (2000:193) *The Baha’i: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity*

<sup>7</sup> Huddleston, John (1998:453) *The Search for a Just Society*, An early indication of benevolence is perhaps attributable to the influence of this religion.

was about to be once again banished, this time to Constantinople, that Baha'u'llah first proclaimed to his followers that he was the Messenger of God for the age.

From Constantinople (now Istanbul) he was banished to Adrianople (now Edirne) in present day Turkey. It was in Adrianople, during a three year stay, that Baha'u'llah addressed "in a series of letters to the most powerful kings and rulers of the world ... His claim to be the Messenger for this age"<sup>8</sup> as well as a list of instructions for those political leaders to follow, *including a directive to look after the poor*. It was during this time period also, that He wrote His *Book of Laws* and related tablets that included the principle of the equality of men and women – a very radical idea for that time. Baha'u'llah, his family and followers eventually ending up in 'Akka (Acre), across the bay from the present-day city of Haifa, Israel.

In the prison of 'Akka, Baha'u'llah continued to write prolifically, and is claimed to have produced as much literature as that of the total scripture of all other religions combined. He died in 1892, appointing his oldest son, 'Abbas Effendi, to succeed him as leader of the Baha'i community. 'Abbas Effendi, who came to be known as 'Abdu'l-Baha (Servant of the Glory), was freed from the 'Akka prison with the freeing of all political prisoners that resulted from the rebellion of the Young Turks in 1911. Traveling to Europe in 1911 and North America in 1912, 'Abdu'l-Baha lectured in churches and public halls including ones in Montreal, Canada. Before his own death in 1921, 'Abdu'l-Baha designated his grandson, Shoghi Effendi, as the Guardian of the faith.

Shoghi Effendi organized the administration of the Baha'i Faith, and translated many of the writings of Baha'u'llah into English. He also encouraged the establishment of the faith in all parts of the world. "Perhaps his greatest achievement was to nurture the young community ... to abide by the highest moral standards"<sup>9</sup>. Following his death in

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<sup>8</sup> Huddleston, John (1998:444) *The Search for a Just Society*

<sup>9</sup> Huddleston, John (1998:456) *The Search for a Just Society*

1957, leaving no children by his Canadian-born wife, and not having designated a successor, the first election of representatives to the UHJ (Universal House of Justice) was carried out in 1963. The life work of Shoghi Effendi and, in particular, the advent of the UHJ completes the process termed as “routinization of authority”<sup>10</sup> as Max Weber would have classed it – the system whereby the charismatic authority of the founder is eventually institutionalized and vested in an organization.

The growth of the Baha'i Faith was not without resistance, and in great part from within the religious organization itself. Mirza Yahya, the younger brother of Baha'u'llah refused to recognize His claim in 1863, making instead his own counter-claim to be the successor to the Bab. Mirza Muhammad-Ali, a half-brother of 'Abdu'l-Baha, likewise claimed to be the successor to 'Abdu'l-Baha on his death in 1921. When Shoghi Effendi died in 1957, an American named Manson Remy declared himself to be the second Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, despite the written directive that Shoghi Effendi could only be succeeded by his own blood relatives or by a descendent of Baha'u'llah. Remnants of “the Remy schism” can be still be found on internet web sites posted from locations such as Montana and Alaska. However, “While there have been several schisms in Baha'i history ... none has succeeded in garnering substantial support”<sup>11</sup>. A recent enumeration of Baha'is globally counts 6,404,000 adherents to the Baha'i religion in 210 countries of the world<sup>12</sup>. The main body of Baha'i Faith adherents have remained together, fulfilling one of the basic principles of the religion, that of unity.

### ***Baha'i Beliefs and Practices***

The Baha'i Faith is a monotheistic religion, teaching that the one God has been made known to humanity through many prophets or messengers throughout history.

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<sup>10</sup> Weber, Max (1946:297) ) From Max Weber

<sup>11</sup> McMullen, Michael (2000:195) The Baha'i: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity

<sup>12</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica (1997:311) Book of the Year

Baha'is believe in a series of divine manifestations, accepting all prophetic religions as being true, and claim that theirs is the latest and therefore the most suitable for present times. The teaching is that this manifestation is not the last, but that another will make itself known in no less than one thousand years<sup>13</sup>. The Baha'i belief is that the teachings of the latest manifestation of God are essentially an update on the previous teachings. It is believed by Baha'is that these successive revelations will continue to come in the future with the evolution of human society.

The idea of unity-in-diversity is perhaps the key concept of the Baha'i belief system. Prejudice for any reason including race, culture, gender, religion or nationality is forbidden, with the objective of creating a unified peaceful global society including all persons on the planet. The Baha'i organization presents itself as a prototypical model of society for the people of the entire planet to observe and emulate. It teaches that a "new world order"<sup>14</sup> will one day come, conditional on the following of the teachings of the prophet Baha'u'llah, including an improvement in issues of social justice. That inspiration comes from the divine is apparent, "but the speed and ease of its attainment (have now become) a matter of human responsibility"<sup>15</sup>. People are responsible for engineering an improved society, with its evolving tradition of social justice, in the time frame of their own making.

Often, Baha'i literature publishes the principles of the Baha'i Faith. Included in these principles are the equality of men and women, which can be expanded on to stress the principle of equal rights and opportunities and privileges for men and women. Also

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<sup>13</sup> Smith, Peter (1987:1) *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*

<sup>14</sup> Smith, Peter (1987:141) *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*, Baha'is speak of the "old world order" being rolled up and gradually being replaced by the Baha'i "new world order". See McMullen (2000:109, 111-115,125) for a full description and discussion of the 'new world order' or 'Baha'i world order'.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, Peter (1987:76) *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*

presented is the principle of the “elimination of the extremes of poverty and wealth”<sup>16</sup> or a principle that is at times otherwise worded as ‘a spiritual solution to economic problems’. These two issues, wealth equity and gender equality – the ones being addressed in my study, are Baha’i taught beliefs.

Contrary to the widespread perception that religion runs counter to science, that they are two mutually exclusive perspectives, one of the basic principles of the Baha’i Faith is that science and religion must be mutually supportive. “Science deals with the reality and operation of our physical world, while religion (is) broadly defined as the basic value systems shared by a community”<sup>17</sup>. Specific to the emphasis of this study on wealth distribution, one author gives a Baha’i religious perspective of science “All economic problems may be solved by the application of the science of the Love of God”<sup>18</sup>. Science on its own, without the moral influence of religion, can become narrow in focus and dangerous to the survival of humanity, and globally, the mal-distribution of science and technology is a contributing factor to the mal-distribution of wealth. The Baha’i Faith teaches that religion and science are complementary, an outlook that should value a scientific study, such as this one, which investigates the way behavior of adherents to religion are affected by teachings of that religion.

Another Baha’i precept, where the nature of man is defined as being two fold, is of value here. One side of human nature is the drive for physical survival and its associated need for food, clothing and shelter and perhaps the extended list of possessions available in a consumer culture, while the other, the spiritual side, is the expression of love and concern for the well being of others. The Baha’i view is that “the purpose of life is to develop the spiritual side of man’s nature”<sup>19</sup>, and create an “ever-advancing

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<sup>16</sup> Warburg, Margrit (1999:50) *Baha’i: A Religious Approach to Globalization*

<sup>17</sup> Dahl, Arthur Lyon (1996:105) *The ECO Principle: Ecology and Economics in Symbiosis*

<sup>18</sup> Shams, Badi (1998:26) *A Baha’i Perspective on Economics of the Future*

<sup>19</sup> Huddleston, John (1998:407) *The Search for a Just Society*

civilization”<sup>20</sup>. Hanson portrays this Baha'i belief in the context of greed and generosity, with human selfishness being the cause of injustice, but also, human ability to rise above selfishness being the potential source of justice.<sup>21</sup> The spiritual side or soul, in conjunction with other worldly religious teachings, is also taught to continue to exist after the physical demise of the human body, suggesting conditions for a longer-term investment in a purpose of life than the mere human life span on earth<sup>22</sup>. It may be found that the followers of the Baha'i Faith are relatively detached from the material world of their lower nature, realizing that material possessions are only temporary. “If one’s horizons enlarge to include spiritual values, personal material interest is no longer the only or ultimate good.”<sup>23</sup> With this type of a teaching in play, I expect that the Baha'is may be influenced to act on this and other of Baha’u’llah’s teachings in a pragmatic manner. This teaching from a new and revised religion could plausibly be the underlying factor in individual Baha’i’s decisions to follow Baha'i teachings, with an understanding that their purpose in life is being truly and effectively carried out. The activities and behaviors influenced by Baha'i teachings are measured in my study for their effect on social justice.

The Baha'i Faith teaches that religious revelation from the deity patterns itself as a progressive cycle. Each manifestation of God, those of other world religions being all recognized by Baha’is, comes at a time and place where human development most needs the teachings along its path to ever-advancing civilization. Thus, it is safe to assume, according to these teachings, that the impact of a new revelation will be greater in its

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<sup>20</sup> Baha’u’llah (1983:215) Gleanings From the Writings of Baha’u’llah

<sup>21</sup> Hanson, Holley (1996:44) The Process of Creating Social Justice

<sup>22</sup> Heller (2000:48) The Religious Foundations of Civil Society (Part 2), Heller makes a case for the purpose of life having a spiritual destiny to have an influence on the formation of civil society, including law, order and governance.

<sup>23</sup> Lerche, Charles O. (1996a:6) Justice As a Theme in the Revelation of Baha’u’llah

initial stages than the previous revelations of educators from God, now in their later stages. One of the timings targeted by God's manifestations are times of confusion and declines in established beliefs, when society needs help the most. Previous religious revelations have shown to be cyclic in their influence over people, early Christian society compared to the circus culture of Rome under Tiberius and Caligula, the Kingdom of David after Moses and the great Islamic civilization that followed Muhammad<sup>24</sup>. Huddleston proposes that there is an autumn to each cycle, when the original point of the teachings is lost. Dahl proposes that human social evolution is also a pattern of cycles, where a burst of creative energy results in a more evolved state of civilization.<sup>25</sup> I propose here, to attempt to show empirically a sample of measurable difference of this wave of new influence that a newer religious teaching may be having.

Religions, despite their proscribed differences, have many similarities. They basically teach people to be humble, *generous*, honest, *selfless*, forgiving, truthful, faithful and a long list of other potential human virtues. These are the religious teachings that do not vary, that are consistent across all religions. "The golden rule of love and charity finds its expression in all the great religious traditions"<sup>26</sup>. It is adapting these teachings in practical application to the social conditions of the time that is the second part of each religion, a part that does vary with each revelation.<sup>27</sup> "The second part is not eternal; it deals with practical life, transactions and business, and changes according to the evolution of man and the requirements of the time of each prophet"<sup>28</sup>. Added information brought by a new religion in this second category may have an influence on social justice in a community following its teachings. It is possible that the Baha'is in the

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<sup>24</sup> Huddleston, John (1998:412) *The Search for a Just Society*

<sup>25</sup> Dahl (1996:157) *The ECO Principle: Ecology and Economics in Symbiosis*

<sup>26</sup> Dahl (1996:117) *The ECO Principle*, Dahl sources Schnapper (1952) showing one static religious lesson.

<sup>27</sup> Huddleston, John (1998:412) *The Search for a Just Society*

<sup>28</sup> Huddleston (1998:413) *The Search for a Just Society*, Huddleston quotes 'Abdu'l-Baha.

Alberta community constitute an example of adaptation of religious teachings in a practical manner to current Alberta social conditions.

Education, and, indeed, “universal compulsory education”<sup>29</sup> is strongly encouraged by Baha’i teachings. Education of women is taught to be more important than that of men, as they are the primary educators of their children, but the same curriculum is to be taught to both genders, one promoting unity of sexes. Education is also seen as a manner of allowing each person to attain their greatest potential, including gaining of a trade or profession, allowing each person to earn their own livelihood<sup>30</sup>. Each person being employable, not restricted in any way by gender, suggests a possible trend towards eliminating poverty. There is one Baha’i run high school in Canada, (though none in Alberta), where moral education is stressed and non-Baha’is are encouraged to attend.

Marriage is recognized by the Baha’is with the fundamental belief that it is based on submission of both partners to the will of God, a view that is expressed in vows that are exchanged. For Baha’is, the primary purpose of marriage is the procreation of children and the education of those children. A Baha’i marriage ceremony is a prerequisite for recognition of the marriage by the Baha’i community, whether or not this ceremony is recognized as legal by the state. In it, the two partners, before two witnesses chosen by themselves or the LSA (Local Spiritual Assembly), state their vows. A marriage certificate is issued by the LSA. The ceremony is simple, encouraged to be free of ritual or dogma. Success in marriage is believed by Baha’is to come from nurturing a union that is fundamentally spiritual in nature, including the development of moral virtues. “Baha’u’llah and ‘Abdu’l-Baha have given us prescriptions for acquiring the virtues on which a spiritual marital union depends”<sup>31</sup>. Baha’is feel this is best

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<sup>29</sup> Smith, Peter (1987:1) *The Babi and Baha’i Religions*

<sup>30</sup> Bramson-Lerche, Loni (1996:75) *An Element of ‘Divine Justice’: The Baha’i Principle of the Equality of Women and Men*

<sup>31</sup> Baha’i Publishing Trust (1988:9) *Marriage: A Fortress for Well-Being*



accomplished by immersing themselves in the teachings of the Baha'i Faith and by striving to apply the principles taught there in all facets of their lives.

The Baha'i calendar<sup>32</sup> is divided into nineteen months of nineteen days each. Baha'is are encouraged to assemble on the first day of each month, at meetings called feasts, where prayers, community business and socialization occur. Baha'is fast for the last month of the year, the nineteen days preceding March 21, the first day of spring and the Baha'i New Years Day.

There are no theocratic professionals in the Baha'i community; priesthood is not allowed, consumption of alcohol and mood altering recreational drugs is prohibited, as well as extramarital sex, homosexuality, gambling, begging and confession of sins for the purpose of forgiveness by another person. These teachings may be different from some other religions and, though also similar in some ways, provide a basis for a model of society practicing high moral standards.

“Baha'i scripture consists of the writings of (the) Bab, Baha'u'llah and ‘Abdu'l-Baha ...”<sup>33</sup>, while Shoghi Effendi and the UHJ were confined to interpretation of existing scripture. The elected Universal House of Justice, responsible to God and its own conscience, through enactment of laws based on their interpretation of the writings of the central figures of the religion, as well as its own decisions that can be modified to suit changing circumstances, write letters to the Baha'is of the world on an ongoing basis. So the original writings of the central figures form the basis of the teachings of the Baha'i Faith to its adherents, while ongoing direction is given in written form through the UHJ.

Though the Baha'i Faith claims to have a divine source for its teachings, Baha'is also act in conjunction with secular bodies such as the United Nations, and thus, “Baha'is

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<sup>32</sup> McMullen (2000:197) *The Baha'i: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity*, See this source for a complete description of the Baha'i calendar.

<sup>33</sup> Cooper, Roger (1985:5) *The Baha'is of Iran*, The Minority Rights Group, Report No. 55

perceive themselves as being but part of a wider process of transformation”<sup>34</sup>. The evolution of humanity is not understood to be restricted to the Baha’is alone, and for Baha’is to associate with any body of persons following the same line of ideals as their own is strongly encouraged. Baha’is support the United Nations for its activities looking for world governance, global peace, elimination of poverty, equality of women and men as well as its policies related to human rights. For example, Huddleston’s book, which searches for a model of society with higher levels of justice than current society portrays, and emphasizes the Baha’i model as having great potential, includes the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights as an appendix.<sup>35</sup>

How are the teachings, including those of wealth equity and gender equality, of the Baha’i Faith promulgated to the world, and especially to Baha’i adherents themselves? Echevarria notes three studies of American Baha’i communities presenting evidence that “the Baha’is do not separate themselves geographically from the larger society”<sup>36</sup>. That is to say that Baha’is interact with the communities they settle in, rather than isolating themselves from the outside communities. Current studies show that transmission of the faith to new believers is predominantly through personal contact<sup>37</sup>. The current five year plan formulated by the Universal House of Justice promotes three distinct activities for the Baha’is of the world. Children’s classes teach the beliefs and cultural structure of Baha’i to the youngest members (although each member is free to make an individual choice of *declaring* as a Baha’i or not at age fifteen), study circles are made up of adults inquiring into further knowledge of the faith and how to teach it to non-Baha’is and *devotional gatherings* occur where Baha’is and guests are encouraged to

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<sup>34</sup> Smith, Peter (1987:199) *The Babi and Baha’i Religions*

<sup>35</sup> Huddleston, John (1998:481-486) *The Search for a Just Society*

<sup>36</sup> Echevarria, Lynn (2000:5) *Working through the Vision: Religion and Identity in the Life Histories of Baha’i Women in Canada*, This is a PhD dissertation.

<sup>37</sup> McMullen, Michael (2000:17) *The Baha’i*; Warburg, Margrit (1986:229) *Conversion*

attend; these three activities are the prescribed focus. Locally in Calgary, ideals promoted include the holding of one or more devotional gatherings as well as one or more study circles in each of the five Baha'i sectors. The 100% participation of children in children's classes is set as a goal. Also of interest are targets of a 50% participation rate of contributing to the funds of the faith as well as general participation in service projects somewhere in Calgary twice per calendar month.

***Baha'i World Order – Current and Potential***

An elected system of assemblies of faithful Baha'i members administers the Baha'i Faith, with the UHJ (Universal House of Justice) in Haifa, Israel, since 1963, being the global center of legislative and judicial decision-making. In each locality, whenever there are nine or more Baha'i adults (21 years and older), there is a local election to form an LSA (Local Spiritual Assembly). In each country with sufficient LSA's, Baha'is elect another assembly of nine adults called an NSA (National Spiritual Assembly), elected by an electoral body representative of the national Baha'i population. It is interesting to note that in all of these electoral processes, no restriction exists on the basis of gender, nor wealth, as men and women, rich and poor can equally vote, and are candidates for election. Electioneering is not allowed in Baha'i elections. All Baha'is in the community are candidates for an LSA election, in which each person votes for nine names, while being enjoined to keep in mind the spiritual values and observed community activity of the candidates. Baha'is are forbidden from participating in partisan political parties<sup>38</sup>, though they may vote in government elections using candidates' personal qualities to decide, and they are instructed to respect the legal authority of governments currently in power. Cooper categorizes the Baha'i administrative system as

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<sup>38</sup> Huddleston, John (1998:425) *The Search for a Just Society*

a “theocracy without priests”<sup>39</sup>. Religion and its associated moral values are included in the political arena, according to Baha’i teachings.

The Baha’i Faith, therefore, has teachings for a complete, globally focused, future model of politics, a teaching for not just community organization, but for global political organization. Baha’is are involved in presenting a model to the world for observation as an alternate system of governance. In the Baha’i system, no individual holds power over any other, as elected councils of nine people with a mandate to ideally make decisions by consensus, or by majority vote as a back up, are the ones with power to make community decisions. These assembly members are responsible to God, through their knowledge of the teachings of the latest revelation of God, Baha’u’llah, more so than to those who elected them. Except for Islam, which provided some guidance for state organization<sup>40</sup>, the Baha’i Faith is the first religion to provide guidance in the political arena. The Baha’is feel that the best thing they can do for the world political scene is to offer the model they are a living example of<sup>41</sup>, to be inspected and tested for its potential application.

So, as a finger points to the Baha’i Faith in its role as a political model, so also can it point to it as a social model, where “in the Baha’i teachings we find a model already in practice”<sup>42</sup>, offered for inspection and evaluation. In the early 1970’s, Hatcher had drawn attention to the Baha’i community, inviting readers “to see how well this system works and is working already all over the world”.<sup>43</sup> Huddleston’s evaluative search for an alternative form of social organization, along with Dahl’s suggestion that

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<sup>39</sup> Cooper, Roger (1985:6) The Baha’is of Iran, The Minority Rights Group, Report No. 55

<sup>40</sup> Huddleston, John (1998:424) The Search for a Just Society; Dahl, Arthur Lyon (1996:98) The ECO Principle

<sup>41</sup> Huddleston, John (1998:425) The Search for a Just Society

<sup>42</sup> Lerche, Charles O. (1996a:2) Justice As a Theme in the Revelation of Baha’u’llah

<sup>43</sup> Hatcher, William S. (1974-75:26) Economics and Moral Values

“the Baha’i community ... operating globally on a pilot scale”<sup>44</sup>, together present this religious community to stand available for evaluation in its current stage of development.

The idea that Baha'i ethics and their influence on Baha'i behavior stand available to be tested in the local Alberta community involved in this study is assumed to be true. Directives have been given to the Baha’is of Alberta, where they are advised on “keeping to the highest moral standards at all times to serve as a good example”<sup>45</sup>. Badi’i notes that globally, but specifically focused on voluntary giving, “the Baha’is all over the world have amply demonstrated the practicality and prospects embedded in this principle of voluntary sharing”<sup>46</sup> in reference to Baha'i behavior involving contributions to their own funds. Within the local Alberta community, one survey response in this study included a written note addressing this religion, including encouragement of action, to be a model available to be examined: “The Baha'i Faith is a blueprint for a better world. It is not enough to know. It is urgent that it be acted upon. Divine assistance will be given if we act.”<sup>47</sup> With itself as an example to the world of an alternative developmental path to a new model of society, the Baha'i Faith “still possesses an impressive dynamism and potential for growth”<sup>48</sup>. This study pursues the idea of looking at an existing Baha'i community, and investigating aspects of its alternate model of society.

### ***Social Ethics in Baha’i Writings***

The Universal House of Justice published an overview of the twentieth century from a Baha'i perspective entitled “Who is Writing the Future?”. The UHJ, in the

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<sup>44</sup> Dahl, Arthur Lyon (1996:145) *The ECO Principle*

<sup>45</sup> Pemberton-Pigott (1992:18) *The Baha'i Faith in Alberta, 1942-1992*, This is a historical study.

<sup>46</sup> Badi’i, Hooshmand (1997:150) *Spiritual Solution of Economic Problems*

<sup>47</sup> This is a note written by one respondent to the questionnaire survey done for my study.

<sup>48</sup> Smith, Peter and Moojan Momen (1989:84) *The Baha'i Faith 1957-1988: A Survey of Contemporary Developments*

aftermath of World War II, considers the establishment of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, to be steps in the right direction, though still crude tools to work with in comparison with what is possible. They state that evidence shows that “the use of the planet’s wealth can be fundamentally reorganized in response to entirely new conceptions of need”<sup>49</sup>. In this writing, evidence is given for a need for further change in the social organization of humanity. Regarding wealth distribution, a requirement for reorganization both of the system of distribution of resources, as well as the attitude of people towards this distribution is described.

Another publication from the UHJ specifically addresses the subject of the distribution of wealth. It clearly states that the Baha'i Faith's writings contain “no technical teachings on economics” but rather that the Baha'i economic system consists of “the application of spiritual principles to our present-day economic system”<sup>50</sup>, quoting one of Shoghi Effendi's letters. Future Baha'i economists, in this letter dated 1935, are referred to as being the ones who will design an economy based on religious teachings that will address the issue of wealth distribution. This writing also makes clear that other fundamental principles of the Baha'i teachings apply in conjunction with each other to redistribution of wealth. These include the principle of the oneness of mankind, the combination of material and spiritual outlooks on life, as well as the Baha'i perspectives on wealth itself and on the elimination of poverty and wealth.

It is evident that the Baha'i teachings on redistribution of wealth continue to rely on the original teachings of the central figures of the faith. A publication associated with the one mentioned above is a compilation of writings addressing the issue of wealth

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<sup>49</sup> Universal House of Justice (2001:II) Who is Writing the Future?

<sup>50</sup> Universal House of Justice (2002:1) Extract From “Jurisprudence and the Distribution of Wealth”, This is a memorandum by the Research Department of the Baha'i World Center, quoting Shoghi Effendi in a letter to an individual believer in 1935.

redistribution. In a count of the number of quotes in this publication, five are those of Baha'u'llah, nine are those of 'Abdu'l-Baha, eight are those of Shoghi Effendi and three originate from the UHJ.<sup>51</sup> The writings of Baha'u'llah address issues of giving and generosity, especially on the part of the rich, an implication of wealth having a spiritual definition, that the payment of Huququ'llah brings prosperity, honor and purification of possessions to the donor and a questioning of the advantage of people's desire to amass fortunes for their heirs. 'Abdu'l-Baha reiterates His father's idea of the rich needing to be generous – introducing the idea of compassionate intelligence, and the benefits of Huququ'llah. He also adds the ideas of cooperation, the legislative legal system being used to regulate wealth accumulation, profit sharing as well as noticing the problems associated with being wealthy. Shoghi Effendi continues to support the statements of the previous two, and as well adds in two distinct statements supporting the idea of progressive income tax. He also advocates a high inheritance tax and consultation being necessary between capital and labor. The three writings directly from the UHJ itself, the most current writings, address the importance of education of human beings on the purpose of life, which from a Baha'i perspective includes the spiritual dimension, and the required attitude adjustment necessary by individuals and governments with respect to spiritual principles.

The Baha'i International Community (BIC) addresses the issue of material wealth distribution in a short publication entitled “Abolishing the Extremes of Poverty and Wealth”.<sup>52</sup> The authors of this document speak to the issue of spiritual orientation (see below: “Motivations for Benevolence – Can there be a spiritual one?” in Chapter 3) being

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<sup>51</sup> Universal House of Justice (2002:6-12) The Redistribution of Wealth – Some Specific Measures, This is associated with “Extract From ‘Jurisprudence and the Distribution of Wealth’”.

<sup>52</sup> Baha'i International Community (1998) Abolishing the Extremes of Poverty and Wealth, The BIC is the body by which Baha'is are accredited to the United Nations, operating under the direct supervision of the Universal House of Justice, the elected global Baha'i authority.

of great importance in addressing the world's present economic status of wealth and poverty. They emphasize cooperation and, as well, introduce the idea that a minimum income as well as a maximum income level should exist. In addition, the BIC quotes several of the central figures of the faith, supporting the idea of generosity on the part of the rich.

The BIC has also published a document devoted to overall prosperity of the peoples of the globe in general: "The Prosperity of Humankind"<sup>53</sup>. In this publication, the strictly materialistic attitude of current society, even within the realm of social and economic development, is considered as a problem. The role of governments is seen as crucial in its involvement in change needed to address what is named an 'economic crisis'. Regarding poverty, the BIC suggests a reordering of the priorities of scientific focus, such as development of technology focused on human development, as opposed human destruction, for instance that focused on military conflict. This report suggests a new work ethic, replacing gainful employment with the concept of service to humanity, referring to the spiritual purpose of life taught in Baha'i culture. The establishment of full equality of men and women is stressed, and the publication highlights justice as being of vital importance, with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights given as an example of social justice in writing. The BIC strongly emphasizes justice as being the central organizing principle for society.

### ***The Alberta Baha'i Community***

Alberta is one of ten provinces of Canada. It has a population approaching three million and has two primary cities, Edmonton the provincial capital and Calgary, that lie approximately 300 kilometers apart. Calgary currently has a population of just over 900,000 and Edmonton is slightly smaller with a population of about 700,000, the next

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<sup>53</sup> Baha'i International Community (1995) The Prosperity of Humankind



largest city in the province having a population of just over 100,000. So the population of the province is dominated by these two large cities, with many smaller towns, cities and municipalities helping reflect the demographic distribution.

The first Baha'i LSA (Local Spiritual Assembly) to be elected in Alberta was in Edmonton on April 20, 1943, made up of the nine adult Baha'is age 21 or over who were residing in the city at that time. The representative LSA count of Alberta has grown to number 26 LSA's as of April 20, 2003. Pemberton-Pigott's study of the history of the Baha'i community coming together in Alberta identifies three stages of growth. The first stage involved the attraction to the Baha'i Faith of North American natives in the 1960's, the second stage was made up of youth in the late 1960's and early 1970's and the third stage was an influx of Iranian immigrants in the 1980's. The National Spiritual Assembly of Canada records a membership of 4718 Baha'is living in Alberta as of May 31, 2001<sup>54</sup>.

It is interesting to notice that all nine members of that first LSA were women, who "considered [...] gender imbalance to be a serious impediment to expansion"<sup>55</sup>. Between 1937 and 1948, van den Hoonaard details other Canadian Baha'i LSA's, Vancouver and Hamilton, to have had a proportion of women either exceeding or roughly equaling the proportion of female Baha'is in the whole community<sup>56</sup>.

The involvement by the North American native population leveled off. Pemberton-Pigott summarizes "for the most part Alberta's natives have not been well integrated into expansion/dispersion plans or the process of community development"<sup>57</sup>. He also mentions that "the Baha'is have come to expect non-participation from native

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<sup>54</sup> National Spiritual Assembly The Baha'is of Canada, (5 Dec, 2001), This was personal correspondence.

<sup>55</sup> Pemberton-Pigott, Andrew (1992:26) *The Baha'i Faith in Alberta: The Ethic of Dispersion*

<sup>56</sup> van den Hoonaard (1996:242) *The Origins of the Baha'i Community of Canada*

<sup>57</sup> Pemberton-Pigott, Andrew (1992:7) *The Baha'i Faith in Alberta: The Ethic of Dispersion*, For a complete discussion on the history of the Baha'i native population in Alberta and reasons for its declining involvement, see Pemberton-Pigott's Chapter Three: The first wave: Indians, pg 34-46.

believers”<sup>58</sup>. This demographic change may be evident in my study in which response from Baha’is who consider their ethnic background to be native was low.

Pemberton-Pigott details the ethic of geographic expansion in the province of Alberta, noting that “By any standard their (Alberta Baha’is) numbers and dispersion are a notable phenomenon”<sup>59</sup>. Since Baha’is are encouraged to establish themselves in communities where no Baha’is reside, part of the geographic expansion may be explained by their tendency to adhere closely to Baha’i authoritative direction. This suggests the existence of a recorded tendency of Baha’is in Alberta to follow instructions from a Baha’i administrative source, adding to the possibility that Baha’is may put in to practice other teachings of their faith.

In an overview of his study, looking at the pattern over time of teaching campaigns, activities motivated by adherence to the Baha’i Faith, Pemberton-Pigott notices that Baha’i activity can be cyclic, and that “it was easier to mount teaching campaigns during peak periods of crisis at the end of teaching Plans”<sup>60</sup>. Energy directed towards displaying the finer ideals of this alternate model of society may be sporadic, distracted at times, perhaps by the strong influence of the traditions of society around it. Smith comments “the extent to which Baha’is should become involved in philanthropic activities ... had always been a problematic area, particularly for Baha’is in the more developed countries”.<sup>61</sup> This suggests that the influence of status quo traditions, such as materialism, consumerism and the individual seeking out and retention of material wealth

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<sup>58</sup> Pemberton-Pigott, Andrew (1992:45) *The Baha’i Faith in Alberta: The Ethic of Dispersion*

<sup>59</sup> Pemberton-Pigott, Andrew (1992:7) *The Baha’i Faith in Alberta: The Ethic of Dispersion*

<sup>60</sup> Pemberton-Pigott, Andrew (1992:79) *The Baha’i Faith in Alberta: The Ethic of Dispersion*, The Baha’i community has ‘Plans’ that last several years. See Pemberton-Pigott (1992:Appendix 1:96) for a historical description of Baha’i Plans.

<sup>61</sup> Smith, Peter and Moojan Momen (1989:80) *The Baha’i Faith 1957-1988: A Survey of Contemporary Developments*

within these developed countries, such as Canada, may be having a larger influence over the Baha'is than the teachings of the Baha'i Faith. Obstacles stand in the way of the expression of the ideals of the Baha'i Faith, as may be expected, with the engineering of an alternate model of society being a daunting task for the new religion to face.

The Alberta Baha'i community was chosen as one to be investigated for several reasons, not the least of which was that I am a resident of Alberta, and have known that community for several years, as a result of my membership in it. However, given the nature of my research intent, it was a fruitful choice: the contrast between the ethos of free enterprise and laissez-faire capitalism that characterizes Alberta and the spiritual values of Baha'i could not be greater. Also, the benefits of statistics available through the NSGVP (National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating) surveys help the study to make comparison at a detailed empirical level. Multi-generational Baha'is, arriving as immigrants from Iran, here speculated to have well ingrained Baha'i behavioral traits, were also taken into consideration for selection of the Alberta community for study.

A literature review of publications representing current thought of Baha'i views on gender equality is presented over the next chapter. These publications exist in the academic literature and mostly come from the few journals that focus exclusively on the Baha'i Faith for subject material.

## Chapter 2 - Gender Equality

*“Two wings of a bird”*<sup>62</sup>

This second chapter will review the literature, as it pertains to the subject of gender equality, both in Baha'i writings and more generally, including education as a gender equalizer, women's representation on decision-making bodies as well as the current status of Baha'i and non-Baha'i models of gender equality. These publications represent the relatively scant academic studies of the Baha'i Faith, published mostly in three journals. Though most authors are Baha'is themselves, their views may or may not represent general Baha'i opinion, but rather the academic discussion on issues of Baha'i teachings. This chapter will serve as a review of what these authors have published on the subject of gender equality in the ideal, as well as current, Baha'i and non-Baha'i communities.

### ***Introduction***

The two genders are equal according to Baha'i teachings. “The establishment of equality between women and men is a key element in the Baha'i world order model.”<sup>63</sup> The ideals of Baha'i suggest total equality between men and women, while maintaining the self-evident truth that women and men are not identical. The ideal can be stated succinctly; “Woman is different from man, but equal”<sup>64</sup>. Or, in analogous form; “The world of humanity has two wings – one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. Should one wing remain weak, flight is

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<sup>62</sup> National Spiritual Assembly, U.S. (1997:1) Two Wings of a Bird: The Equality of Men and Women

<sup>63</sup> Bramson-Lerche, Loni (1996:75) An Element of ‘Divine Justice’: The Baha'i Principle of the Equality of Women and Men

<sup>64</sup> Schoonmaker, Ann (1984:144) Revisioning the Women's Movement

impossible”<sup>65</sup>. Symbolized by this analogy representing each gender by one wing of a bird, the Baha’i teachings suggest flight for a bird, or a social model for humanity with balance, requires that each wing, or gender, though not identical in function, must work in unison with the other to allow flight, or the healthy social functioning of society. Gender equality, in short, is not merely a desirable thing, but a necessary condition for the emergence of the ideal society of the future.

In the Baha’i view, gender equality has positive results for everyone; “males do not escape the consequences of females being devalued in our culture ... Any benefits we make as a society to improve the station of women do not simply benefit women. Everyone benefits.”<sup>66</sup>. This statement from a Baha’i publication interestingly agrees with that of a Canadian government publication: “Women’s issues are society’s issues. When successfully resolved, both women and men will reap the benefits”<sup>67</sup>. Referring to conditions already modified, that same Canadian government report unequivocally declares “There is no question that women – and men – are living in a better Canada because of advances in gender equality”<sup>68</sup>. Equality of genders, a Baha’i ideal, are presented to be a step towards social justice with benefits to society as a whole.

In this chapter, I will survey several of the themes that tend to recur in Baha’i writings on gender equality, beginning with the oft-repeated notion that women are by nature more oriented to social justice and to service.

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<sup>65</sup> Ray, Marilyn J. (1995:11) *Women and Men: Toward Achieving Complementarity*, Ray quotes ‘Abdu’l-Baha.

<sup>66</sup> Huggins, Janet (1990:54) *Exploring Male Oppression*

<sup>67</sup> Status of Women Canada (1995:Societal Partners) *Setting the Stage for the Next Century*

<sup>68</sup> Status of Women Canada (1995:Setting the Stage) *Setting the Stage for the Next Century*

### ***Are Women More Service Oriented?***

Are women naturally more spiritual beings with a greater tendency towards being of service to humanity and perhaps being more benevolent? ‘Anima’, which is Latin for the soul, is also the word used to describe the feminine qualities of each person in some schools of psychology<sup>69</sup>. Ross Woodman, in an esoteric writing, presents the Feminine, independent from the gendered word *female*, and points out “its larger spiritual meaning”<sup>70</sup>. Spirituality and religion have a definite overlap of values. “Recent studies attempting to determine people’s religiosity have confirmed that women in general are more religious than men”<sup>71</sup>, suggesting a more spiritual flavor to their character. Feminine qualities are seen to overlap those of generosity and social benevolence. Although they may be latent in all people, “spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong”<sup>72</sup> have been culturally developed to have extra strength in women. In the Baha’i world, Hatcher quotes ‘Abdu’l-Baha and Baha’u’llah; “woman has greater moral courage than the man(;) ... as regards tenderness of heart and abundance of mercy and sympathy ye (women) are superior”<sup>73</sup>.

Schweitz cites research on gender differences in psychology suggesting “women invoke an ‘ethic of care’ ... evidence that women as a group tend to perceive social relations and approach moral issues differently than men do”<sup>74</sup>. She contrasts this ethic in the legal system with what is described as a strongly masculine constructed system based on the “ethic of rights”.

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<sup>69</sup> Woodman, Marion (1989:62) *The Role of the Feminine in the New Era*

<sup>70</sup> Woodman, Ross (1995:76) *The Role of the Feminine in the Baha’i Faith*

<sup>71</sup> Ma’ani, Baharich Rouhani (1997:64) *The Effect of Philosophical and Linguistic Gender Biases*

<sup>72</sup> Ray, Marilyn J. (1995:16) *Women and Men: Toward Achieving Complementarity*

<sup>73</sup> Hatcher, John S. (1990:64) *The Equality of Women*

<sup>74</sup> Schweitz, Martha Leach (1995:25) *Of Webs and Ladders: Gender Equality*

It is interesting to note a Canadian government publication, giving quantitative measures showing women's involvement in the service sector; "Women are more likely than men (86 percent versus 63 percent, in 1993) to work in the service sector"<sup>75</sup>. This same publication points out "the special skills that women bring to management"<sup>76</sup>, suggesting change from male dominated supervisory roles may bring improvement in the work place. Current empirical studies show that "women in Canada spend more time working than men"<sup>77</sup>, and with a greater involvement in service oriented occupations, as well as unpaid work in the household, it can be rationalized that women have a strong positive influence on a service focused society. Women, then, are highly represented in service oriented employment as well as having special potential in decision-making management positions.

A Baha'i author, Lynn Echevarria questions community decision-makers positions as being ones of authority and power, as opposed to positions of service, suggesting that "power itself as a value has greatly diminished in importance ... and that the Baha'i positions of service ... are seen as acts of servitude and humility toward others, not as positions from which to wield influence and control"<sup>78</sup>. Also, she sees that the Baha'i organization "constructs women as capable (of) serving as administrators and leaders"<sup>79</sup>, where their service oriented tendencies would fit in well. Moojman concurs in a forward

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<sup>75</sup> Status of Women Canada (1995:#84) Setting the Stage for the Next Century

<sup>76</sup> Status of Women Canada (1995:#335) Setting the Stage for the Next Century

<sup>77</sup> Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women (1997:26) Economic Equality Gender Indicators

<sup>78</sup> Echevarria, Lynn (2000:87) Working through the Vision, For a discussion on this topic see pages 86-89 – Institutional Participation: Nature, Role and Function.

<sup>79</sup> Echevarria, Lynn (2000:94) Working through the Vision

looking statement: “We will truly have achieved a more *feminine* society when the question of who wields power is no longer important”<sup>80</sup>.

Another Baha'i author, Iulie Aslaksen sees association between femininity and a benevolent attitude; “Generosity may be perceived as having feminine-positive associations”<sup>81</sup>. This author, drawing inspiration from feminist economics, makes a case for the feminine outlook and its potential application to the market place, with a focus on what conditions may influence human motivation; “narrow self-interest and greed may be changed to ... (an outlook) of self-interest combined with generosity and social responsibility.”<sup>82</sup>. In a discussion about a transition from greed to generosity, Aslaksen addresses the issues of ancient wisdom pointing to the dangers of greed, the spiritual emptiness associated with the absence of an inner purpose and how love and care, presented as feminine characteristics, are “crucial for sustainable economic development”<sup>83</sup>. Of great interest to this study, Schoonmaker cites ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s directive to an American audience in 1912, to “strive to show in the human world that women are ... more *philanthropic* and responsive toward the needy and suffering”<sup>84</sup>. This study sees the possibility of women having benevolent characteristics empirically measurable in comparison with those of their male counterparts. This suggests an overlapping influence of gender equality on wealth distribution.

Empirical evidence from international development is cited to show the social benefits of women being in control of finances. Schweitz explains: “If a woman is given an opportunity to earn a livelihood, research has shown that the benefits nearly always

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<sup>80</sup> Momen, Moojan (1994:6) *In all the Ways that Matter, Women Don’t Count*, Italics are mine.

<sup>81</sup> Aslaksen, Iulie (2002:123) *Gender Constructions and the Possibility of a Generous Economic Actor*

<sup>82</sup> Aslaksen, Iulie (2002:120) *Gender Constructions and the Possibility of a Generous Economic Actor*

<sup>83</sup> Aslaksen, Iulie (2002:126) *Gender Constructions and the Possibility of a Generous Economic Actor*, For a discussion on the transition from greed to generosity, see pages 124-127.

<sup>84</sup> Schoonmaker, Ann (1984:150) *Revisioning the Women’s Movement*, Italics are mine.



redound to her family and village. If the same opportunity is given to a man, in a high percentage of cases the benefits go to him alone or into channels far less conducive to community development”<sup>85</sup>. A Canadian government report states: “women tend to spend a higher proportion of their income on children and immediate household needs, rather than invest in fixed assets, bonds, securities, etc., as men might”<sup>86</sup>. This same report concludes: “(its) priority is achieving women’s economic equality, through which all of Canada will benefit”<sup>87</sup>. Elevation of women in the material economic sphere brings to a societal model economic management with a family or community focus rather than a self focus, with resultant benefits to society as a whole. There is thus a convergence between Baha’i thinking and secular feminist thinking on these issues.

There is discussion in the literature suggesting comparison be made between feminine and masculine traits, where “the transformation of present-day society entails the acquiring, by both sexes, of traits traditionally associated with their opposites”<sup>88</sup>. One paper presents the argument that feminine and masculine characteristics are culturally ingrained in an individual; “Statistical generalizations allow for considerable overlap of shared characteristics between sexes. . . . The theory is that many of their differences are ‘learnt’ rather than genetically determined”<sup>89</sup>. Another paper also makes this point: “there are no masculine or feminine qualities, only human qualities that have come to be labeled that way as the result of socialization”<sup>90</sup>. This seems to imply, if gender roles are culturally determined, the possibility for adjustment to the roles each gender has to play in society.

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<sup>85</sup> Schweitz, Martha Leach (1995:34) *Of Webs and Ladders: Gender Equality*

<sup>86</sup> Status of Women Canada (1995:#123) *Setting the Stage for the Next Century*

<sup>87</sup> Status of Women Canada (1995:Conclusion) *Setting the Stage for the Next Century*

<sup>88</sup> Finch, Trevor R. J. (1994:8) *Unclipping the Wings: A Survey of Secondary Literature*

<sup>89</sup> Ta’eed, Lata (1994:2) *Sex, Gender and New Age Stereotyping*

<sup>90</sup> Russell, Jane J. (1995:52) *Spiritual Vertigo at the Edge of Gender Equality*

Addressing their perhaps natural tendency to be oriented towards social justice, ‘Abdu’l-Baha has set tasks for the women’s movement including “to take up the cause of women in illiterate and inferior conditions...”<sup>91</sup>, suggesting women of higher socio-economic status are to be of service to those in lower levels. Schoonmaker proposes these directives be seen as applying directly to “those women of this country (U.S.) who have had the benefits of equal opportunities and education”<sup>92</sup>. Baha’i directives encourage women to utilize their ethic of caring to improve the conditions of their fellow citizens who may be in less fortunate circumstances.

Whether women themselves, or the spiritual attributes associated with *femininity*, create an advanced spiritual status compared with men, the Baha’i literature is in agreement that feminine traits can have a positive place in the development of social justice, including a positive effect on wealth distribution. These feminine traits, more prevalent in women, make the equalization of genders a desirable step towards releasing spiritual attributes to have their positive influence on society.

### ***Education; The Primary Gender Equalizer***

Universal education, requiring the same academic as well as spiritual education for both girls and boys, is a basic teaching of the Baha’i Faith. Reference is given to education in writings looking at gender; “Education in the Baha’i Faith is both compulsory and universal”<sup>93</sup>. Along with this basic instruction runs the idea that education for girls and women is one of the primary means of fostering women’s equality with boys and men. Education is presented as a way of bringing about gender equality,

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<sup>91</sup> Finch, Trevor R. J. (1994:11) *Unclipping the Wings: A Survey of Secondary Literature*

<sup>92</sup> Schoonmaker, Ann (1984:150) *Revisioning the Women’s Movement*

<sup>93</sup> Ma’ani, Baharich Rouhani (1997:65) *The Effect of Philosophical and Linguistic Gender Biases on the Degradation of Women’s Status in Religion*; Schoonmaker, Ann (1984:145) *Revisioning the Women’s Movement*

and the education of women, especially, is presented as having extra economic value, adding to the influence education and gender equality have on wealth equity.

From an international development perspective, Schweitz points out that the World Bank has gradually come to realize the importance of education of women in international development. She summarizes the realization; “If you educate a woman, you educate a whole village”<sup>94</sup>. Kingdon emphasizes the contrast between male and female education, also looking at international development; “The social benefits from investing in female education are far greater than those from investing in male education”<sup>95</sup>. Graham, reviewing the direct impact on economics and society, points out; “returns to education are almost universally higher for women. According to the economics literature investment in women is economically efficient and socially advantageous”<sup>96</sup>. Using global development experience as a sounding board, gender biased education appears to have benefits.

The teachings of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, stated: “the female sex is treated as though inferior ... This condition is due not to nature, but to education”<sup>97</sup>. Ma’ani restates this as follows; “Lack of education prevented women from acquiring the powers they needed to challenge men’s assumption of a superior role in religion and society”<sup>98</sup>. Hatcher interprets a statement made by ‘Abdu’l-Baha as meaning the reason the imbalance in genders has come to exist is because of the deprivation of women in the realm of educational opportunity, and that as well, education alone would bring about equality. ‘Abdu’l-Baha also said “At present in the sphere of human activity woman does not

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<sup>94</sup> Schweitz, Martha Leach (1995:34) *Of Webs and Ladders: Gender Equality*

<sup>95</sup> Kingdon, Geeta Gahdhi (1997:3) *Education of Women*

<sup>96</sup> Graham, Bryan (1997:13) *The Baha’i Faith and Economics*

<sup>97</sup> Echevarria, Lynn (2000:57) *Working through the Vision*, Echevarria quotes ‘Abdu’l-Baha from “Paris Talks”, pg 161

<sup>98</sup> Ma’ani, Baharich Rouhani (1997:46-47) *The Effect of Philosophical and Linguistic Gender Biases*

manifest her natal prerogatives, owing to lack of education and opportunity. Without doubt education will establish her equality with men”<sup>99</sup>. There appears to be agreement in the literature that education can have major impact in bringing about gender equality. The globally guiding body of the Baha’is, the Universal House of Justice, sees education of girls as having a positive future impact; “well-educated girls are a guarantee of the excellence of future society”<sup>100</sup>. The correlation between education and economic well being implies that educated women will become equal in the realm of material possessions, and it is speculated here that with their higher propensity for social well being, this equalization may be measurable in the sample Baha’i community being studied. Within the Baha’i ideal community, women will also be given added spiritual education, allowing further benevolence-oriented learning than non-Baha’i women.

### ***Women Making Community Decisions***

If women were represented on decision-making bodies that govern communities and society, it would seem that their influence would favor not only the female population, but also the more feminine values and ways of decision-making discussed in all decision-making processed by these governing bodies. In Canadian society, “women have not achieved full equality with men nor gained equal access to the decision-making process”<sup>101</sup>. The literature shows potential for added feminine input into political governing bodies.

In provincial Canadian governments, currently “In provincial/territorial legislatures, in January 1999, some 18% of the elected members were women”<sup>102</sup>, which

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<sup>99</sup> Hatcher, John S. (1990:58) *The Equality of Women*

<sup>100</sup> Khan, Janet A. (2000:85) *Promoting the Equality of Women and Men*, Khan quotes the UHJ.

<sup>101</sup> *Status of Women Canada (1995:Societal Partners) Setting the Stage for the Next Century*

<sup>102</sup> *Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women (2001:22) Women’s Economic Independence and Security*

shows a distinctly unequal representation of women serving on legislative bodies. In private and crown businesses, “Very few women reach management or senior management positions in Canadian firms ... within the 560 biggest firms in Canada, ... women hold only 12% of management and 3.4% of senior management positions”<sup>103</sup>. Even in fields where the majority of workers are women, “men dominate the high-level categories, including supervisory positions of otherwise female-dominated occupations ...”<sup>104</sup>. In the cultural development setting of Canada, “They (women) are often left out of the decision-making process, and their contributions and ideas are regarded with lesser importance”<sup>105</sup>. Women’s views and opinions are missing on political bodies, private industry and any culturally influenced setting for their input into significant decisions.

The literature distinguishes between female representation on decision-making bodies and the role of the Baha'i ideal of representation of the feminine qualities in society. “The values (of patriarchy) continue to exist even when, as occurred in Britain during the 1980’s, a female monarch and a female prime minister ruled. ... These women simply were made into ‘honorary males’ with the patriarchy’s structure”<sup>106</sup>. Schoonmaker views the recent feminist movement where “the goals of radical feminists appear to be to achieve the same position and control within the power structure as men ... trapped within the confines and limits of Western patriarchal patterns”<sup>107</sup>. She continues, seeing secular feminist movements to be dissimilar from the Baha'i ideals, “the women’s movement became, not a joyful sisterhood celebrating the rich potentialities and

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<sup>103</sup> Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women (2001:23) Women’s Economic Independence and Security

<sup>104</sup> Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women (1997:35) Economic Equality Gender Indicators

<sup>105</sup> Status of Women Canada (1995:#269) Setting the Stage for the Next Century

<sup>106</sup> Momen, Moojan (1994:1) In all the Ways that Matter, Women Don’t Count

<sup>107</sup> Schoonmaker, Ann (1984:138) Revisioning the Women’s Movement

diversities of women, but a fragmented, disillusioned and bitter quarrel”<sup>108</sup>. Baha'i ideals, though still in the process of development, see the feminine spiritual attributes of people in general as having potential to add to social justice within their model of society.

### ***Current Status of Gender Equality***

How do women stand in comparison with men as society exists now? A global economic summary contends, “Women account for roughly half the world’s population, perform two thirds of the hours worked, receive one-tenth of the world’s income, and have less than one hundredth of the world’s property registered in their names.”<sup>109</sup> These unequal patterns are detectable in the nation of Canada also.

The Canadian government recognizes economic measurements of gender inequality. The government of Canada acknowledges, “women in Canada continue to receive an unequal share of the benefits of their labor ... women experience unequal pay for work of equal value”<sup>110</sup>. Referring to education and careers, “girls are still concentrated in a limited number of fields of study”<sup>111</sup> and “women are still more numerous in fields related to the social sciences, education and health”<sup>112</sup>. When looking at the way current Canadian culture values women and their representation in service positions, their rate of pay can be used for comparison. These service oriented fields continue to offer lower levels of remuneration in Canada: “In 1997, women working full-time for a full year earned on average 72.5% of the average earnings of men ... The full-

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<sup>108</sup> Schoonmaker, Ann (1984:141) *Revisioning the Women’s Movement*

<sup>109</sup> Kingdon, Geeta Gahdhi (1997:1) *Education of Women*

<sup>110</sup> Status of Women Canada (1995:#37,#39) *Setting the Stage for the Next Century*

<sup>111</sup> Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women (2001:10) *Women’s Economic Independence and Security*

<sup>112</sup> Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women (2001:12) *Women’s Economic Independence and Security*

time female to male earnings ratio is 74% for university graduates...<sup>113</sup>. In Calgary, these numbers are very similar with women earning 70.4% of the income of men; 75.4% for university graduates<sup>114</sup>. Women, including those in Alberta, work more than men with a 1.16 index being measured for 1992<sup>115</sup> where a 1.0 index indicates equality and over 1.0 shows women's workload to be greater. Women, also, are more likely to live in poverty than men, where "single mothers and senior women living alone are most liable to experience poverty"<sup>116</sup>. Though current governments are aware of them, gender biased economic discrepancies continue to exist in Canadian culture.

How did this cultural pattern come to exist?

Echevarria points out from a theological stance, "Although women have advanced in the realms of religion and society to a much greater degree today than in the 1900s, they still struggle with age-old prejudices, habits of thought and behaviors ... inequality between the two sexes"<sup>117</sup>. The Judeo-Christian tradition of subordination of women, "women scholars argue, has led to many other limiting beliefs and behaviors"<sup>118</sup>. Echevarria also shows that Greek philosophical thought has had an impact on current Western concepts on women's nature. In a Greek legend, Pandora's Box, "parallel with the Judeo-Christian interpretations, the first woman on earth was held responsible for humanity's ills and sorrows"<sup>119</sup>. Another author, Ma'ani concludes from a discussion on

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<sup>113</sup> Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women (2001:14) Women's Economic Independence and Security

<sup>114</sup> Statistics Canada (2001) Income Trends in Canada, Series 100

<sup>115</sup> Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women (1997:46) Economic Equality Gender Indicators

<sup>116</sup> Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women (2001:18) Women's Economic Independence and Security

<sup>117</sup> Echevarria, Lynn (2000:53,55) Working through the Vision

<sup>118</sup> Echevarria, Lynn (2000:57) Working through the Vision

<sup>119</sup> Echevarria, Lynn (2000:58) Working through the Vision

the philosophical influence on gender attitudes formed over time: “the foundation of the theory laid earlier by Greek philosophers regarding women as inferior human beings was strengthened”<sup>120</sup>. Ma’ani sees it as “ironic that religion should have been used as a potent force to deprive women of their human rights”<sup>121</sup>. Ray adds in a psychological evaluation, where “psychological moralists have determined that women, because of their differences, are inherently inferior to men in their moral views”<sup>122</sup>. This historically developed gender-biased tradition may be having an influence on current Canadian culture where “negative or inaccurate portrayals of women’s lives in commercials, television programs and music videos continue”<sup>123</sup>. Perhaps older religious traditions have added to the current cultural gender bias measurable in economic terms in Canada and the world, inviting new religious teachings to have potential to make changes.

Hatcher views a problematic male-values driven economy and society; “we are experiencing the dire crisis that has resulted from a society’s domination by males and so-called male attributes (i.e., the emphasis on territorialism, materialism, acquisitiveness, aggression, etc.)”<sup>124</sup>. Aslaksen also sees current society’s economic attitude to have a gender-biased outlook, perhaps lacking a true feminine or spiritual outlook; “Regardless of women’s increasing participation in public life, both society and economic thinking remain conditioned by gender-polarized male identities”<sup>125</sup>. This same society is seen further by Aslaksen as being very greed focused, where “lack of interest in ethical investments in mainstream economics reflects a cultural construction of identity reinforcing the image of economic actors motivated by narrow self-interest rather than

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<sup>120</sup> Ma’ani, Baharich Rouhani (1997:52) *The Effect of Philosophical and Linguistic Gender Biases*

<sup>121</sup> Ma’ani, Baharich Rouhani (1997:50) *The Effect of Philosophical and Linguistic Gender Biases*

<sup>122</sup> Ray, Marilyn J. (1995:11) *Women and Men: Toward Achieving Complementarity*

<sup>123</sup> *Status of Women Canada* (1995:#271) *Setting the Stage for the Next Century*

<sup>124</sup> Hatcher, John S. (1990:57) *The Equality of Women*

<sup>125</sup> Aslaksen, Iulie (2002:125) *Gender Constructions and the Possibility of a Generous Economic Actor*



self-interest, generosity and social responsibility”<sup>126</sup>. Historically, “the reluctance of women as well as men to accept a role of full equality”<sup>127</sup>, points to both genders as having an influence on the status quo. Mostly men in decision-making positions, with the support of women to some extent, have created society’s gender patterns to be as they are today.

Khan, in a writing looking at the practical application of the Baha’i teachings on gender equality, sees the need for “a tremendous change in ways of thinking and acting which have been accepted as normal for centuries ...”<sup>128</sup>, a need that may be showing itself in current Baha’i communities. On referring to the Baha’i teachings, Mahmoudi declares the evidence to be “quite conclusive, indicating that women have not achieved nearly the level of equality that the Baha’i Revelation advances”<sup>129</sup>.

### ***Baha’i Gender Equality***

The Baha’i community is presented as a distinctly separate mode of cultural operation. “Baha’i gender roles can only be fully understood and effected ‘in the context of Baha’i society, not in that of past or present social norms’”<sup>130</sup>. Within the Baha’i communities at their stages of development to date, some advances towards gender equality have been made while some remain to be attained. Equality of men and women, worded in absolute terms, is distinctly one of the primary Baha’i teachings. “Baha’u’llah states unequivocally that ‘women and men have been and will always be equal in the

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<sup>126</sup> Aslaksen, Iulie (2002:129) Gender Constructions and the Possibility of a Generous Economic Actor

<sup>127</sup> Finch, Trevor R. J. (1994:5) Unclipping the Wings: A Survey of Secondary Literature

<sup>128</sup> Khan, Janet A. (2000:72) Promoting the Equality of Women and Men

<sup>129</sup> Mahmoudi, Hoda (1991:77) Commentary on ‘Exploring Male Oppression From a Family-Systems Perspective’

<sup>130</sup> Hatcher, John S. (1990:63) The Equality of Women

sight of God ...”<sup>131</sup>. Women and men, seen as equal in the eyes of God, and though having variation in function, ideally have equal rights, opportunity and voice in the community.

There are arguments against the viability of Baha'i as being a true teaching of equality. Perhaps the greatest claim of those who see this as untrue is the male only membership roster of the UHJ (Universal House of Justice) and differences in cases of intestacy<sup>132</sup>. In the Baha'i administrative system, except in the case of the UHJ, women are both eligible to vote as well as to be elected or appointed to administrative positions. The Baha'i teachings, oriented towards women, instruct; “Their rights with men are equal in degree. They will enter all the administrative branches of politics”<sup>133</sup>. Finch concludes: “So much of what Baha'is write is not ground-breaking, but distinctly treading in others' footsteps. In many ways we, as Baha'is, are far behind in developing our thinking in the realm of equality and gender studies”. These may be the strongest arguments against the Baha'i Faith having positive influence on gender equality. Another author with a less demanding tone suggests that “no one is totally immune from the influence of outworn philosophies”<sup>134</sup> in reference to gender biases, suggesting the Baha'i community's need to struggle against the social norm to maintain its ideals in practice.

There are authors commenting on the progress of Baha'is to attain their own self-proclaimed goals. One author describes Baha'i development thus, “What has been

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<sup>131</sup> Hatcher, John S. (1990:56) *The Equality of Women*

<sup>132</sup> Cooper, Roger (1985:15) *The Baha'is of Iran*; Finch, Trevor R. J. (1994:3) Finch refers to a publication by Linda and John Walbridge “Baha'i Laws on the Status of Men”, arguing that the Baha'i Faith favors men over women, initiating controversy and discussion.

<sup>133</sup> Mahmoudi, Hoda and Richard DaBell (1992:10) *Rights and Responsibilities*; Khan, Janet A. (2000:83) *Promoting the Equality of Women and Men*

<sup>134</sup> Ma'ani, Baharich Rouhani (1997:53) *The Effect of Philosophical and Linguistic Gender Biases*

described in relation to the advancement of women is an unfinished process”<sup>135</sup>.

Addressing gender equality, another writer observes; “We are only beginning to come to terms with how to translate this revealed truth into human relationships and institutions”<sup>136</sup>. A very recent study of gender equality in the Baha'i community of Canada, finds many Baha'is wondering “whether or not the Baha'is were ‘actually behind the non-Baha'i community,’ even though we might *think* we are ahead”<sup>137</sup>. There are doubts of progress being made on viewing their own development potential within the Baha'i community.

An example of the community in the United States can be reviewed. “Present patterns of Baha'i community life in the United States cannot yet fully show to the world the ‘viable model and ... alternative means of social organization’”<sup>138</sup>. Distractions may result in a less than perfect application of Baha'i ideals; “a woman has never been elected as secretary to the National Spiritual Assembly in the United States”<sup>139</sup>. Citing an example of the Baha'i community, Khan points out: “elements of polarized gender identities ... linger in the U.S. Baha'i community to a surprising degree in view of Baha'i teachings that clearly abolish both”<sup>140</sup>. Difficulties in attaining their gender equality ideals are present in Baha'i communities as they stand today.

With the idea generally presented in the Baha'i literature that further progress is being made in the Baha'i community in ‘developing’ countries as opposed to ‘developed’ countries, an example from a South Pacific nation can be shown. Sier, in her study of the

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<sup>135</sup> Khan, Janet A. (2000:89) Promoting the Equality of Women and Men

<sup>136</sup> Hatcher, John S. (1990:56) The Equality of Women

<sup>137</sup> van den Hoonaard (2002:6) (A Preliminary Report) The Equality of Women and Men, This was obtained through personal correspondence.

<sup>138</sup> Russell, Jane J. (1995:46) Spiritual Vertigo at the Edge of Gender Equality

<sup>139</sup> Finch, Trevor R. J. (1994:5) Unclipping the Wings: A Survey of Secondary Literature

<sup>140</sup> Russell, Jane J. (1995:48) Spiritual Vertigo at the Edge of Gender Equality

Baha'is of Samoa, finds that between 30 and 40% of the people serving on Local Spiritual Assemblies are women. She points out, that in a village environment, typical of Samoa, this is “much higher than the average 6% female representation on the Samoan village *fono* (village council of chiefs)”<sup>141</sup>. Though she challenges circumstantial reasons for this pattern, it may be positive evidence for the Baha'i construct being different.

In contrast to Greek philosophy and Judeo-Christian religious tradition, Baha'is believe that men and women *both* were created in the image of God. In reference to the story of Genesis in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Baha'is interpretation finds that “no negative interpretations are drawn from this story in relation to the status of women”<sup>142</sup>. Ma'ani, agreeing with this updated theological view, states clearly “male superiority, accommodated in scriptures of the past, has been annulled by the Baha'i Faith”<sup>143</sup>. Woodman reveals the Baha'i teaching alleviating any blame for the human condition on women; “Abdu'l-Baha abrogates entirely the ancient doctrine of Original Sin identified with the Feminine”<sup>144</sup>. The Baha'i tradition seems to have the potential to negate the influence of previous religious traditions and their influence on cultural gender patterns.

There is one further behavior stressed by the Baha'i model as beneficial to gender equality. Consultation is a common word in the Baha'i vocabulary. The process of consultation involves a group (which could be a family) of Baha'is sitting together, each voicing an opinion if desired – but with no attachment to the final outcome – and through a process of discussion, arriving at a consensus or group conscience about which idea would be best for the group, family or community as a whole. In consultation, unity is stressed, where consensus on an poor decision is considered more important than a better decision, maintaining the basic Baha'i philosophy of the importance of unity. Through

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<sup>141</sup> Sier, Maureen (1999:177) *Sounding – Women in Samoa*

<sup>142</sup> Echevarria, Lynn (2000:61) *Working through the Vision*

<sup>143</sup> Ma'ani, Baharieh Rouhani (1997:64) *The Effect of Philosophical and Linguistic Gender Biases*

<sup>144</sup> Woodman, Ross (1995:80) *The Role of the Feminine in the Baha'i Faith*

this technique, it is argued that equality of men and women can come about in the household environment. “Baha’u’llah has given humankind the art of consultation as a powerful instrument to be used toward the goal of unity and equality ... In the case of husband and wife ... the role of consultation becomes ... crucial”<sup>145</sup>. Consultation is described further where, “In the Baha’i teachings family life is based not on authoritarian rule but on a model of consultation founded on principles of frankness and mutual respect”<sup>146</sup>. Schweitz goes on to argue that the process of consultation is a more feminine process; “The principles of consultation would appear to reflect the ‘contextual’ decision making compatible with the female approach to moral issues”<sup>147</sup>. Khan portrays the diplomatic ideal of the cooperative decision-making method; “loving consultation should be the keynote, that all matters should be settled in harmony and love, and that there are times when the husband and wife should defer to the wishes of the other”<sup>148</sup>. Consultation is a practice that may be having a positive influence on gender equality in the Baha’i community, a practice that is investigated briefly in this study.

The possibility of the Baha’i community having two more balanced wings to fly with than the non-Baha’i community exists. Government measurements and possible influence show society in Canada to be on an almost parallel path, except for the implication of spiritual influence proposed by Baha’i, in a quest to achieve equality between women and men in the sphere of social justice.

This literature review will now close its discussion of the social justice indicator of gender equality. Continuation of a review of wealth distribution in Chapter 3, next, will address academic discussions, analyses and studies made of wealth equity as it is taught in the Baha’i context focusing on the ideal beliefs instigated into Baha’i adherents.

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<sup>145</sup> Mahmoudi, Hoda and Richard DaBell (1992:6) Rights and Responsibilities

<sup>146</sup> Schweitz, Martha Leach (1995:32) Of Webs and Ladders: Gender Equality

<sup>147</sup> Schweitz, Martha Leach (1995:32) Of Webs and Ladders: Gender Equality

<sup>148</sup> Khan, Janet A. (2000:81-82) Promoting the Equality of Women and Men

### Chapter 3 – Wealth Equity

“... and with gold We will test Our servants”<sup>149</sup>

In this chapter I will review the literature on the subject of wealth equity in a very broad perspective including issues of materialism, morals, wealth distribution measures, comparison with Adam Smith, reasons for disparity, taxation vs. philanthropy, and motivations for benevolence including those with Baha'i spiritual influence.

#### *Introduction*

Mal-distribution of material wealth is considered in the Baha'i writings to be a key problem in the realm of social justice. One Baha'i source proclaims: “One of the most striking examples of injustice in the world today is the grave imbalance in economic and material conditions”<sup>150</sup>, while a comparable secular report introduces itself with the statement: “Poverty amid plenty is the world’s greatest challenge.”<sup>151</sup> Hanson, in a review of the Baha'i perspective on the creation of social justice, points out: “The inequalities of wealth and opportunity in our world are painful to contemplate... (and), from a Baha'i point of view, neither inevitable nor irremediable”<sup>152</sup>. Dahl suggests; “Social justice ... requires a reduction in the extremes of wealth and poverty in the world”<sup>153</sup>. Not only is

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<sup>149</sup> Baha'u'llah (1994:55) Hidden Words, The Arabic

<sup>150</sup> Baha'i website (2002) The Teachings of Baha'u'llah

<sup>151</sup> World Bank (2001:v) World Development Report 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty, This is the opening line of the Foreword to this comprehensive report on current global poverty.

<sup>152</sup> Hanson, Holley (1996:32) The Process of Creating Social Justice

<sup>153</sup> Dahl, Arthur Lyon (1996:160) The ECOPrinciple: Ecology and Economics in Symbiosis, A marine biologist compares the dynamics of a natural system, a coral reef, to the human societal system, noting the requirements of the natural system to keep itself alive and in balance.

wealth disparity seen as a problem, but according to Baha'is, it is one that can be addressed through a religious moral solution. This study proposes the moral virtue of benevolence to be a contributing factor to wealth redistribution.

As the domain of wealth equity is broad, an attempt is made here to focus on those parts of importance to this study. Though the problem of wealth disparity is complex, two main causal factors for this have been repeatedly cited in the literature, these being materialism and the moral values in current society, both of which contribute to wealth disparity levels now existing.

### ***Materialism***

One author defines materialism as “the belief that the ultimate goals of personal life can be fulfilled by things and sensations”<sup>154</sup>. The Baha'i literature addresses materialism from a negative stance, with descriptions associated with sin, degrading forces and mind-altering substances, to a more neutral stance, where it is something to be simply utilized to attain spiritual goals.

Poyer introduces materialism as being a widely acknowledged “besetting sin of modern Western civilization”<sup>155</sup>. From a global poverty relief outlook, Huddleston poses the question; “Is the Western consumer society with its present emphasis on massive use of resources to produce extravagant, disposable goods a practical or desirable model for a development strategy intended to abolish international poverty?”<sup>156</sup>, suggesting the materialism of the consumer market to be wanting if wealth equity is desirable. In one comparison of science with religion, materialism's influence is referred to as

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<sup>154</sup> Poyer, Lin (1989:58) *The Role of Material Goods in Spiritual Development*, Poyer quotes the definition from (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg Halton, *Meaning*, ix).

<sup>155</sup> Poyer, Lin (1989:58) *The Role of Material Goods in Spiritual Development*

<sup>156</sup> Huddleston (1991:31) *Towards a World Economy*

“corrosive”<sup>157</sup>. Remembering the importance of science to the Baha'i model, materialism is suggested to be negatively influencing science which, it is contended, “lose(s) its bearings when it falls victim to materialism”<sup>158</sup>. Badi'i refers to materialism in a degrading context as “opium”<sup>159</sup>, suggests that it “is the root cause of many problems (including) extremes of wealth and poverty”<sup>160</sup> and that “materialism has failed to provide an effective and practical solution to the problems of the world”<sup>161</sup>. These views of authors addressing materialism from a Baha'i perspective paint a negative picture of its market influence, including those on material wealth equity.

Poyer describes the purchase of material goods as being a symbol of success in American culture, one that he suggests, counter to what we might expect in a critique of materialism, to be part of a healthy growth process, where goods are “morally neutral”<sup>162</sup> and thus, can be seen as part of a spiritual development process. Dahl agrees that “material development is not an end in itself”<sup>163</sup> but that “the challenge is to utilize material means for spiritual ends”<sup>164</sup>, continuing with descriptions of the social problems associated with “a hostile and competitive society frantically pursuing empty material

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<sup>157</sup> Baha'i International Community (2000a:3) Science, Religion and Development: Some Initial Considerations

<sup>158</sup> Baha'i International Community (2000c:15) Review: The Lab, Temple and Market, This is a book review of a compilation of four writings, one written by Dr. Farzam Arbab, a member of the Universal House of Justice at the time of this writing.

<sup>159</sup> Badi'i Hooshmand (1997:60) Spiritual Solution of Economic Problems

<sup>160</sup> Badi'i Hooshmand (1997:44) Spiritual Solution of Economic Problems

<sup>161</sup> Badi'i Hooshmand (1997:182) Spiritual Solution of Economic Problems

<sup>162</sup> Poyer, Lin (1989:62) The Role of Material Goods in Spiritual Development

<sup>163</sup> Dahl, Gregory C. (1984:156) A Baha'i Perspective on Economic and Social Development

<sup>164</sup> Dahl, Gregory C. (1984:159) A Baha'i Perspective on Economic and Social Development



goals”<sup>165</sup>. These are the more positive outlooks on materialism found in the literature, though they fail to promote materialism as itself being the answer to wealth disparity<sup>166</sup>.

“All the world’s great religions and philosophies recognize that material wealth is ephemeral”<sup>167</sup>, and the Baha’i Faith is no different. Huddleston, in reference to a statement made by ‘Abdu’l-Baha, interprets the statement to predict; “in a Baha’i society there would be a more balanced view of material things”<sup>168</sup>. With a view towards human development, van den Hoonaard suggests, “A piecemeal, materialistic approach to uplifting the human condition strikes a Baha’i as an unsatisfactory way ...”<sup>169</sup>. Hassall agrees with the lack of value materialism has in a move towards a more just society, stating clearly; “a purely materialistic conception of development ... presumes economic justice will result as by-products of material success – a premise which in the Baha’i view is false”<sup>170</sup>. Materialism can be conceptualized within the context of the Baha’i teachings, which teaches about the higher spiritual nature of humanity and the lower physical or material nature. “Every good habit, every noble quality belongs to man’s spiritual nature, whereas all his imperfections and sinful actions are born of his material nature.”<sup>171</sup> Baha’i literature appears to agree on material wealth and a materialistic outlook as failing to contribute to social justice in and of themselves.

Materialism shows a negative influence on equity of wealth, associated with a lack of moral standards in the materially focused world, suggesting it contributes to

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<sup>165</sup> Dahl, Gregory C. (1984:161) A Baha’i Perspective on Economic and Social Development

<sup>166</sup> Adkin, Laurie E. (1986) Marxism, Human Nature, and Society, This statement may bring to mind the theories of Karl Marx. See other proceedings also from a 1986 conference entitled “The Baha’i Faith and Marxism”.

<sup>167</sup> Thomas, June Manning (1984:94) Poverty and Wealth in America: A Baha’i Perspective

<sup>168</sup> Huddleston, John (1984:74) Some Thoughts on the Economy of a World Commonwealth

<sup>169</sup> van den Hoonaard, Will C. (1984:108) A Pattern of Development

<sup>170</sup> Hassall, Graham (2001:112) Rights to Human and Social Development

<sup>171</sup> Badi’i, Hooshmand (1997:88) Spiritual Solution of Economic Problems, Badi’i quotes ‘Abdu’l-Baha.

wealth disparity. Materialism is also seen by the Baha'i teachings as being a distraction from the true spiritual purpose in life. This study of Alberta, Canada, concentrates on a part of the world that some might consider to have a highly material focus, where the religious group being looked at may be deterred in their materialistic ethos by their religious beliefs, or, perhaps influenced by the materialistic economic values of the society around them.

### *Moral Values*

The moral values, or ethics, of current society are generally argued by Baha'i authors to have a negative impact on equitable wealth distribution. The moral values of people who seek to acquire material wealth out of a narrow-focused self-interest may be distant from the virtues of generosity and benevolence. Glamorization of the well-to-do as ideals to imitate, the idea that more is better and the advertised associations between material wealth and happiness may be having an impact on current levels of wealth distribution. Moral values in general may be reflected by our way of doing business where "our economic system is simply an external and concrete reflection of our collective inner life"<sup>172</sup>. Authors looking at the moral standards of society in the material sphere are generally critical.

Graham quotes Sabetan's argument that the tendency opposite to economic harmony - self-interest - is "perhaps the single element most destructive of well-being"<sup>173</sup>. Agreeing in part with this statement, Graham goes on to make his own argument that the market place, though acceptable in principle, is "lacking ... the moral backbone in society to constructively guide and set its parameters"<sup>174</sup>. Greed and

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<sup>172</sup> Hatcher, William S. (1974/5:14) Economics and Moral Values

<sup>173</sup> Graham, Bryan (1997:11) The Baha'i Faith and Economics; Sabetan, Farhad (1997) An Exploration into the Political Economy of Global Prosperity

<sup>174</sup> Graham, Bryan (1997:13) The Baha'i Faith and Economics

selfishness, and a lack of higher moral standards, are certainly alluded to by these authors as contributing to current representations of economic and social justice. Rassekh, agreeing with other sources, defines “self-interest as indifference to the welfare of other individuals”<sup>175</sup>, going on to say that although this attitude may not injure other people, it does nothing to alleviate their problems. Badi’i, in a long list of prevailing social problems, quotes Shoghi Effendi to include “the increasing evidences of selfishness, ... the feverish pursuit after, earthly vanities, riches and pleasures ... the lapse into luxurious indulgence”<sup>176</sup> when he addresses problems and difficulties in our world. He goes on to view world hunger in a moral context, where “expressions of unwillingness to share the surplus produce” is a problematic situation. He points out that the shortage of food is not the basis of the problem, but rather “the shortage of the feelings of love and concern” or higher moral or spiritual values, constitutes the foundation of the issue being discussed.

Religion teaches ethical behavior, and the Baha’is have a global organization emphasizing the potential impact ethics will have on economics. The Baha’i International Community<sup>177</sup> (BIC) suggests “a major global ethical principle, *collective trusteeship*, which if integrated into social and economic policy, would contribute significantly to reducing the current extremes of wealth and poverty”<sup>178</sup>. Here, the claim is openly made that, with the application of moral values to a new system of society, a Baha’i world order, a reductive influence on the gap between rich and poor will come to exist.

The Baha’i Faith’s idea is that, to know success with social justice, moral values are a requisite. This suggests moral values or ethics to be a necessary part of the plan for human societal development, with a strong suggestion that moral values originate from religion. Suggesting resolution through this spiritual solution, Thomas advises “The

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<sup>175</sup> Rassekh, Farhad (2001:42) *The Baha’i Faith and the Market Economy*

<sup>176</sup> Badi’i, Hooshmand (1997:3) *Spiritual Solution of Economic Problems*, Badi’i quotes Shoghi Effendi.

<sup>177</sup> Smith, Peter and Moojan Momen (1989:66-67) *A Survey of Contemporary Developments*

<sup>178</sup> Lerche, Charles O. (1999:86) *Statescraft, Globalization and Ethics*

entire population must develop higher moral standards ...”<sup>179</sup> and the reality of current society is one in which “Few indeed are those who truly devote themselves to protecting the destitute and helping the oppressed”<sup>180</sup>.

It is broadly determined by authors on the subject of morality and economics, from a Baha’i perspective, that there is not only a great deal of space available for improvement in the economy, but that the way to achieve improvement is through a shift in moral values. Religion is believed by Baha’is to be the source of these desired moral values; “The establishment of a strong religious belief ... is the most reliable guarantee of a proper moral view”<sup>181</sup> states one author looking at Baha’i. Another Baha’i author, Farhad Rassekh, states; “The role of market is to allocate resources toward the production of goods and services that people desire; the role of religion is to edify (to profit morally or spiritually by good example) humanity. Their roles are complementary.”<sup>182</sup> Rassekh’s analysis of the economy concludes that “markets alone are not sufficient, and moral values can and should influence market outcomes.”<sup>183</sup>, suggesting that Adam Smith’s ‘invisible hand’ and the trickledown theory are insufficient to produce a socially just outcome.

### ***Current Measures of Wealth Distribution***

How can wealth equity be measured and operationalized?

Quantitative evidence will be further presented in Chapter 5, while some general qualitative statements that exist in the literature are put forward here. Graham contends “there are many examples of exploitation in the world; whether it is a senior executive

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<sup>179</sup> Thomas, June Manning (1984:102) Poverty and Wealth in America: A Baha’i Perspective

<sup>180</sup> Thomas, June Manning (1984:106) Poverty and Wealth in America: A Baha’i Perspective

<sup>181</sup> Libo, Sun (1996:69) Morality, Law and Religion: A Comparison of Three Concepts of Justice

<sup>182</sup> Rassekh, Farhad (2001:51) The Baha’i Faith and the Market Economy

<sup>183</sup> Rassekh, Farhad (2001:42) The Baha’i Faith and the Market Economy

exploiting corporate shareholders or a local landowner exploiting peasants”<sup>184</sup>. He compares this view with ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s statement; “When we see poverty allowed to reach a condition of starvation it is a sure sign that somewhere we shall find tyranny”<sup>185</sup>. Looking at an international comparison of nations, and attempts to alleviate disparity there, “No international development strategy looks promising enough to overcome this fundamental handicap in our global economy”<sup>186</sup>. More recently, Hassall observes that “despite so much attention to ‘economic development,’ the masses continue to live in poverty”<sup>187</sup>. Thomas, referring to the United States, discloses “The proportion of national income received by the lowest quintile has not improved at all”<sup>188</sup>. Though the world may be growing richer in an aggregate sense, the common understanding among writers on wealth equity is that wealth disparity is not only not disappearing, but may be increasing.

There is concurring evidence in a variety of publications showing that wealthier people, though they give more and larger donations on average in Canada, nevertheless give a lower percentage of their income than those in lower income brackets do. “The percentage devoted to such expenditures (gifts and contributions) still remains considerably higher in the lowest income quintile ... than in the highest quintile”<sup>189</sup>. “The Poor Give the Hardest”<sup>190</sup> is the title of a graph showing a range of percentages given compared to income brackets. A look at what happens in Alberta in the context of what

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<sup>184</sup> Graham, Bryan (1997:6) *The Baha’i Faith and Economics*

<sup>185</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Baha (1995:159) *Paris Talks*

<sup>186</sup> van den Hoonaard, Will C. (1984:122) *A Pattern of Development*

<sup>187</sup> Hassall, Graham (2001:108) *Rights to Human and Social Development*

<sup>188</sup> Thomas, June Manning (1984:92) *Poverty and Wealth in America: A Baha’i Perspective*, Thomas is quoting the US Department of Commerce (1981).

<sup>189</sup> Reed, Paul B. (2001:4) *Generosity in Canada*

<sup>190</sup> Greenfeld, Karl Taro (2000:45) *The New Philanthropy: A New Way of Giving*, *Time Magazine*

percentage of household income is donated across a range of incomes, both within and outside of the Baha'i community, is presented in Chapter 5.

Fish, in a reference to economic development action programs, points out “Most of the various programs initiated have been fraught with disappointment”<sup>191</sup>, suggesting current non-Baha'i attempts to alleviate poverty are less than successful. The Baha'i Universal House of Justice, in a 1985 statement, makes direct reference to the issue of disparity where “the inordinate disparity between rich and poor”<sup>192</sup> is considered to be a source of suffering. Closer to home, a study of the absolute and relative homeless, the poorest of the poor in Calgary, Alberta, suggests a strong connection between homelessness and poverty. Problems with homelessness, where; “the situation for both AH (absolutely homeless) and RH (relatively homeless) has grown more grave since 1997”<sup>193</sup>, suggests current attention to the problem has room for improvement. This stands in direct contrast to the Baha'i writings about their vision of an ideal society where “there will be no needy ones seen in the streets”<sup>194</sup>. It is agreed in many cases by authors cited in this review that ample indications of wealth disparity exist, and as well that methods attempted to alleviate the problems of disparity of wealth are less than successful.

### ***Baha'i Scholarly Perception of Adam Smith and the Enlightenment***

Baha'i scholars often bring Adam Smith, one of the most recognized economists of all time, into their discussions of economics. Though they note that Smith included Providence and high moral values as factors in his evaluation of reasons for wealth being created and distributed, they also point out that he is the author of one influential idea that

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<sup>191</sup> Fish, Mary (1997:4) Economic Prosperity: A Global Imperative

<sup>192</sup> Universal House of Justice (1985:10) The Promise of World Peace

<sup>193</sup> Gardiner, Helen et. al. (2002:11) 2002 Calgary Homelessness Study

<sup>194</sup> Badi'i, Hooshmand (1997:125) Spiritual Solution of Economic Problems, Badi'i quotes 'Abdu'l-Baha.

the ‘economic man’ on an individual basis and “comparative advantage”<sup>195</sup> on a national basis have a real impact in the economy. Another idea of his that Baha’i authors discuss is his idea of the ‘invisible hand’<sup>196</sup>, the tendency of one individual involved in the market to have an unintentional, yet beneficial, impact on others in the market, an idea considered to have influence on wealth distribution. Several Baha’i authors have considered Adam Smith in their articles, while it is noted here that certain aspects of Smith’s works were not discussed by these authors, such as the criticisms and observations he made in his 1776 publication “Wealth of Nations” of the various arrangements and influences of religion sects at his time<sup>197</sup>.

According to Rassekh, the economic outlook developed in association with the Enlightenment may be the primary economic paradigm that the Baha’i teachings are currently facing. Rassekh, in his essay, delves deep into the history of Adam Smith, referring to his writings’ association with the Enlightenment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, noting that Smith contributed to economics, social psychology as well as ethics.<sup>198</sup> Smith is mentioned in this literature review, with constant reference to his high code of morals or ethics. Graham compares the World Development Report’s use of the word ‘corruption’ as standing in stark contrast to Smith’s “code of honor”<sup>199</sup>. Fish looks at Smith’s outlook on human motivations in economics, discussing Smith’s conclusions that self-interest is a predominant one<sup>200</sup>. Rassekh gives historical evidence of an “economic solution (specialization and exchange) for a moral problem (self-love)” being written about by

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<sup>195</sup> Huddleston (1991:24) Towards a World Economy

<sup>196</sup> Rassekh, Farhad (2001:38) The Baha’i Faith and the Market Economy

<sup>197</sup> Smith, Adam (1958:270-278) The Wealth of Nations, Volume 2, See these pages for Adam Smith’s views on organized religion at his time.

<sup>198</sup> Rassekh, Farhad (2001:33) The Baha’i Faith and the Market Economy

<sup>199</sup> Graham, Bryan (1997:4) The Baha’i Faith and Economics

<sup>200</sup> Fish, Mary (1997:8) Economic Prosperity: A Global Imperative

Smith and others of the same time period<sup>201</sup>, similar in ways to the issue being addressed here, where the same moral problem of selfishness or self-love is contrasted with a spiritual economic solution.

Rassekh points out that Smith's morals included "approval for actions performed out of self interest as long as they do not injure others",<sup>202</sup> however Smith could not see a market based entirely on benevolence.<sup>203</sup> Rassekh presents the Baha'i views in contrast with the beliefs of Adam Smith, suggesting that through the teachings of Baha'i, with true religious faith, benevolence can be a much more important factor in the market<sup>204</sup>.

### ***Reasons for Disparity***

Why does the current level of material wealth disparity exist? Mary Fish, writing from a secular economic perspective, realizes "Economists have been frustrated in deducing the universal root causes of poverty and the maldistribution of wealth"<sup>205</sup>. This suggests that there is room for debate, and that some of the authors addressing the issues from a spiritual outlook may have space for their opinions to be heard.

Several authors in the literature posit partially influencing factors that contribute to existing patterns. "The Baha'i writings assert that the reason there are very poor people is because there are very rich people."<sup>206</sup> This simple observation can be evaluated at a deeper level. From an economist's point of view, "The right to create wealth, the first

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<sup>201</sup> Rassekh, Farhad (2001:36) *The Baha'i Faith and the Market Economy*

<sup>202</sup> Rassekh, Farhad (2001:41) *The Baha'i Faith and the Market Economy*

<sup>203</sup> Rassekh, Farhad (2001:44-46) *The Baha'i Faith and the Market Economy*, See these pages for a discussion of Smith's beliefs on a market based on benevolence.

<sup>204</sup> Rassekh, Farhad (2001:47-49) *The Baha'i Faith and the Market Economy*, See these pages for a Baha'i interpretation of self-interest in the market place.

<sup>205</sup> Fish, Mary (1997:4) *Economic Prosperity: A Global Imperative*

<sup>206</sup> Hanson, Holley (1996:38) *The Process of Creating Social Justice*



principle of economic justice, is an aspect of 'freedom', and it has as a normal consequence a tendency to result in differences in levels of wealth, often including extreme riches for some, and extreme poverty for others."<sup>207</sup> Huddleston goes on to point out that inheritance laws contribute to disparity; "Continuation of extremes of wealth and poverty is as much a function of transfers of wealth between generations as it is of income during an individual's life-time."<sup>208</sup> These writings suggest that the structure of 'free' society as it is arranged and organized today is itself a contributing cause to the pattern of wealth distribution as it exists in that same society.

Mohtadi makes a direct causal connection between moral values and the economy as it stands today; "among the fundamental causes of economic injustice are such attitudes of selfishness, greed, competitiveness, and apathy."<sup>209</sup> Dahl, referring to attitudes and beliefs, proposes "prejudices and biases ... are themselves major reasons for the current inequalities and injustices in the world"<sup>210</sup>. Graham gives historical evidence of a long term trend towards current disparity, where ethics have degraded over time, and referring to consumerism, that "an erosion of the original motive force behind the Protestant ethic of restraint (has occurred)"<sup>211</sup>. Uncontrolled capitalism, or peoples' unrestrained pursuit of wealth, is undesirable in society's organization, if wealth equity is a goal. "The distribution of wealth should not be solely determined by the unfettered operation of markets"<sup>212</sup>. The controlling behavior suggested by the Baha'i Faith to be of

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<sup>207</sup> Huddleston, John (1996:138) Principles of Economic Justice, See this article for a full discussion of these three principles (summarized as freedom, equity and environment) of economic justice.

<sup>208</sup> Huddleston, John (1996:145) Principles of Economic Justice

<sup>209</sup> Mohtadi, Shahruz (1996:163) Economic Justice in the New World Order

<sup>210</sup> Dahl, Gregory C. (1984:155) A Baha'i Perspective on Economic and Social Development

<sup>211</sup> Graham, Bryan (1997) The Baha'i Faith and Economics, Graham refers to Daniel Bell's (1996) "The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism".

<sup>212</sup> Lerche, Charles O. (1999:86) Statescraft, Globalization and Ethics

influence in eliminating extremes of poverty and wealth is mostly at an individual level, influenced by moral teachings. Levels of moral values, thus, are alluded to or contended to directly contribute to the cause of maldistribution of material wealth.

Hassall connects lack of unity – global unity of all of humanity including all other religions and cultures being one of the primary teachings of the Baha'is – to disparity; “The question of poverty alleviation, and alleviation of gross disparities between rich and poor is linked directly to consciousness of the oneness of humanity.”<sup>213</sup>. Perhaps religious teachings of the past add to current contributing attitudes towards poverty and wealth distribution. Huddleston refers to poverty as historically being considered an inevitable condition of life. “The poor will always be with us”<sup>214</sup>. This adds to the possibility that the empirically measured effects of a new and unique religious teaching may have variance with those of older and perhaps dated teachings.

Badi'i<sup>215</sup>, writing on the Baha'i ideal of a spiritual solution to economic problems, points out his view of the reasons for wealth disparity. “It is irreligiousness and ignorance of the latest law for humankind and society which has led to the extremes of wealth and poverty...”. He adds to this argument suggesting the cause of wealth disparity to be due to “the negligence of humanity’s collective will”, paralleling Hatcher’s statement directed at economics, moral values and a ‘collective inner life’<sup>216</sup>. He also looks for government intervention, blaming disparity on current tax laws; “the principle cause of these difficulties (between labor and capital) lies in the laws of the present civilization, for they lead to a small number of individuals accumulating incomparable fortunes”. Badi'i notes that education, and the lack of it, contribute to disparity; “The root cause of many social and economic problems today is lack of proper education”. Badi'i makes an overall

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<sup>213</sup> Graham, Bryan (1997:107) *The Baha'i Faith and Economics*

<sup>214</sup> Huddleston, John (1996:139) *Principles of Economic Justice*

<sup>215</sup> Badi'i, Hooshmand (1997:49,57,80,116) *Spiritual Solution of Economic Problems*

<sup>216</sup> Hatcher, William S. (1974/5:14) *Economics and Moral Values*

argument of the Baha'i model of society being the solution, the spiritual solution, to the problems of disparity of wealth .

Thomas, in reference to American society, which is very similar to Canadian society in its socio-economic system, points out that though “The average American is far wealthier than most inhabitants of the world ... (yet) most feel no obligation to share their incomes with those less fortunate”<sup>217</sup>, and a reason proposed for this attitude is a lack of understanding of obligations<sup>218</sup>. Aslaksen points to a recent survey, that “indicates both poor and rich people to some extent are dissatisfied with their income levels, because they compare themselves with people higher up on the income scale”<sup>219</sup>. Thomas addresses a misperception of the causes of poverty, where laziness cannot be totally blamed, as “the working poor, often work harder than the rest of the population”<sup>220</sup>. This concurs locally with Gardiner’s observation about her own investigation; “This finding corresponds with other studies which indicate that a significant number of Albertans work but are still poor”<sup>221</sup>. It may be observed from the literature then, that lack of desire to share one’s possessions may have an impact on current levels of wealth disparity, while the attitude of ‘every man for himself’ has led to even hard workers being part of the poverty stricken. The poor may be adhering to their part of the bargain according to Baha’u’llah’s injunction to the poor to “strive to earn the means of livelihood”<sup>222</sup>, while in contrast, measured adherence to his instructions to the rich to be benevolent may be lacking, and are of interest here.

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<sup>217</sup> Thomas, June Manning (1984:96) Poverty and Wealth in America: A Baha'i Perspective

<sup>218</sup> Thomas, June Manning (1984:101) Poverty and Wealth in America: A Baha'i Perspective

<sup>219</sup> Aslaksen, Iulie (2002:119) Gender Constructions and the Possibility of a Generous Economic Actor

<sup>220</sup> Thomas, June Manning (1984:103) Poverty and Wealth in America: A Baha'i Perspective

<sup>221</sup> Gardiner, Helen et. al. (2002:60) 2002 Calgary Homelessness Study

<sup>222</sup> Dahl, Gregory C. (1984:167) A Baha'i Perspective on Economic and Social Development

### *Tax and Philanthropy*

The question of taxation versus voluntary donation brings to mind contrasting methods of collecting revenues central to a community. These two methods, even though they might achieve the same end, are held in different esteem by Baha'i writers, in both their spiritual value as well as their practical value, to either the individual or to society, as well as their pragmatic influence on the redistribution of material wealth. Progressive taxation is one method advocated by 'Abdu'l-Baha, one that is generally considered to be of lower spiritual importance. The voluntary sharing of material wealth is considered to be of high spiritual value to the individuals participating, as well as an indicator of society moving towards a more advanced or civilized status according to Baha'is. Hanson points this out in Baha'i teachings, quoting 'Abdu'l-Baha; "the Teachings of Baha'u'llah advocate voluntary sharing, and this is a greater thing than the (imposed) equalization of wealth"<sup>223</sup>. Huddleston agrees in context and argues "voluntary action in the social interest would be a stronger force than the instruction and law of government"<sup>224</sup>. Graham makes the overall proclamation of the effects voluntary giving would have on economics; "The economic implication of voluntary giving, as opposed to involuntary giving (ie. taxation) are profound"<sup>225</sup>. Alluding to the possibility of an improvement to a system of income tax being that of a taxation of overall wealth<sup>226</sup>, Thomas also denotes the benefits of it being voluntary; "It would be more appropriate to tax real wealth, but it would be even more laudable if the well to do were to voluntarily donate ..."<sup>227</sup>. Authors

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<sup>223</sup> Hanson, Holley (1996:38) *The Process of Creating Social Justice*

<sup>224</sup> Huddleston, John (1984:72) *Some Thoughts on the Economy of a World Commonwealth*

<sup>225</sup> Graham, Bryan (1997:5) *The Baha'i Faith and Economics*

<sup>226</sup> Mohtadi, Shahruz (1996:160) *Economic Justice in the New World Order*, Mohtadi interprets 'Abdu'l-Baha to mean the Baha'i approach would be one of wealth taxation rather than income tax.

<sup>227</sup> Thomas, June Manning (1984:96) *Poverty and Wealth in America: A Baha'i Perspective*

certainly emphasize benefits of the ideal of an attitude of benevolence in comparison with that of forced or imposed laws in motivating - or enforcing - the sharing of wealth.

However, Baha'i sources also see the need for taxation to be used to redistribute wealth. Hatcher prophesizes "Through taxation and similar means, the higher paid individual will never be allowed to amass excessive riches (in the Baha'i society of the future)"<sup>228</sup>, suggesting a need even within the Baha'i community for enforced rules of redistribution. This view agrees with Hassall's quote of the BIC, where "Moderation should, therefore, be established by means of laws and regulations that would limit personal wealth"<sup>229</sup>. Hedley contends "the principle of service to humanity is perhaps a laudable one but cannot be legislated"<sup>230</sup>, arguing that acts of benevolence as opposed to forced taxation are motivated by different sources. Huddleston speculates on a philanthropic taxpayer where "the rich would take pride in paying large taxes"<sup>231</sup>. Although benevolence is viewed as a desirable aspiration for society to develop, enforced taxation is still seen as necessary by the Baha'is.

### ***Motivations for Benevolence – Can there be a spiritual one?***

What motivates people to be benevolent? This is certainly a broad topic beyond the scope of this study to cover entirely. It is the possibility of there being evidence of a spiritual motivation, the basis of the Baha'i view that there is a spiritual solution to economic problems, that I feel justifies this section. Among the many reasons suggested, some views reviewed here speak to the possibility of a spiritually or ethically influenced motive.

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<sup>228</sup> Hatcher, William S. (1974-75:26) Economics and Moral Values

<sup>229</sup> Hassall, Graham (2001:107) Rights to Human and Social Development, Hassall quotes a BIC (Aug, 1994) "Human Rights and Extreme Poverty" statement to a United Nations sub-commission.

<sup>230</sup> Hedley, Darren (2001:140) The Right to Development Assistance

<sup>231</sup> Huddleston, John (1998:443) The Search for a Just Society

Looking at current reasons for philanthropy, Huddleston speculates, although there may be other reasons, “many philanthropists are inspired by motives of a more noble character”. He adds; “It is not unreasonable to expect that such practices would increase dramatically in a society which has been educated to a more profound view than generally exists today of the meaning and purpose of life”<sup>232</sup>. Fish discusses motivators in current economic models where such figures as a “self-interested being”, Smith’s “economic man”, a “rational person” are described; she then goes on to question what these terms can be replaced by. She suggests that “Religion provides an understanding of human motivation”<sup>233</sup>, and that the spiritual part of human nature may possibly be involved. Motivations of a spiritual nature, sought to be evaluated here in a Baha’i context, may have some influence on benevolence and philanthropy.

The introduction to one compilation of Baha’i writings focused on justice, alludes to the Baha’i view itself being a source of motivation; “... a Baha’i view and approach can contribute toward solutions of those social problems”<sup>234</sup>. Hedley, in a recent case study of a development project, suggests that people volunteer for multiple reasons. “The individual who volunteers typically does so only after weighing alternatives ... voluntary action is complex and many-faceted ... concern for others, while not always purely altruistic, remains important ... the motivation to give and volunteer is shaped and constrained by broader social realities”<sup>235</sup>. These studies leave room open for a group of Baha’is, educated with ethics, spiritual principles and virtues as being important in their list of options to consider when deciding to volunteer, donate or otherwise be involved with the well-being of others in mind, to make decisions based on their education that may be beneficial to society, as well as being measurable.

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<sup>232</sup> Huddleston, John (1998:443) *The Search for a Just Society*

<sup>233</sup> Fish, Mary (1997:13) *Economic Prosperity: A Global Imperative*

<sup>234</sup> Lerche, Charles O. (1996b:ix) *Toward the Most Great Justice*

<sup>235</sup> Hedley, Darren (2001:132-133) *The Right to Development Assistance*

One of Hanson's ideas of how redistribution can occur is through close association between people living at varying socio-economic levels<sup>236</sup>. Sabetan, in conjunction with the argument that lack of unity contributes to disparity, also suggests that the simple "concept of unity ... may well present a pragmatic shift in economic thinking"<sup>237</sup>; where it may become clear to the people of this planet that they all do share it with each other, and are mutually responsible for each other. Aslaksen alludes to this being a truth also; "Generosity can also come out of feeling a sense of connection with others. To see someone's real needs ..."<sup>238</sup>. Close association of all people and the applied concept of unity may motivate people towards sharing.

Another essential idea is that if people believe that the wealth we have attained came to us from God, they might be more inclined to give part of it back through the Baha'i funds or other charitable donations that benefit humanity. Though the focus of this study is on generosity or benevolence, the Baha'i system provides a new system of taxation or obligatory payment – the huququ'llah (discussed further below) - that is at present embryonic, to embryonic to be considered as an important numerical consideration in this survey. These stated ideal motivations may be supported by the results of an NSGVP study, where mostly non-Baha'i religion is discussed<sup>239</sup> as being of positive influence on benevolent behavior. Motivations may have also been influenced by selflessness; where for "most Albertans' charitable giving ... was motivated by some sort of altruism."<sup>240</sup> A deity-consciousness, perhaps resulting in a benevolent attitude, may be potential contributing factors of motivation for benevolent behavior.

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<sup>236</sup> Hanson, Holley (1996:35,49) *The Process of Creating Social Justice*

<sup>237</sup> Sabetan, Farhad (1997:56) *An Exploration into the Political Economy of Global Prosperity*

<sup>238</sup> Aslaksen, Iulie (2002:128) *Gender Constructions and the Possibility of a Generous Economic Actor*

<sup>239</sup> Greenberg, Liane (2001:11-12,22-23) *Giving and Volunteering in Alberta*, This is a discussion of the role of religion on donations and volunteering in Alberta.

<sup>240</sup> Greenberg, Liane (2001:15) *Giving and Volunteering in Alberta*

Libo suggests “the establishment of a strong religious belief ... is the most reliable guarantee of a proper moral view and the surest foundation for establishing justice”<sup>241</sup>; presenting the basis of an argument that religious belief can be the motivating factor for a person operating in the economic market. Huddleston concurs, presenting “humanity’s religious experience ... as the main source for the three basic principles of economic justice”<sup>242</sup>. Put in another fashion, Badi’i suggests, “there can be individuals who as a result of the altruistic education imparted by religion, may be willing to produce more and consume less”<sup>243</sup>. Nicholson sees the previously discussed proposition of a new and unique religion being of motivating influence; “the Baha’i Faith, in a manner not paralleled in other contemporary religious movements, has a particular perspective to offer”<sup>244</sup>. This thesis seeks to see how this different religious emphasis looks “on the ground”, so to speak. With many complex influences expected to be involved in acts of benevolence, the Baha’i belief system will be reviewed for its potential influence on donating and volunteering.

### ***Baha’i Central Figures as Models***

*“Thou dost wish for gold and I desire thy freedom from it”*<sup>245</sup>

*“Wealth is praiseworthy ... if it be expended for philanthropic purposes”*<sup>246</sup>

It is proposed that the lifestyles of the charismatic leaders and originators of the Baha’i Faith would be of influence by example on adherents to the religion they

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<sup>241</sup> Libo, Sun (1996:69) *Morality, Law and Religion: A Comparison of Three Concepts of Justice*

<sup>242</sup> Huddleston, John (1996:142) *Principles of Economic Justice*, See this article for a full discussion of these three principles (summarized as freedom, equity and environment) of economic justice.

<sup>243</sup> Badi’i, Hooshmand (1997:36) *Spiritual Solution of Economic Problems*

<sup>244</sup> Nicholson, Graham (1996:178) *Toward a Global Ethic*

<sup>245</sup> Badi’i, Hooshmand (1997:64) *Spiritual Solution of Economic Problems*, Badi’i quotes Baha’u’llah.

<sup>246</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Baha (1990) *The Secret of Divine Civilization*



originated. Both Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha can be viewed as examples of the Baha'i ideal of how to interact with the market and economy on a personal level. Benevolence can be shown to have been a part of their living lifestyles as central figures of this religion.

Thomas speaks of the life of Baha'u'llah, pointing out that though born into a wealthy family, he “shunned the sheltered life of the wealthy”<sup>247</sup> and refers to the time when Baha'u'llah spent two years in Kurdistan, as a sample time when he chose poverty. The life of the primary contributor to the Baha'i teachings, I suggest to be an example to current Baha'i communities, and to have potential to be of influence on their behavior.

The son of Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha, regularly visited the homes of the poor, according to Thomas<sup>248</sup>, giving at times when He was sacrificing his own comfort in doing so, giving in the face of outright hatred and giving the potential frills of his daughter's wedding to the poor instead. Thomas reveals that on His visit to North America, 'Abdu'l-Baha, pressed a silver coin into the hand of four or five hundred men in the Bowery area of New York and gave his own trousers to a destitute man in the streets of Dublin, New Hampshire. This other central figure of the Baha'i Faith, with full historical accounts available, has led by living example, a lifestyle that exemplifies the ideals of detachment from material wealth and benevolence at a personal level.

The central figures of the Baha'i Faith did not lead only by example. They also gave many clear instructions and teachings to those who choose to follow them and these instructions are now discussed.

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<sup>247</sup> Thomas, June Manning (1984:106) Poverty and Wealth in America: A Baha'i Perspective

<sup>248</sup> Thomas, June Manning (1984:107-109) Poverty and Wealth in America: A Baha'i Perspective

### ***Baha'i Teachings on Generosity***

*“To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine”<sup>249</sup>; “They who are possessed of riches, however, must have the utmost regard for the poor ... Tell the rich of the midnight sighing of the poor”<sup>250</sup>; “Blessed is the rich man whom earthly possessions have been powerless to hinder from turning unto God”<sup>251</sup>; “Enrich the poor ... This is the work of a true Baha'i, and this is what is expected of him”<sup>252</sup>*

The central figures are also the teachers of all adherents to the Baha'i Faith. They have several things to say about generosity itself, as well as some teachings oriented towards the rich in particular. The literature is rife with reference to statements about virtues and certainly, *generosity*<sup>253</sup> is often included. Huddleston, interestingly, summarizes the basic thesis of this study; “Generosity contributes to the goal of a just distribution of resources and the abolition of extremes of wealth and poverty.”<sup>254</sup>. Hanson suggests the differences between society with and without virtues including generosity; “The essential place of love, *generosity* and self-sacrifice in creating social justice becomes more apparent when we consider attempts to redistribute wealth without these qualities”<sup>255</sup> alluding to the benefits of such ethical virtues. Hanson also quotes ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s writing directed at those who have wealth, where “the rich should extend

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<sup>249</sup> Badi’i, Hooshmand (1997:64) *Spiritual Solution of Economic Problems*, Badi’i quotes Baha’u’llah.

<sup>250</sup> Dahl, Gregory C. (1984:167) *A Baha'i Perspective on Economic and Social Development*, Dahl quotes Baha’u’llah.

<sup>251</sup> *The Calgary Candle* (2002:1) A Calgary Baha'i Publication, This is referring to Huququ’llah.

<sup>252</sup> *Alberta Action Newsletter* (2002:1) An Alberta Baha'i publication

<sup>253</sup> Rassekh, Farhad (2001:35) *The Baha’i Faith and the Market Economy*; Dahl, Gregory C. (1984:160) *A Baha'i Perspective on Economic and Social Development*; Graham, Bryan (1997:11) *The Baha’i Faith and Economics*

<sup>254</sup> Huddleston, John (1998:417) *The Search for a Just Society*

<sup>255</sup> Hanson, Holley (1996:40) *The Process of Creating Social Justice*, Italics are mine.

assistance to the poor”<sup>256</sup>. She points out the ideal of how “society might change if people who have social and economic privilege acknowledged that the way they live their lives could be related to the elimination of poverty”<sup>257</sup> suggesting education or awareness as having potential influence on behavior. Huddleston also presents the specific Baha'i teaching; “the encouragement of the rich in particular to voluntarily give to the communal treasury for the benefit of all”<sup>258</sup>, agreeing with Hanson’s contention that the wealthy are specifically responsible for wealth distribution.

Mohtadi adds some logical argumentation to the discussion of the wealthy being benevolent. “A dollar in the hand of a rich person should, all things considered, be worth less than the dollar in the hand of a poor person ... Through income redistribution, the rich sacrifice a little and the poor gain a lot”. He goes on to discuss, how along with wealth taxes and inheritance laws, prescribed benevolence from the Baha'i writings teach “that wealthy men each year give a certain part of their fortune for the maintenance of the poor”.<sup>259</sup> This perspective shows how it makes practical sense, if it is possible to be detached from self-motivated drives, to redistribute material wealth.

From a more esoteric point of view, Badi’i quotes Baha’u’llah’s warning; “wealth is a mighty barrier between the seeker and his desire”<sup>260</sup>, showing the problematic spiritual situation of a wealthy person in his or her attempt to approach the Creator. A writing of ‘Abdu’l-Baha agrees; “If ... a few have inordinate riches while the rest are

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<sup>256</sup> Hanson, Holley (1996:39) *The Process of Creating Social Justice*

<sup>257</sup> Hanson, Holley (1996:40) *The Process of Creating Social Justice*

<sup>258</sup> Huddleston, John (1998:442) *The Search for a Just Society*

<sup>259</sup> Mohtadi, Shahruz (1996:159) *Economic Justice in the New World Order*, Mohtadi quotes ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 277. He (‘Abdu’l-Baha) also states that, ‘The highest righteousness of all is for blessed souls to take hold of the hands of the helpless and deliver them out of ... poverty, and with pure motives ... to devote themselves to the services of the masses, forgetting their own worldly advantage ...’

<sup>260</sup> Badi’i, Hooshmand (1997:64) *Spiritual Solution of Economic Problems*

impoverished, and no fruit or benefit accrues from that wealth, then it is only a liability to its possessor”<sup>261</sup>. These teachings bluntly point out the problem wealthy people have from a spiritual viewpoint.

‘Abdu’l-Baha predicts “The time will come in the near future when humanity will be so much more sensitive than at present that the man of great wealth will not enjoy his luxury in comparison with the deplorable poverty about him”<sup>262</sup>. He also suggests, according to Thomas<sup>263</sup>, that one way for a wealthy man to find salvation is through giving to the poor on an annual basis. Thomas suggests this type of person can be referred to as a spiritually mature person, one who realizes the obligations and limitations of being materially wealthy.<sup>264</sup> She points out the fallacy in society’s thinking where “society adores wealth, with no understanding of the spiritual handicaps that cripple the wealthy”<sup>265</sup>. With human maturity a possibility, and with that maturity the realization that material wealth involves personal responsibility to help distribute it, a religiously influenced segment of society may prove to be different.

An interesting popular book is now available to the Baha'i community, addressing the wisdom of financial investment strategies with a Baha'i touch. One review sees its advice to be; “Baha'i writings ... foretell that extremes of wealth and poverty will be eventually eliminated ... that we should strive to become wealthy so that we will be able to contribute to the common weal”<sup>266</sup>. The fact that this book exists suggests the Baha'i economics system is forming. In it, the basic Baha'i-approved personal financial philosophy is described; “Wealth is highly praised by the central authorities of the Faith

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<sup>261</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Baha (1990:25) *The Secret of Divine Civilization*

<sup>262</sup> Badi’i, Hooshmand (1997:145) *Spiritual Solution of Economic Problems*, Badi’i quotes ‘Abdu’l-Baha.

<sup>263</sup> Thomas, June Manning (1984:95) *Poverty and Wealth in America: A Baha'i Perspective*

<sup>264</sup> Thomas, June Manning (1984:95) *Poverty and Wealth in America: A Baha'i Perspective*

<sup>265</sup> Thomas, June Manning (1984:96) *Poverty and Wealth in America: A Baha'i Perspective*

<sup>266</sup> Muttart, M. E. (1995:100) *Created Rich* book review

when it is acquired legitimately and used correctly. In fact, the acquisition of wealth by one's own efforts and hard work is viewed by Baha'u'llah as a necessity for those who have achieved spiritual maturity.<sup>267</sup> Thus, the idea that living in poverty is a morally superior status is not promoted by Baha'is, but rather "where poverty is mentioned (in the Baha'i teachings) in a positive sense, it is only used as a metaphor to describe detachment from the material world, not as a favorable human condition in a literal sense."<sup>268</sup> The average Baha'i is thus encouraged to become materially wealthy, while keeping in mind the ideals of benevolence. One interviewed person in this study pointed out the book as a source of reference. In a current sample model of the community, with these teachings available, it will be interesting to see what measurable influence they may be having.

### ***The Spiritual Purpose***

"The essence of wealth is love for Me"<sup>269</sup>

With a spiritual purpose to life being recognized, the ideals of the Baha'i Faith may be attainable. Graham, in a survey of Baha'i publications oriented towards economics, concludes: "The main Baha'i teaching on economics is that man's material activities must be imbued with a sense of spiritual purpose"<sup>270</sup>, suggesting the virtue of generosity may be at play in a Baha'i economy. Huddleston, speaking to the future Baha'i economy, states "the underlying force driving the economy will be spiritual or, in secular terms, ethical"<sup>271</sup>, showing moral values to be of importance. There is even a redefinition

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<sup>267</sup> Barker, Patrick (1995:9) *Created Rich: How Spiritual Attitudes and Material Means Work Together to Achieve Prosperity*

<sup>268</sup> Barker, Patrick (1995:9) *Created Rich: How Spiritual Attitudes and Material Means Work Together to Achieve Prosperity*

<sup>269</sup> Thomas, June Manning (1984:94) *Poverty and Wealth in America*, Thomas quotes Baha'u'llah.

<sup>270</sup> Graham, Bryan (1997:14) *The Baha'i Faith and Economics*

<sup>271</sup> Huddleston (1991:23) *Towards a World Economy*

of the meaning of wealth, according to Baha'i writings, where true wealth is presented as the acquisition of spiritual qualities<sup>272</sup>. Calkins, who shows that part of the Baha'i ideal model involves “detachment from income and consumption drives”, describes an expose of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s economic analogy of a global economy, represented by a Baha’i Village Granary<sup>273</sup>, where common funds for the good of the community are important. These teachings suggest an alternate view of what constitutes wealth and an ideal which would likely result in an attitude that would downplay the importance of material possessions, and have a higher propensity for benevolence.

Is it possible that wealth can be a measure of satisfaction with life and happiness, a status many people seem interested in. With happiness in mind, Shams quotes a tablet written by ‘Abdu’l-Baha giving direction to the wealthy: “It is commanded as regards wealth that the rich among the people, and the aristocrats should, by their own free will and for the sake of their own happiness, concern themselves with and care for the poor”<sup>274</sup>. Though I find it difficult to classify happiness, or inner peace and contentment, as a spiritual virtue – it may be the result of acquiring other spiritual virtues.

Dahl points out a basic similarity in both the Baha'i Faith and Christianity regarding material wealth; “Baha’u’llah, like Christ before Him, has clearly indicated that wealth is usually an obstacle to spiritual advancement”<sup>275</sup>, a teaching that occurs with agreement in both faiths. A difference between Christianity and Baha’i, however, follows the progressive revelation teaching of the Baha'i Faith discussed in Chapter 1. Addressing wealth equity historically, “it was ... assumed – again with full concurrence of organized religion – that poverty was an enduring and inescapable feature of social

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<sup>272</sup> Badi’i, Hooshmand (1997:160) *Spiritual Solution of Economic Problems*; Thomas, June Manning (1984:94) *Poverty and Wealth in America: A Baha'i Perspective*

<sup>273</sup> Calkins, Peter and Benoit, Girard (1998:12) *The Baha'i Village Granary*

<sup>274</sup> Shams, Badi (1998:27) *A Baha'i Perspective on Economics of the Future*

<sup>275</sup> Dahl, Gregory C. (1984:160) *A Baha'i Perspective on Economic and Social Development*

order”<sup>276</sup>. Baha'i teachings clearly disagree with this older religious tradition, claiming to have a method that will eliminate extremes of poverty. Badi'i<sup>277</sup> suggests an alternate maxim to the religious tradition of “love thy neighbor as thyself”, changing it to “love thy neighbor more than thyself” suggesting an improved benevolence in Baha'i economic teachings as compared with earlier religions. Rassekh explains Shoghi Effendi's statement ‘the economic solution is divine in nature’ to mean “that religion alone can ... bring in man's nature such a fundamental change as to enable him to adjust the economic forces ...”<sup>278</sup>. So, though religions of the past may have lost influence in achieving their very similar ideals, this new religion is of interest in an empirical measure of the influence of its teachings.

It is pointed out clearly; “A society composed of individuals who truly strive for selflessness ... is a society which (will) eliminate extremes of poverty and wealth”<sup>279</sup>. The idea that individuals acting in accordance with a common realization or belief about generosity is also presented as a possibility by Aslaksen; “a potential is created for personal transformation that may lead to social transformation”<sup>280</sup>. A measure of these individuals and their activities is of interest here, in an evaluation of Baha'i behavior and its possible connection to Baha'i teachings.

From the perspective of international development, the focus of a study on science, religion and development concludes the missing link in the development model to be the spiritual perspective. “The great majority of the world's peoples do not view themselves simply as material beings ... now there is a perception that spirituality is the

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<sup>276</sup> Universal House of Justice (2001) *Who is Writing the Future?*, This is stated in this historical overview of the twentieth century.

<sup>277</sup> Badi'i, Hooshmand (1997:166) *Spiritual Solution of Economic Problems*

<sup>278</sup> Rassekh, Farhad (2001:57) *The Baha'i Faith and the Market Economy*

<sup>279</sup> Thomas, June Manning (1984:110) *Poverty and Wealth in America: A Baha'i Perspective*

<sup>280</sup> Aslaksen, Iulie (2002:129) *Gender Constructions and the Possibility of a Generous Economic Actor*

(missing) link”<sup>281</sup>. This meeting of experts reaches conclusions similar to the teachings of the Baha’i Faith about material gains and development, contributing to the evidence that the spiritual solution may have value.

The Baha’i Faith teaches that extremes of poverty and wealth can be eliminated through adherence to its spiritual as well as material principles. “A change in consciousness”<sup>282</sup> or a spiritual enlightenment is required in the implementation of the Baha’i principles, one of which regards “the poor as a divine trust”<sup>283</sup>. Shoghi Effendi’s vision of the future Golden Age (contained in a letter dated March 1936) “includes the disappearance or abolition of ... both destitution and gross accumulation of ownership” according to Smith<sup>284</sup>.

How close has the world come to this vision? Huddleston, in his inquiry into defining a just society, asks questions of the Baha’i Faith at its current stage of development. He wonders, “Are Baha’is fully committed to the vision of their Faith? Are they ready to make the necessary sacrifices? ... What evidence is there that the Baha’is have in fact started to put their teachings into practice?”<sup>285</sup>. Though the basic principle of economic change was presented several decades ago, specifics of the creation of a new economic order may be yet to be determined. Dahl, in a practical sense, does fill this in with a synopsis of the values associated with ‘love for Me’ (see epigraph above); “Baha’i objectives include self-fulfillment through service to humanity, the maintenance of moderation and balance (as, for example, between the material and spiritual rewards of life), the satisfaction of doing one’s best and producing the highest quality of work, and

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<sup>281</sup> Baha’i International Community (2000b:8-9) Colloquium

<sup>282</sup> Smith, Peter (1987:77) *The Babi and Baha’i Religions*

<sup>283</sup> Smith, Peter (1987:77) *The Babi and Baha’i Religions*

<sup>284</sup> Smith, Peter (1987:142) *The Babi and Baha’i Religions*

<sup>285</sup> Huddleston, John (1998:450) *The Search for a Just Society*



the reward of making a positive, lasting contribution to society.”<sup>286</sup>. He continues, emphasizing the “spiritual rewards of work as service to others”<sup>287</sup>, concurring with Graham’s statement: “Work becomes a spiritual act, and thereby imbued with virtue”<sup>288</sup>. This development of spiritual principles attached to the daily work of people of the Baha’i Faith, suggests a practical real world model of society, where a source of revenue is available through a strong work ethic and a source of benevolence is available through a spiritual purpose.

Warburg, one of the few writers on Baha’i religion who is not personally a Baha’i, studies the nature of Baha’i identity; “To give money is something every Baha’i does or should do, otherwise they cannot consider themselves Baha’is”<sup>289</sup>. Huququ’llah is one of the ways of contributing to the Baha’i Faith. This payment, meaning the “Right of God”, is a way of acknowledging that God the creator is the originator of all wealth, and specifically requires a payment of 19% of a believer’s surplus wealth. The contribution constitutes a religious obligation, actually a voluntary taxation system – as opposed to the Baha’i funds which are acts of sacrifice – and one Baha’i, in discussion, revealed an opinion that payment of huququ’llah is a spiritually motivated behavior. I have discovered, through conversations with Baha’is in Alberta, that it is at the individual’s discretion to decide what is surplus, and therefore huququ’llah is a payment made where the amount paid is entirely at the individual’s discretion. This fund is spent on anything the UHJ (Universal House of Justice) decides. Both Baha’u’llah and ‘Abdu’l-Baha have

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<sup>286</sup> Dahl, Gregory C. (1991:6) *Evolving toward a Baha’i Economic System*

<sup>287</sup> Dahl, Gregory C. (1991:8) *Evolving toward a Baha’i Economic System*

<sup>288</sup> Graham, Bryan (1997:3) *The Baha’i Faith and Economics*

<sup>289</sup> Warburg, Margrit (1993:29) *Economic Rituals*

described it as one way of meeting the needs of the poor and eliminating poverty.<sup>290</sup> It is also considered by believers to contribute to the prosperity of the giver. Warburg, points out “From the 1890’s the Iranian Baha’is were allowed to pay huququ’llah, but no other Baha’is were considered spiritually mature enough ... not until 1984 ... the system is now gradually being implemented worldwide”<sup>291</sup>. Smith makes a statement agreeing with Warburg; “Baha’is of Middle Eastern origin are also charged with more detailed spiritual obligations ... the payment of huququ’llah (the Right of God), an exaction of 19 percent on capital gains”<sup>292</sup>, making the huququ’llah comparable to a capital gain. Payment of the Right of God suggests a higher level of maturity and spiritual advancement, but is not likely to have an impact on the Alberta community through direct payments to the poor. These payments are directed to the UHJ which uses them principally for social and economic development projects in developing countries.

It is interesting to note two parallel lines of thought evident in Baha’i literature, the future and the present. Many speculations made on the *future* society based on Baha’i principles, imply the model of society is yet to be developed. Empirical evaluations of the current stage of development of the economy are few in published form, but as noted earlier, many authors suggest an interest in the current state of Baha’i societal development. For example, Hanson, in her publication, paints a portrait of the Baha’i world as having very few places globally where even a minority of society’s members are trying to implement the laws of Baha’u’llah<sup>293</sup>, a view that is challenged here with an

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<sup>290</sup> Hanson, Holly (1996:37) *The Process of Creating Social Justice*; Hanson describes the ideology taught by the Baha’i founders of Huququ’llah as well as suggesting its future potential for redistributing wealth globally.

<sup>291</sup> Warburg, Margrit (1993:29) *Economic Rituals*, Correction is made here to Warburg’s date of 1984, which should actually read 1992.

<sup>292</sup> Smith, Peter (1987:140) *The Babi and Baha’i Religions*

<sup>293</sup> Hanson, Holley (1996:30) *The Process of Creating Social Justice*

empirical study of a segment of the dispersed community. It is the Baha'i model, at its current stage of development, empirically considered here, that is sought to be measured for its potential future value.

## Chapter 4 – The 2002 Alberta Baha'i Survey

A this point, we will shift from the theoretical and theological to the empirical. Having looked at Baha'i thought on two social justice issues, we now look at a category of actual Baha'is, living their lives in the midst of contemporary society, and we ask how these moral concepts of Baha'i theology play out in the lives of ordinary people.

### *Rationale*

With the goal of studying Baha'i morals in action, it was reasoned that some standard anthropological and sociological research methods would best be utilized. These included being active as a participant observer, semi-structured interviews with representative Baha'i households, and a questionnaire survey administered to all Baha'is in Alberta with available contact information. This partially follows McMullen's method<sup>294</sup> where he also used three of these methods – participant observation, interviews and a questionnaire survey, along with archival research. It seemed logical to follow established methods with a proven track record of use as well as methods used in previous studies, for reasons of comparability. McMullen points out the benefits of combining a variety of methodologies, such as the four methods that were part of his study, together in one study.

With the idea of addressing the thesis question being proposed here, namely whether spiritually taught beliefs can be shown to affect the behavior of members of society, it was proposed that the survey questionnaire of Baha'is, compared to Statistics Canada data for comparable groups, would provide sufficient data to yield an answer to the question.

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<sup>294</sup> McMullen, Michael (2000:xii) *The Baha'i: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity*

### ***Participant Observation***

A critical reader might well ask whether there are any problems of objectivity given the involvement of the observer as an active participant within the community being observed and studied. Jacobs partially looks at some of these issues, and, referring to the participant observer, summarizes: “He must be able to understand his own impact upon the social situation he studies and what influences other participants and the situation have upon him.”<sup>295</sup> My answer is that, ultimately, objectivity is an ideal, and all human thought is socially situated. For me, participant observation was a means of extending my reach into the Baha’i community and of meeting and interacting with many more individuals than I normally would have, and I have no doubt that it enhanced both the quality and richness of my data. Because I interacted with a number of individuals, I have a greater awareness of the variability of the community, and an enhanced sense of how theological doctrine and personal circumstance conjoin to shape peoples’ sense of their faith.

I do not personally feel that the result was any different that if I had been a sympathetic outsider who entered the community to do the same research. However, it is ultimately the reader who must decide whether my project of research within my own faith community has hampered my objectivity.

Participant observation allowed involvement in the community, the opportunity to live as a Baha’i, and to interact with other Baha’is in community events, during which observations of Baha’i beliefs and resultant behaviors were possible. I had already become a member of the Baha’i community in the early months of 1999 through contact with Baha’is in Calgary, and so my academic study is a study of my own community. Events I attended or in which I was involved included Nineteen-Day feasts - both local and community (Calgary is divided into sectors, each of which has a local feast gathering

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<sup>295</sup> Jacobs, Glenn (1970:7) *The Participant Observer*

for two Baha'i months in a row, and on the third month, a citywide community feast), study circles (I attended training courses allowing me to facilitate a study circle for several months), holy day celebrations, pioneering<sup>296</sup> both locally and internationally (I pioneered locally to Okotoks, a town just south of Calgary, referred to as homefront pioneering as well as to the Cook Islands in the South Pacific for several months), visits to the Baha'is of Fiji, Samoa and Tonga also in the South Pacific, training courses at the Sylvan Lake Alberta Baha'i Center and speaker presentations of visiting Baha'is from other localities.

The visits to Baha'i communities of other countries were helpful in giving a broad perspective on the issues studied and I at one point considered conducting my study in Samoa or Tonga. The Baha'i communities of the South Pacific islands make up some of the highest percentages of national populations adhering to the faith<sup>297</sup>, but data for comparison is difficult to find (for example, a census from Tonga records age, gender, and little more) and the adherents are relatively recent in their introduction to the religion. Alberta, in comparison, has many multi-generational Baha'is as part of its community as well as having data for comparison gathered by Statistics Canada including the NSGVP 1997 and NSGVP 2000.

Through participation as an observer in the Alberta Baha'i community, many benefits were forthcoming. From a sociological point of view, there are precedents of improved research quality through this method; McMullen refers several sources to his statement: "There is in the sociology of religion a precedent of quality research by 'insider' researchers"<sup>298</sup>. Even though I was already an "insider", the ethnographic

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<sup>296</sup> Pioneering is the voluntary relocating of Baha'is, for the general purpose of spreading the faith through personal participation in the communities of all towns, cities and regions of the globe.

<sup>297</sup> Hassall, Graham (1996:4) *The Baha'i Faith in the Asia Pacific: issues and prospects*

<sup>298</sup> McMullen, Michael (2000:xii) *The Baha'i: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity*

framework helped me to think much more systematically about my research questions in the field.

### *Interviews*

As a member of the Calgary Baha'i community, as well as having previously been a member of the Okotoks Baha'i community, I was able to meet other Baha'is, making contact with them for possible interviews. Through personal interaction with other Baha'is at community events such as house parties and feasts, I was able to develop a series of community norms and to meet people who, knowing that I was conducting a study, expressed a willingness to be interviewed. It was reasoned that the household should be the basic unit of study, evaluation and analysis, and thus the desire for interviews with all members of a household being present was the ideal. The household is the same unit of evaluation used for income in the questionnaire survey. As well, the household unit also concurs with the unit used in the NSGVP surveys, keeping in mind that many questions are answered at an individual level and do not reflect the entire household.

The interview format was semi-structured, with initial basic demographic questions being asked first, and then several open ended questions being posed. My procedure was to listen to responses from any household member, and to encourage complete coverage of information available by soliciting comments from each household member. The interviews lasted about one hour, depending on how much information was forthcoming.

In an attempt to capture something of the diversity of the province of Alberta, eight interviews were carried out in the city of Calgary, two in the town of High River (one hour south of Calgary), one in the town of Strathmore (half an hour east of Calgary) and two in the small city of Cochrane (half an hour west of Calgary). Unfortunately, neither Baha'is from remote rural regions nor those of native ethnicity were able to be

included in the group interviewed. Several of the interviewees were members of the LSA's (Local Spiritual Assemblies) of their communities.

The purpose of the interviews was to elicit the personal beliefs about disparity of wealth and gender equality of the interviewees in their own words, and to gain a sense of what they understood to be the authority for their beliefs. One of the primary objectives of interviewing Baha'is was to develop a set of relevant questions for a questionnaire that could be administered to a wider sample of Alberta Baha'is. With this in mind, several interview questions were tested out in initial interviews, with the same standard questions being presented in varying formats. This helped to produce a standard demographic and observational overview of the household (see Appendix A) as well as a standard question set for each household (see Appendix B). This development process proved very helpful in defining questions to be presented through the questionnaire process, and from it I gained considerable insight into the subtleties of thinking and talking about wealth and gender equality.

### ***Questionnaire***

According to Russell H. Bernard, "The most common form of structured interviewing is the questionnaire"<sup>299</sup>. And so, following the semi-structured interviews, questionnaires were used to perform structured interviews with the broader Baha'i community. Bernard also says, "quality of information obtained from a questionnaire is directly proportional to the quality of ... the question construction process ... garbage in is garbage out"<sup>300</sup>. High quality data were desired and keeping in mind my limited experience with writing questionnaires, I had to read up on the topic of survey design.

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<sup>299</sup> Bernard, Russell H. (1995:237) *Research Methods in Anthropology*

<sup>300</sup> Peterson, Robert A. (2000) *Constructing Effective Questionnaires*



Converse states: "Use the experience of master question writers"<sup>301</sup>. With this idea in mind, questionnaires written by Statistics Canada for the 1996 Census of Canada, the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (NSGVP) as well as McMullen's questionnaire were reviewed. A copy of the NSGVP survey questionnaire was obtained from the internet and reference was made to McMullen's questionnaire included in his publication. Questions that could be asked of the Baha'i community were replicated from a combination of these questionnaires with the idea of using questions written by experts in the field. Several versions of questionnaires were written, and a draft copy was completed.

One aim of the survey questionnaire design was for answers to questions to be comparable with the results of the other surveys, especially that of the NSGVP. Comparable data would become available to measure differences between the Baha'i community in this survey, and the essentially non-Baha'i community represented in a survey such as the 1997 NSGVP for Alberta, 2000 NSGVP for Canada as well as McMullen's 1994 Baha'i survey in Atlanta. Of course the overall Alberta NSGVP results may have included some Baha'is as well, but their proportional representation in the population is so small that this fact can be essentially ignored.

Bernard<sup>302</sup> suggests a pretest of any questionnaire and this was carried out for this survey. Five Baha'is were approached, as a participant observer, for their possible interest in filling out the questionnaire on a trial basis. The survey was administered to each of these five as an email attachment with a request for feedback on difficulties in understanding the questions. I was also interested in evaluating the viability of the email alternative method to the postal system. One questionnaire was received in reply, with most questions being answered at this pretest stage. Another non-Baha'i friend also

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<sup>301</sup> Converse, Jean M. (1986) *Survey Questions: Handcrafting the Standardized Questionnaire*

<sup>302</sup> Bernard, Russell H. (1995:281) *Research Methods in Anthropology*, See also Peterson, Robert A. (2000), *Constructing Effective Questionnaires*.

volunteered to fill out the questionnaire and give general feedback. As well, I sent the questionnaire to two university professors and a graduate student for feedback, which was received.

Utilizing all resources and feedback available, a four-page questionnaire was drafted (see Appendix C). The questionnaire's intent was to gather in depth data from the Baha'i community including both qualitative and quantitative attitudinal and activity oriented information. This document was included in my application for ethics clearance (see Appendix F).

After an initial attempt to gain contact information for the entire Alberta Baha'i community through the National Baha'i office for Canada, it was found that a more effective method of gaining contact with Alberta Baha'is was by making a request to each Local Spiritual Assembly for a list of Baha'is in their community. Contact methods allowed by each LSA varied, resulting in a less than ideal representative sample, but on the whole, this method yielded useful results. This method follows McMullen's method wherein he "contacted the secretaries of the metro Atlanta communities and (obtained) permission to borrow their membership lists"<sup>303</sup>. In this case, knowing the members of the LSA of Calgary allowed a personal request to be made for a contact list of the Calgary Baha'i community. Contact with the LSA of Edmonton, the other major city in Alberta, resulted in an offer to publish the request for interested people in the local Baha'i newsletter of Edmonton. Other LSA's of communities with smaller populations gave either contact lists for their Baha'i community, or publication of the request for interest in participation in the questionnaire survey. These smaller communities included High River and Cochrane, mentioned under "Interviews" (above), as well as the small city of Airdrie (a half hour north of Calgary) and the municipal district of Rockyview bordering

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<sup>303</sup> McMullen, Michael (2000:xiii) *The Baha'i: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity*

Calgary. Baha'is living within the city limits of Calgary turned out to be the basis for 85% of the data received.

Having gained email or telephone contact with a sample of Baha'is in Alberta, a procedure required by the LSA of Calgary was followed for making contacts. The LSA of Calgary asked that each member be given a telephone call asking if they would be willing to participate in the survey. This was done following a protocol (see Appendix D) wherein three calls were made to each number before leaving a message on any answering machine, with the hope of having a direct conversation with the potential respondent. Questionnaires were submitted to each willing respondent either by email or by post, depending on their preference, and a follow up phone call following protocol (see Appendix E) was made if a reply was not received within three weeks. For those replying to the advertisements of their LSA, their willingness to participate was considered self-evident.

Of the 178 Baha'i households contacted in Calgary, 154 (87%) agreed to have the questionnaire sent to them, an encouraging participation rate. Out of the 154 questionnaires sent out in the city of Calgary, 81 (53%) replied, and with another 14 out of 20 (70%) questionnaires replied to from outside of Calgary, a total reply rate of 55% for all questionnaires sent out was achieved. This rate is comparable with that of McMullen's survey (49.5%) which he describes, citing another author, as "adequate"<sup>304</sup>. Comparison can also be made with the NSGVP surveys, where: "The 2000 NSGVP survey ... reflects a 63% response rate."<sup>305</sup> A summary of these survey results is contained in the blanks of the questionnaire itself (see Appendix C) showing some interesting patterns to be evaluated in Chapter 5.

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<sup>304</sup> McMullen, Michael (2000:xiii) *The Baha'i: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity*

<sup>305</sup> Hall, Michael et. al. (2001:5) *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians: Highlights from the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating*

The questionnaire for this study is composed of six sections. Section A asks questions that give an idea of the household members' participation in the Baha'i community, all questions being based on McMullen's questionnaire<sup>306</sup> and question A3 having comparability with an NSGVP question. Section B is a summarized version of NSGVP questions oriented towards volunteer time, and Section C is a summary of the NSGVP inquiry into financial contributions and reasons for making them. An inquiry into measuring wealth using housing as a yardstick makes up Section D, which also includes a question set addressing the ideals of the participants. The E1 chart asks about attitudes towards wealth disparity and gender equality, questions I generated in reference to the literature reviewed, while E2 investigates self-assessments of wealth status in Alberta. E3 and E4 are duplicated from the NSGVP survey, asking about financial concerns. The last section, Section F asks basic demographic questions, including gender, ethnic background (asked by NSGVP also) and ancestral involvement in the Baha'i Faith (question F4 is duplicated from McMullen's survey<sup>307</sup>), as well as more questions directly comparable to the NSGVP survey. Questions F8 and F9 were asked by NSGVP regarding life satisfaction and religiosity. Postal code and household income were requested in the last two questions, income being a paraphrased summary of questions asked by NSGVP.

Comparing this survey with the NSGVP survey, it is obvious that methodologies differ. As already noted, NSGVP or McMullen questions were not always exactly duplicated for reasons of questionnaire size as well as modifications to fit the focus of the study. It is important to note the differences between the NSGVP survey and the one associated with this study, as they form the framework of comparisons for this study. The NSGVP surveys were carried out in one-on-one interviews, where the questions were read to the participant, whereas this survey involved telephone introduction and a mailed

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<sup>306</sup> McMullen, Michael (2000:186-187) *The Baha'i: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity*

<sup>307</sup> McMullen, Michael (2000:191) *The Baha'i: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity*

or emailed self-administered questionnaire. The NSGVP survey, as mentioned above, uses a sophisticated representative sample of all Canadians, while this survey attempted to sample the entire population with contact information available. This survey, though it does query a population of Baha'i adherents, should not be considered a representative sample either of Baha'is as a whole, nor the Baha'i population of Alberta, from a statistical point of view. These considerations had to be kept in mind when making comparisons.

## Chapter 5 – Survey Results

In this chapter I will present the results of my questionnaire survey of a sample of the Baha'i population of Alberta, the rationale and design of which were discussed in Chapter 4, and I compare some of my results with the Alberta population as a whole, and with studies of local and national Baha'i communities in other parts of the world, as well as comparisons internal to the Baha'i community being studied. This chapter will serve as a snapshot of the Alberta Baha'i community in so far as it was captured by my survey, enabling the reader to see the ways in which it is similar to or different from the essentially non-Baha'i population of Alberta.

The primary source of data for comparison is the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating. The NSGVP “furnishes the most comprehensive assessment of giving, volunteering and participating ever undertaken in Canada, and perhaps, in the world”<sup>308</sup>. This survey mentions the influence of religion on benevolence.

Note that in the tables and figures that follow, a title that includes “Baha'i 2002” includes data from the survey done for my study, “NSGVP 2000” includes data from the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating done in 2000 while the “NSGVP 1997” includes data from that survey for the year 1997. Data in the table or figure that stands out as being of significant interest, and that may correspond to a character profile description, is shown with bold text.

### *Baha'is of Alberta Surveyed*

I will begin my presentation of survey results with a few statistics which will help to sketch in a broad overview of the Baha'is of Alberta.

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<sup>308</sup> Hall, Michael et. al. (2001:5) Highlights from the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating. The NSGVP survey is carried out every three years, starting in 1997, by the Canadian Center for Philanthropy in association with Statistics Canada and other Canadian government departments.

The average age of the Baha'is of Alberta responding to this survey is 44.1 years<sup>309</sup>. The average length of time as a Baha'i adherent is 24.9 years. Women made up 61% of respondents while men answered the other 39% of surveys. The majority, 58%, of Baha'is participating here are married, while 20% are single, 19% are divorced or separated, and 2% are widowed.

The religious ancestry of Baha'is of Alberta is interesting. This survey shows 58% of Baha'is reporting one or both parents to have been Baha'is, as well as 39% reporting at least one grandparent as having been a Baha'i. For the purposes of this study, the 40% reporting no parents as being Baha'i are grouped as "first generation Baha'is", the 39% reporting at least one grandparent as a Baha'i are classified as "third generation Baha'is", and the remaining 21% are classified as "second generation Baha'is".

A large part of the Alberta Baha'i community surveyed, 42%, is composed of people of Persian (Iranian) descent, a fact which may have an influence on the multi-generational aspect of Alberta adherents. As Smith and Moojan note, "Apart from Iranians, most Baha'is are first generation converts. Naturally levels of commitment vary widely."<sup>310</sup> Other ethnic backgrounds aside from Persian are also part of the survey results; 34% classify themselves as Canadian, 22% as Other, while 2% selected North American Indian as the ethnic or cultural group their ancestors belonged to.

Respondents to my survey show 2% have a doctoral level of education, 2% have a degree in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine or optometry, 11% have a master's degree and 35% have a bachelor's degree. A summation of these groups shows that 51% of Baha'is report at least a bachelor's degree as the education level they have ever attained. Of those with less than a bachelor's degree, 30% report having achieved a non-university certificate or diploma, 13% have a high school education and 6% have less

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<sup>309</sup> This information, along with many other pieces of collected data, refers to the individual answering the questionnaire as opposed to the household.

<sup>310</sup> Smith, Peter and Moojan Momen (1989:86) *A Survey of Contemporary Developments*

than a high school education. Within Baha'i families, educational attainment increases with number of generations of adherence; 39% of first generation Baha'is have at least a bachelor's degree, 50% of the second generation have at least this degree and 63% of the third generation have at least an undergraduate degree. By gender, 49% of men and 52% of women have at least a bachelor's degree.

Baha'is in this survey have varying household incomes. Households with incomes under \$20,000<sup>311</sup> constitute 12% of households surveyed, those with incomes between \$20,000 and \$39,999 make up 26% of the total, those with incomes between \$40,000 and \$59,999 are 19%, those with incomes between \$60,000 and \$100,000 make up 30% of the population surveyed and those households with annual incomes over \$100,000 represent 15% of the Baha'i households surveyed. I have calculated an average before tax household income of \$57,900 Canadian dollars for Baha'i households represented in my survey. It is of interest to note that 53% of survey respondents "worry about not having enough money in the future", while 39% don't worry and 8% don't know.

When asked about their self-described (out of a menu of choices presented to them) level of religiosity, 26% of respondents to my survey considered themselves to be "very religious", while 64% of those replying placed themselves in the category described as "somewhat religious". These two groupings combine into a total of 90% of the community being at least somewhat religious. The majority of Baha'is surveyed, 56%, report that they are "somewhat satisfied" with their lives in general, while another 35% say they are "very satisfied" with their lives for a total of 91% being at least somewhat satisfied with life in general.

The Alberta Baha'i community as revealed in my survey is thus well-educated, has a strong Persian ethnic representation and the majority have grown up with Baha'i

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<sup>311</sup> Note that all monetary figures are presented in Canadian dollars unless otherwise indicated.



parents. As well, the adjectives “satisfied” and “religious” can be accurately applied to the majority of them.

### *A Comparison with other Baha'i Surveys*

As noted earlier, an important survey of the Baha'is of the metro Atlanta region was carried out by Michael McMullen in 1994. He refers, for comparison with his data, to a survey carried out in 1991 by the Baha'i National Center of the United States. Here, I compare the demographics of these two earlier surveys to my survey.

The average age of a Baha'i responding to the 1994 Baha'i survey carried out in metro Atlanta was 42, which McMullen compared to the 1991 Baha'i National Center survey showing an average age of 49<sup>312</sup>. The average age of my survey respondents is 44. The average length of Baha'i membership for McMullen's survey was 20.3 years, compared with 24.5 years for the 1991 National Center survey<sup>313</sup>. My survey reveals an average time of affiliation of 24.9 years.

Of the respondents to my survey, 61% were female and 39% male. McMullen's survey appears to have essentially the same gender split, as “The female-to-male ratio is 3:2”<sup>314</sup> or 60% female, agreeing with the results of this Alberta survey.

My survey shows a marital status of 58% married, 20% single, 19% divorced or separated, and 2% widowed. McMullen's reference to the 1991 survey of American Baha'is shows 65% married, 14% single, 15% divorced, and 5% widowed<sup>315</sup>.

The Atlanta study shows 13% of Baha'is having a Persian ancestry<sup>316</sup>, also footnoting the 1991 Baha'i National Center survey showing 21% of American Baha'is

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<sup>312</sup> McMullen, Michael (2000:32) *The Baha'i: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity*

<sup>313</sup> McMullen, Michael (2000:32) *The Baha'i: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity*

<sup>314</sup> McMullen, Michael (2000:30) *The Baha'i: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity*

<sup>315</sup> McMullen, Michael (2000:206) *The Baha'i: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity*

<sup>316</sup> McMullen, Michael (2000:30) *The Baha'i: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity*

being of Persian extraction<sup>317</sup>, while my survey shows not quite half, 42%, of the Baha'i community reporting Persian ancestry.

My survey indicates 58% of Baha'is reporting that one or both parents are or were Baha'is. McMullen indicates 36% of metro Atlanta Baha'is report one or both parents are or were Baha'is. Interestingly, he notes that “30% of survey respondents were raised a Baha'i”, noting the difference between this number and the 36% with Baha'i parents to be caused by parents becoming Baha'is after respondents were adults.

McMullen found 65.5% of Atlanta Baha'is to have a bachelor's degree, which he compares with the 1991 nationwide survey of American Baha'is showing 54% to have a bachelor's degree<sup>318</sup>. McMullen concludes that the Baha'i Faith tends to attract well-educated persons and points out that, “more than any other demographic variable, higher than average educational attainment is what distinguishes Atlanta Baha'i converts from the wider population”<sup>319</sup>. My survey shows 51% of Baha'is surveyed to have at least a bachelor's degree. It is noted here that the Baha'i teachings emphasize formal education as well as spiritual education; “Parents are responsible for all aspects of their child's education ... of which the most important is the spiritual”<sup>320</sup>. As well, “The purpose and object of schools, colleges and universities is to educate man and thereby rescue and redeem him from the exigencies and defects of nature”<sup>321</sup>. As with McMullen's survey of the Baha'is of metro Atlanta, the Baha'is of Alberta are notably well educated.

Average household income from my survey was \$CAN57,900 for the year 2001. McMullen reports the 1991 Baha'i National survey to show an average income of

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<sup>317</sup> McMullen, Michael (2000:205) *The Baha'i: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity*

<sup>318</sup> McMullen, Michael (2000:30) *The Baha'i: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity*

<sup>319</sup> McMullen, Michael (2000:19) *The Baha'i: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity*, For a discussion of reasons for educated persons being attracted to the Baha'i faith, see McMullen pg 16-27.

<sup>320</sup> Huddleston, John (1998:422) *The Search for a Just Society*

<sup>321</sup> Shams, Badi (1998:14) *A Baha'i Perspective on Economics of the Future*, Shams quotes 'Abdu'l-Baha.

\$CAN44,200. He states, with reference to his own survey, referring to a median income category for Atlanta Baha'is of \$CAN39,900-\$CAN56,700, "that Atlanta Baha'is are of average income"<sup>322</sup>.

Compared with the Atlanta and American Baha'is, Alberta Baha'is are slightly less educated, are much more likely to have Baha'i antecedents and have a much stronger representation of Persian ethnicity. McMullen calls the Atlanta Baha'i population fairly "old" with 25% officially Baha'i less than 10 years and 25% with more than 28 years as adherents<sup>323</sup>. The Alberta Baha'i population may be even "older", with 25% of Baha'is having less than 15 years and 25% with more than 34 years as Baha'is.

The beliefs and attitudes of the Alberta Baha'i community surveyed, towards representations of social justice, are now examined.

### ***Alberta Baha'i Responses Regarding Wealth***

In an effort to investigate the beliefs of Baha'is towards the two aspects of social justice which I have chosen to focus on in this study, a series of statements were presented in the survey questionnaire. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with those statements. A hypothetical question set was also asked about housing wealth distribution in Alberta in an imagined ideal Baha'i community.

Of respondents to my survey, 73% agree or strongly agree that there are extremes of poverty and wealth in the province of Alberta, while 52% agree or strongly agree that extremes exist within the Baha'i community of Alberta. Baha'is thus consider that the problems of extremes of disparity of wealth in the wider Alberta community are more severe than within the Baha'i community.

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<sup>322</sup> McMullen, Michael (2000:29) *The Baha'i: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity*

<sup>323</sup> McMullen, Michael (2000:32) *The Baha'i: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity*

Several options were posed in my survey as being the “best” way to eliminate the suggested problem of wealth iniquity, where agreement with one option did not exclude the possibility of agreement with another option (see Table 1). Voluntary contributions towards Baha’i funds, and the payment of the Huququ’llah, as well as any form of donating money and time, were seen as the least preferred methods of addressing wealth disparity. While 28% agree or strongly agree that contributing to Baha’i funds is the best way, 36% agree or strongly agree contribution to Huququ’llah is the best approach and 33% agree or strongly agree that donating money and time is the best way to eliminate extremes of poverty and wealth in Alberta.

**Table 1: Agreement on the ‘best’ way to eliminate extremes of poverty and wealth in Alberta, Baha’i 2002**

Statement: “... see below ...” is the best way to eliminate extremes of poverty and wealth in Alberta.	Agree or Strongly Agree
Contributing to Baha’i funds	28%
Donating money and volunteering	33%
Paying Huququ’llah	36%
Differential taxation	37%
Encouraging all people to work	59%
Teaching the Baha’i Faith	62%
Universal education	85%

After these options of benevolence, differential taxation was the next most agreed upon method, where 37% of Baha’is surveyed agreed on it being the best method. This option refers to a taxation system where the wealthier are taxed more and the not so wealthy are taxed less, resulting in a redistribution of wealth.

The next most agreed upon method for eliminating extremes of wealth disparity was the encouragement of all people to work, 59% agree or strongly agree with this being

the best method. Next, teaching of the Baha'i Faith is considered as the best way to eliminate disparity, where 62% agree or strongly agree with the idea. This result may be viewed in the light of comparison with a statement made by Shoghi Effendi in 1942 stating that "the greatest gift that we can give the poor and down-trodden is to aid to build up the divine institutions inaugurated in this day by Baha'u'llah"<sup>324</sup>.

The most agreed upon way to eliminate extremes of poverty and wealth, in a highly educated group of people, is the Baha'i principle of universal education, to which 85% of the survey group agreed or strongly agreed.

What is wealth and how does this fit in with the purpose of life according to Baha'is? In the community surveyed, in response to questions where answers to one question are independent of responses to other questions, 37% agree or strongly agree that wealth is a measure of income and possessions, while 67% agree or strongly agree that wealth is a measure of spiritual values and virtues. Only 12% of Baha'is agreed or strongly agreed that contentment and peace can best be acquired through personal wealth. Only 8% agree that the meaning and purpose of life is to seek out pleasure and entertainment, while 95% agree or strongly agree the meaning and purpose of life to be fundamentally spiritual. Thus, the Alberta Baha'i community presents itself having spiritual beliefs and attitudes.

Most Baha'is see themselves as relatively wealthy compared with fellow inhabitants of the planet. Comparing their family with families around the world, 73% of Baha'is surveyed agree or strongly agree that their family is wealthy in terms of income and material possessions.

Most Baha'is in this survey tend to see themselves as having "average" income in comparison to other Albertans. Comparing their household income with the rest of Alberta households, 50% of Baha'is surveyed classified themselves as having average

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<sup>324</sup> Shams, Badi (1998:50) A Baha'i Perspective on Economics of the Future

incomes, 24% as having low incomes, 16% as having high incomes and the remaining 9% as having either very high or low or extremely high or low incomes.

I now turn to Baha'i answers to questions in the area of housing.

### ***Alberta Baha'i Housing Wealth; Ideals and Practice***

In an attempt to obtain a concrete reading of Baha'i beliefs in regard to housing, I posed a series of questions about houses and housing. The literature reveals housing to be a yardstick commonly used to measure wealth and this part of the study seeks to compare actual behavior (as measured in house values) with Baha'i ideals.

The average value of a house owned by Baha'is answering to this survey is \$215,000, with a range between a high of \$430,000 and a low of \$60,000. For a measure of wealth disparity within this range, the ratio of the most expensive house to the least expensive house is 7.2 to 1.

When asked to imagine an ideal Baha'i community including all of Alberta, the average most expensive house, according to Baha'is surveyed, would sell for \$901,000 (excluding one answer of \$1Billion which I eliminated as it appeared to be anomalous) and the average least expensive house would cost \$78,000. Further to this, 24% of Baha'is surveyed see the most expensive house to cost \$1Million or more, with 7% seeing the least expensive house as costing nothing. This is interesting in the context of the writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha regarding the time when Baha'i laws will be instituted; "there will be no millionaires possible in the community and likewise no extremely poor"<sup>325</sup>, keeping in mind the analogous meaning of "million" in varying currency settings. The ratio of the average most expensive ideal house to the average least expensive house is 11.6 to 1. This is interestingly a greater disparity ratio than the current ratio of 7.2 to 1. It appears to be broadly understood among Alberta Baha'is, that housing

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<sup>325</sup> Shams, Badi (1998:17) A Baha'i Perspective on Economics of the Future

values should not be equal for all. General opinion also seems to concur that housing wealth of the future in an ideal Alberta Baha'i community should be greater than it is currently. These findings can be viewed in the context of Baha'i statements about its future: "The rich will enjoy his palace and the poor will have his comfortable cottage"<sup>326</sup>; disparity will obviously remain. Also, "Baha'is envision the future millennial kingdom as a ... prosperous civilization"<sup>327</sup> where all persons will be wealthy.

A ratio of the average most expensive house to the average least expensive house according to the Baha'i community surveyed was calculated across a range of demographic segments (see Table 2). A quick comparison can be made between different segments of the Baha'i population, for example varying 'Ethnicity' and 'Education', by glancing at the 'Ratio' column for each segment. A person of Persian ethnic background with more than a high school education would tend to show a lower ratio, which would indicate his or her desire for a more equitable housing wealth distribution.

There appear to be varying views within the Baha'i community in these demographic segments about what the future ideal Baha'i community might look like, where extremes of poverty and wealth are eliminated, as represented by housing wealth distribution. As mentioned, segments with lower ideal ratios are those whose ideal model of society has a more equitable distribution of housing wealth. A characteristic profile of a Baha'i whose ideal model of society has a more equitable housing wealth distribution is not married, of Persian ethnicity, second or third generation Baha'i and has attained some level of post secondary education. The ideal ratio is, interestingly, identical when broken down by gender.

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<sup>326</sup> Shams, Badi (1998:49) A Baha'i Perspective on Economics of the Future, Shams quotes 'Abdu'l-Baha.

<sup>327</sup> Collins, William P. (2002:20) Apocalypse and Millennium: Catastrophe, Progress and the Lesser Peace

**Table 2: Ideal Housing Ratios – Ratio of most expensive house to least expensive house in an ideal Baha'i community, Baha'i 2002**

Age	Ratio	Baha'i Generation	Ratio
21-34	13.0	First	16.0
35-44	4.6	<b>Second</b>	<b>8.8</b>
45-54	23.0	<b>Third</b>	<b>8.1</b>
55 +	4.7	Education	
Gender		High School or Less	37.8
Female	11.6	<b>Diploma or Certificate</b>	<b>5.1</b>
Male	11.6	<b>University Degree</b>	<b>8.9</b>
Marital Status		Household Income	
Married	14.0	Under \$20,000	22.6
<b>Not Married</b>	<b>6.7</b>	\$20,000 to \$39,999	6.0
Ethnicity		\$40,000 to \$59,999	12.0
<b>Persian</b>	<b>8.9</b>	\$60,000 to \$79,999	3.0
Other	15.9	\$80,000 to \$99,999	46.8
Canadian/NAI	13.2	\$100,000 and Over	7.0

***A Comparison with Alberta non-Baha'is***

A comparison is now made with the general Alberta population.

Using the age information of the 1996 Canadian Census for Alberta, an approximate average age in the general population was calculated to be 43 years old for persons that are at least 15 years old. Using the data published by the NSGVP 2000, again grouped into categories for persons 15 years old and older, an approximate average age was calculated to be 44. This compares with the average age of 44.1 for my study.



There is an even gender split in the general Alberta population among persons aged at least 15 years, with 50.1% being women according to the 1996 Canadian Census.

The 1996 Canadian Census shows the general population of Alberta to be 61% married, 26% single, 8% divorced or separated and 5% widowed. The 1189 participants in the NSGVP 2000 survey in Alberta show a marital status of 60% married, 22% single, 11% divorced or separated and 6% widowed. Baha'is of Alberta in this survey are 58% married, 20% single, 19% divorced and 2% widowed.

The 1996 Canadian Census shows 15% of Albertans over the age of 15 to have a university level education and the NSGVP 2000 survey shows 16% of its participants having this education level. In my survey, 51% of respondents have at least a bachelors' degree. This adds to McMullen's evidence that Baha'is have very high levels of formal education in comparison with the rest of the people in the communities they live in.

Households in the NSGVP 2000 survey can be compared with households surveyed in association with this study by the percentage of households in each household income bracket (see Table 3). I have calculated an approximate average before tax household income of \$56,500 dollars for non-Baha'i households represented in the NSGVP 2000 survey. The average household income according to Statistics Canada 1996 census for Alberta was \$51,118 and for Calgary was \$56,829. Statistics Canada's Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics report an average income for Calgary in 2000 to be \$58,362<sup>328</sup>. Having an average household income of \$57,900, the Baha'i community of Alberta surveyed here, 85% of whom are Calgary residents, appears to be average in household income.

The 1991 Canadian Census<sup>329</sup> shows 75% of Albertans to be adherent to some version of Christianity, 20% to have no adherence to religion, and 5% to be associated

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<sup>328</sup> Statistics Canada (2001) Income Trends in Canada, Series 200

<sup>329</sup> Statistics Canada (1993:1) Population by Religion

**Table 3: Percentage of Households surveyed within each income bracket, NSGVP 2000 (Alberta General Population), Baha'i 2002**

Household Income	NSGVP 2000	Baha'i 2002
Under \$20,000	12%	12%
\$20,000 to \$39,999	23%	26%
\$40,000 to \$59,999	24%	19%
\$60,000 to \$99,999	28%	30%
\$100,000 and Over	12%	15%

with a religion other than Christianity. Bowen, in an analysis of the NSGVP 1997 survey, further classifies Albertans as religiously active or passive, with the 30% who attend religious services at least monthly classified into the “active” class<sup>330</sup>. Bowen in turn divides these religiously active people into five groups: 31% are Roman Catholic, 22% are “mainline” protestant, 37% are “conservative” protestant, 4% are “other Christian” and 6% are non-Christian. The Baha'is would, on the basis of my study, fit into the last sub-category.

Now, direct comparison will be made, using measures of benevolent behavior, between the non-Baha'i community of Alberta and the Baha'i community surveyed in this study.

#### ***Alberta Baha'i and non-Baha'i Donations***

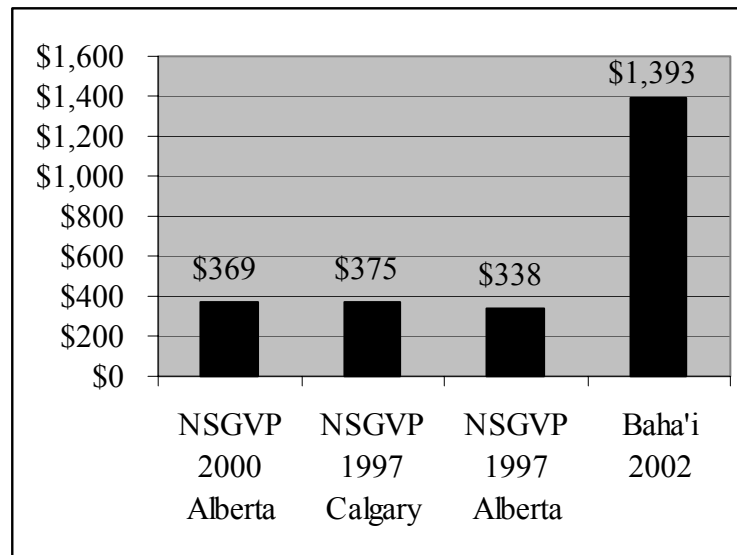
Baha'is represented by this survey show a marked difference in donation participation in comparison with the rest of Alberta (see Figure 1). The highest donation rate published is \$375 for the city of Calgary according to the NSGVP 1997 survey, with little variation between the two survey years of 1997 and 2000 in the province of Alberta.

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<sup>330</sup> Bowen, Kurt (1999:38) Religion, Participation, and Charitable Giving

The Baha'i average annual donation rate of \$1393 is 3.7 times as great as that of Calgary from the 1997 NSGVP.

**Figure 1: Average Annual Donation, NSGVP 1997 (General Population), Baha'i 2002**



It is noted here that the NSGVP, administered in 1997 and again in 2000, shows little change in donations over the three year period between surveys. “The average annual donation in 2000 increased by 8% from 1997, to \$259”<sup>331</sup> for all of Canada. Comparisons made here are with the 1997 NSGVP for Alberta unless otherwise mentioned.

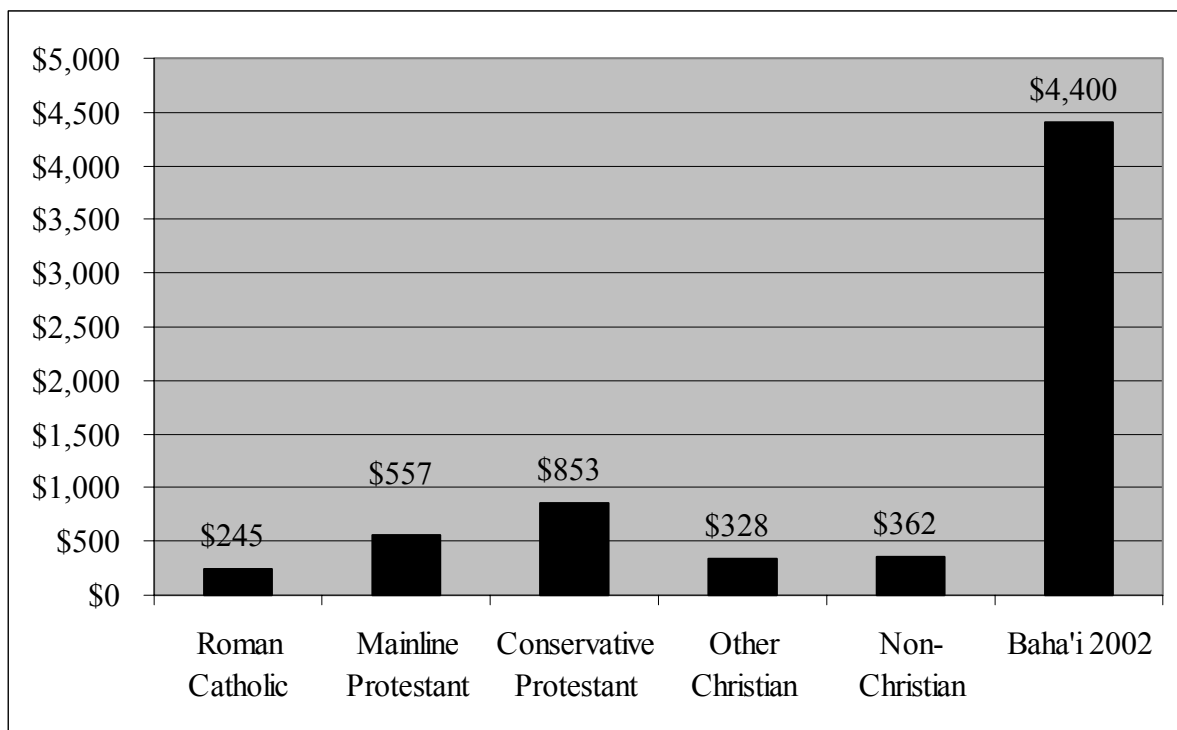
When comparing the religiously ‘active’ non-Baha'i community with a variety of other religious groups<sup>332</sup> for all of Canada, the religiously ‘active’ Baha'i annual donation from this survey stands out as higher than others (see Figure 2). The highest average annual donation rate of those religiously ‘active’ on a national basis is that of the

<sup>331</sup> Hall, Michael et. al. (2001:10) *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians*

<sup>332</sup> Bowen, Kurt (1999:7-8) *Religion, Participation, and Charitable Giving*, Bowen describes how religious groups are classified.

'conservative' protestant Christians (37% of all Albertans), \$853 dollars. Figure 2 shows Baha'is surveyed here, classified as being 'active' through attendance at all 19-day feasts, as having an average annual donation of \$4400 dollars, 5.1 times that of the active 'conservative' Christians across all of Canada.

**Figure 2: Average Annual Donations of Religiously Active, NSGVP 1997 (Canadian General Population), Baha'i 2002**



Baha'is and non-Baha'is can be compared in terms of donor rates and donation amounts. Donor rate is the percentage of persons surveyed who donate by any method in the one year period enquired by the survey. Baha'is surveyed show a 94% donor rate compared to 75% for the rest of Alberta in 1997 and an 85% rate in the NSGVP carried out in 2000 for all of Alberta.

Of significant interest here are the donation amounts themselves (see Table 4). A comparison is made here between Baha'is and non-Baha'is in demographic segments.

Percentages of total values of donations (%TVD) are compared in Table 4, where the group in each demographic segment is shown, along with the donations given by their

**Table 4: Average Donations (AD) and % of Total Value of Donations (%TVD), NSGVP 1997 (Alberta General Population), Baha'i 2002**

	<b>non-Baha'i AD</b>	<b>Baha'i AD</b>	<b>non- Baha'i %TVD</b>	<b>Baha'i %TVD</b>
Total	<b>\$338</b>	<b>\$1393</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Age</b>				
15-24	\$133	\$227	6%	1%
25-34	\$208	\$915	13%	12%
<b>35-44</b>	<b>\$395</b>	<b>\$2357</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>42%</b>
<b>45-54</b>	<b>\$407</b>	<b>\$1498</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>36%</b>
55-64	\$600	\$416	16%	3%
65 and Older	\$375	\$1040	14%	6%
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	\$364	\$914	51%	22%
<b>Female</b>	<b>\$314</b>	<b>\$1638</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>78%</b>
<b>Marital Status</b>				
Married or Common Law	\$392	\$1896	78%	79%
Single, Never Married	\$148	\$300	10%	4%
Widowed	\$357*	\$825	5%*	2%
Separated or Divorced	\$412*	\$1012	7%*	15%
<b>Education</b>				
Less than High School	\$234	\$375	15%	1%
High School	\$266	\$471	15%	4%
Some Post-Secondary	\$379	n/a	10%	n/a
Post Secondary Dipl/Cert	\$313	\$1393	32%	35%
<b>University Degree</b>	<b>\$590</b>	<b>\$1706</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>59%</b>
<b>Household Income</b>				
Less than \$20,000	\$208	\$457	9%	4%
\$20,000 - \$39,999	\$324	\$727	21%	13%
\$40,000 - \$59,999	\$324	\$1066	28%	14%
\$60,000 - \$79,999	\$313	\$621	17%	7%
<b>\$80,000 or more</b>	<b>\$528</b>	<b>\$3136</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>62%</b>

\* Sample size limitations effect the reliability of estimates according to NSGVP

group, as a percentage of the total that was given by all groups. A characteristic profile of a Baha'i who actively donates a higher percentage than non-Baha'is would be distinctly in the 35 to 54 age bracket (78% Baha'i vs. 51% non-Baha'i), distinctly female (78% Baha'i vs. 49% non-Baha'i), almost twice as likely to have a University degree (59% Baha'i vs. 28% non-Baha'i) and over twice as likely to come from a household with an income of \$80,000 or more (62% Baha'i vs. 25% non-Baha'i). The gender difference may be difficult to explain here, since gender may be more representative of the person completing the questionnaire than the one making the donations in the Baha'i survey carried out. However, the 60% of the respondents who were women are associated with 78% of the total value of donations among Baha'is surveyed. As well, the education level is likely highly influenced by the higher level of education of Baha'is in this and further comparisons.

My survey results also allowed me to make comparisons within the Baha'i community itself. A comparison in terms of donation amounts is made using Baha'is' ethnicity, Baha'i generation and responses to the question inquiring into the level of satisfaction with life in general where those who feel very satisfied are compared to those who feel somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (see Table 5). What stands out here is the tendency for third generation, Persian Baha'is to donate larger amounts on an average annual basis. Third generation Baha'is (39% of community) make donations almost double those of first and second generations, while Persian Baha'is (42% of the community) contribute again almost double that of other ethnic backgrounds. (Note that these categories are almost the same, as 94% of Persian Baha'is responding in this study are third generation Baha'i.)

The average household donation of Baha'is in my survey was 2.5% of their income. Research has shown the tendency of less affluent Canadians to give larger proportions of their incomes. An NSGVP analysis reports that "although Alberta donors

**Table 5: Average Donations (AD) and % of Total Value of Donations (%TVD),  
Baha'i 2002**

	<b>Baha'i AD</b>	<b>Baha'i %TVD</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1393</b>	<b>100%</b>
Satisfaction Feeling Intensity; "Very Satisfied" or Other		
Feels Other than "Very Satisfied"	\$1410	64%
Feels "Very Satisfied"	\$1419	36%
Baha'i Generation		
First Generation	\$1103	32%
Second Generation	\$1049	18%
<b>Third Generation</b>	<b>\$1957</b>	<b>50%</b>
Ethnic Background		
Canadian ( inc. NA Indian)	\$1060	30%
<b>Persian</b>	<b>\$1926</b>	<b>53%</b>
Other	\$1093	17%

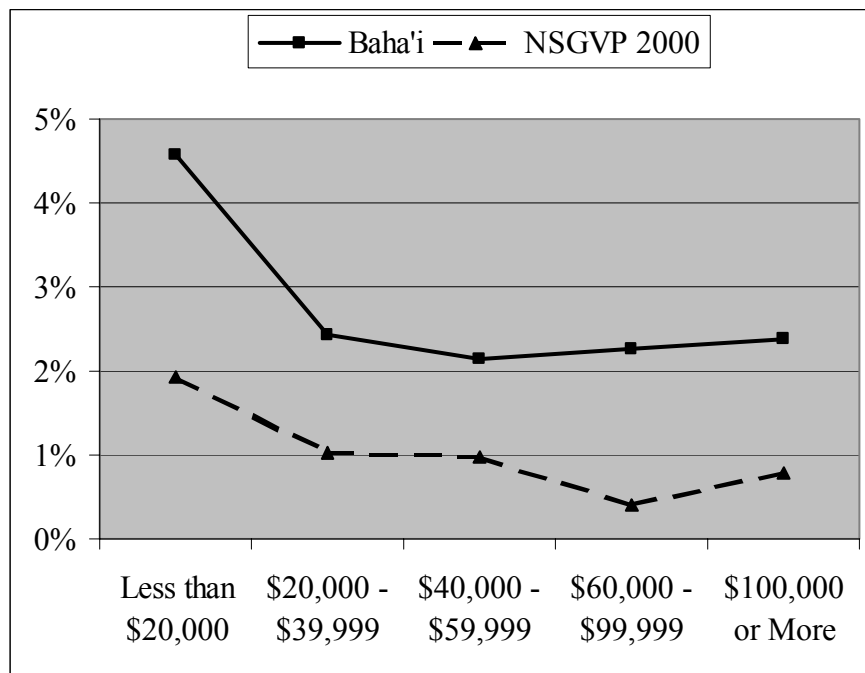
with higher household incomes make larger average annual donations, they did not contribute a greater percentage of their income than did less affluent Albertans. In fact, the reverse was true<sup>333</sup>. It is interesting to look at the percentage of household income given to charitable organizations in various household incomes (see Figure 3). Figure 3 graphs the percentages of incomes donated by Baha'is and non-Baha'is respectively of the NSGVP 2000 survey of Alberta across different household incomes. Though the donations of Baha'is in all income groups are well above those of the average Albertan,

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<sup>333</sup> Greenberg, Liane (2001:9) Giving and Volunteering in Alberta

the same basic pattern of the lowest income category of people being the most benevolent in terms of proportion of income donated prevails.

**Figure 3: Percentage of Income Donated, NSGVP 2000  
(Alberta General Population), Baha'i 2002**



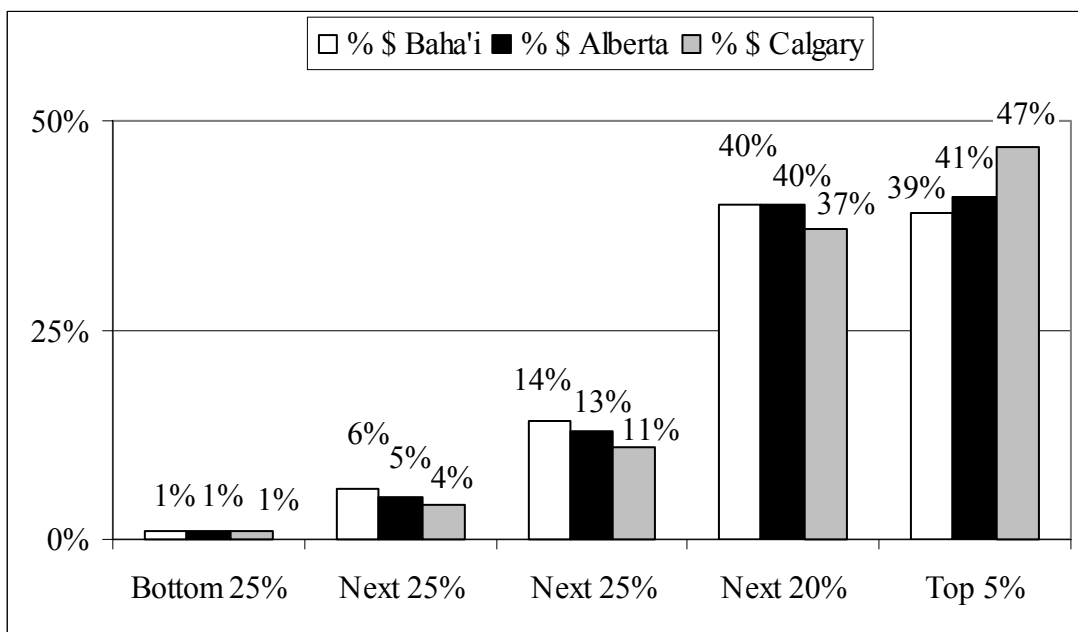
Who gives the most? The NSGVP reports point out repeatedly that the majority of donations are given by a small group of people from the populations sampled. Pareto's Principle<sup>334</sup>, or the 80:20 rule seems to be what people's donation patterns approximate, and this pattern is interestingly almost identical in the Baha'i community surveyed here (see Figure 4). Figure 4 shows that the bulk of donations come from a small group of people within the Baha'i community, a situation very similar to that of both non-Baha'is of Alberta and non-Baha'is of Calgary. The average household donation of the 5% of Baha'i donors giving the largest donations is 11.6% of their household income. The data

<sup>334</sup> Hall, Michael, et. al. (1999:2) Much Comes From the Few



in Figure 4 show that 5% of the population surveyed give about the first 40% of the total value of donations, the next 20% of people give approximately the next 40% while those giving the least, the last 75%, give approximately 20% of the total value of donations. Thus, the top 25% give about 80% of the total in both Baha'i and non-Baha'i communities.

**Figure 4: Distribution of Total Value of Donations from Top Donation Values to Bottom Donation Values, NSGVP 1997 (Alberta General Population), Baha'i 2002**



A further comparison is made between the top 25% of the Alberta general population, who account for 81% of the total value of donations, and the top 25% of Baha'i Albertans who account for 79% of the total value of their donations, to see what characteristics set these donors apart (see Table 6). Greenberg summarizes the non-Baha'is in the top quarter: "A large portion of the top 25% ... were older (over the age of

**Table 6: Demographic Characteristics of the Top 25% of Donors, NSGVP  
1997 (Alberta General Population), Baha'i 2002**

	<b>Top 25% NSGVP</b>	<b>Top 25% Baha'i</b>
<b>Annual Amount Donated</b>	<b>(\$285 +)</b>	<b>(\$1000 +)</b>
<b>Age</b>		
15-24	---	~
25-34	13%*	13%
<b>35-44</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>33%</b>
45-54	21%*	40%
55-64	13%*	~
<b>65 and Older</b>	<b>19%*</b>	13%
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	47%	20%
<b>Female</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>80%</b>
<b>Marital Status</b>		
<b>Married or Common Law</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>67%</b>
Single, Never Married	11%	~
Widowed	---	7%
<b>Separated or Divorced</b>	---	<b>27%</b>
<b>Education</b>		
Less than High School	15%*	~
High School	18%*	7%
Some Post-Secondary	---	n/a
Post Secondary Dipl/Cert	34%	27%
<b>University Degree</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>67%</b>
<b>Household Income</b>		
Less than \$20,000	---	7%
\$20,000 - \$39,999	22%	20%
\$40,000 - \$59,999	23%	20%
\$60,000 - \$79,999	17%	7%
<b>\$80,000 or more</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>47%</b>
~ No data in this survey		
* Sample size limitations effect reliability according to NSGVP		
--- Amount too small to be expressed according to NSGVP		

35), married, university graduates, had a household income of more than \$80,000 ...”<sup>335</sup>.

The top Baha’i quarter, in comparison with the top quarter of the general population generally fit the same profile as non-Baha’is in this top 25% grouping, with the addition of a strong representation of female and divorced persons. Further specific differences between Baha’is and non-Baha’is are in the age bracket of 35 to 54 years old (73% Baha’i vs. 50% non-Baha’i), in the female gender (80% Baha’i vs. 53% non-Baha’i), between those with a bachelor’s degree (67% Baha’i vs. 26% non-Baha’i), and in the income bracket of \$80,000 or more (47% Baha’i vs. 27% non-Baha’i).

It is also interesting to look at the top 25% of Baha’is within the Baha’i community in comparison with the rest of the Baha’i community (see Table 7). There is variation in the ethnicity and Baha’i ancestry between these two groups, with 53% of those of Persian descent and 40% of those who are third generation Baha’i having a higher level of representation in the top 25% group, compared with 33% and 34% respectively, in the rest of the community. Feelings of lack of satisfaction with life in general are highly represented here, with 73% of these people feeling somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied compared to 39% among the less active donors.

The NSGVP reports pay explicit attention to the factor of religion in average annual donations. Greenberg introduces religious involvement stating; “The world’s major religions encourage philanthropy ...”<sup>336</sup>, while Bowen’s report states “all the major faiths in Canada teach the religious obligation to serve others and to give to the needy”<sup>337</sup>. In order to be on as equal terms as possible, the Baha’i community attending all 19-day feasts is used, to make comparison with weekly attendance at a place of worship as defined by the NSGVP. Baha’is, when compared with non-Baha’is, show higher donation

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<sup>335</sup> Greenberg, Liane (2001:9) Giving and Volunteering in Alberta

<sup>336</sup> Greenberg, Liane (2001:11) Giving and Volunteering in Alberta

<sup>337</sup> Bowen, Kurt (1999:2) Religion, Participation, and Charitable Giving

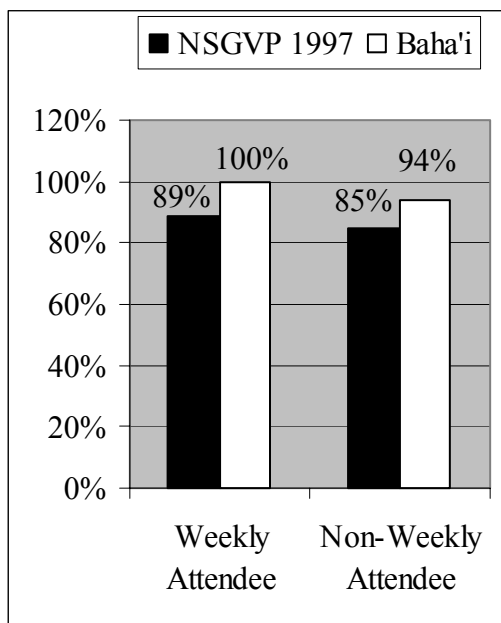
**Table 7: Demographic Characteristics of the Top 25% of Donors and the Rest of Donors (75%), Baha'i 2002**

	<b>Top 25% Donors</b>	<b>Rest of Donors (75%)</b>
<b>Annual Amount Donated</b>	<b>(\$1000 +)</b>	<b>(\$1 - \$1000)</b>
Satisfaction Feeling Intensity; "Very Satisfied" or Other		
<b>Feels Other than "Very Satisfied"</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>39%</b>
Feels "Very Satisfied"	27%	61%
<b>Baha'i Generation</b>		
First Generation	40%	40%
Second Generation	20%	26%
<b>Third Generation</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>34%</b>
<b>Ethnic Background</b>		
Canadian ( inc. NA Indian)	33%	42%
<b>Persian</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>33%</b>
Other	13%	24%

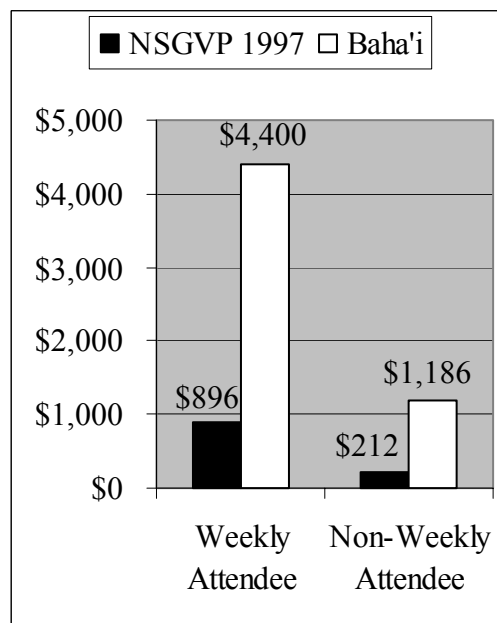
rates and donation amounts in both weekly and non-weekly attendee categories (see Figures 5 and 6). In both Baha'i and non-Baha'i surveys, data show a difference in donation rates, and even more distinctly in donation amounts, between those who attend weekly and those who attend less often. Weekly attendees appear to give more.

One might think that religious people donate only to their own religious community causes. It may be of interest to note at this time, though this was not something measured in this survey of the Baha'i community, that Greenberg concludes by citing evidence regarding the NSGVP survey, that: "Clearly, the notion that religiously

**Figure 5: Donor Rate According to Attendance at Place of Worship, NSGVP 1997 (Alberta General Population), Baha'i 2002**



**Figure 6: Average Donation According to Attendance at Place of Worship, NSGVP 1997 (Alberta General Population), Baha'i 2002**

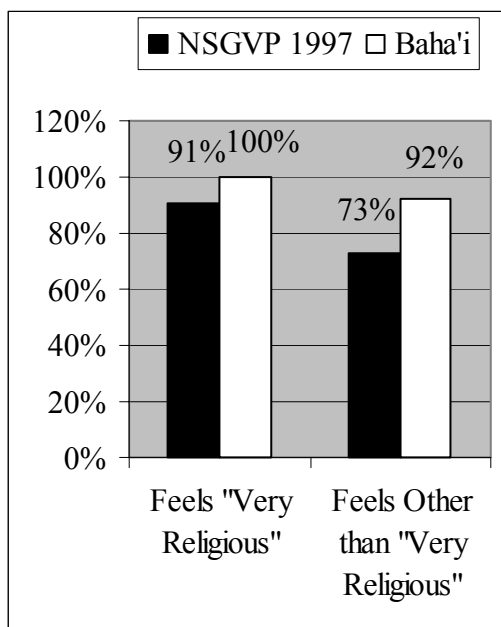


involved individuals ... donate primarily within the religious domain is mistaken<sup>338</sup>.

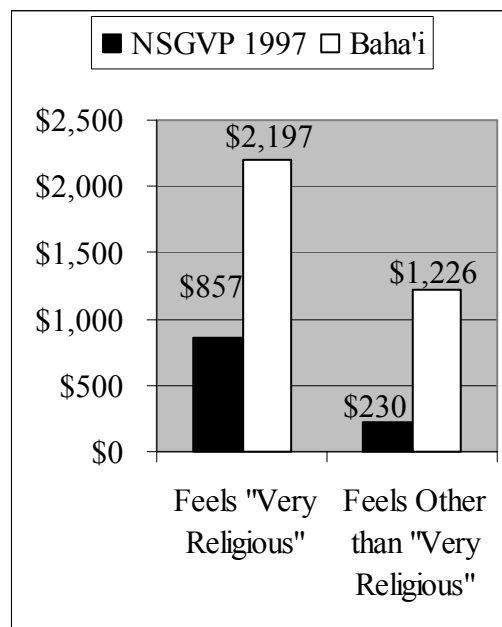
Religiously motivated people thus act in a benevolent manner towards the greater community as a whole. The alternate measure of religiosity used by the NSGVP survey, that of relative feelings of religious identity, show the same pattern as that displayed by measures of religious attendance, a pattern which is evident within the Baha'i community survey as well. Those who describe themselves as feeling very religious tend to give more often (see Figure 7) and to give more (see Figure 8) than those who feel somewhat, not very or not at all religious.

<sup>338</sup> Greenberg, Liane (2001:12) Giving and Volunteering in Alberta

**Figure 7: Donor Rate According to Intensity of Religious Feeling, NSGVP 1997 (Alberta General Population), Baha'i 2002**



**Figure 8: Average Donation According to Intensity of Religious Feeling, NSGVP 1997 (Alberta General Population), Baha'i 2002**

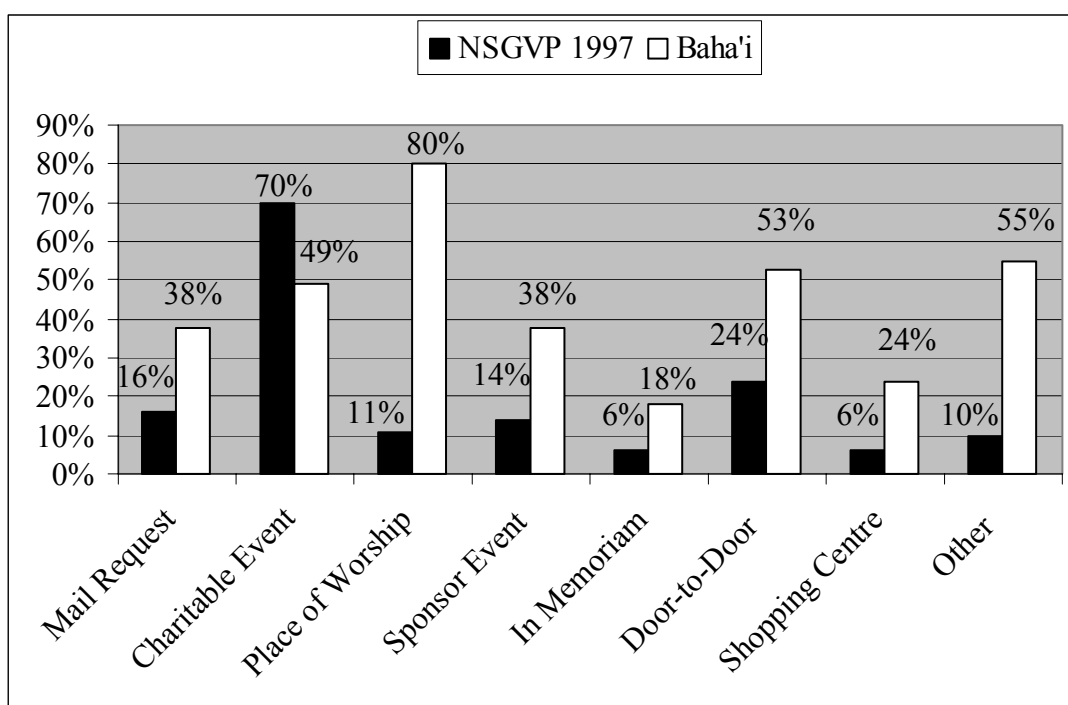


Further to religion as seen by the NSGVP, “The differences in religious involvement of the top 25% of donors, compared with that of the remaining donor population are striking. ... The majority (85%) of the top 25% of donors had an affiliation with a place of worship (100% is assumed for this Baha'i survey). This dropped to 59% for the remaining non-Baha'i donor population. The differences in attendance at religious services were even more marked. Three out of every five of the top 25% of Albertan donors attended a place of worship weekly (one out of every 5 of top 25% of Baha'i donors attend all feasts), compared to only one out of five of the remaining donor population (2% of remaining Baha'i donor population attends all feasts). Finally, 38% of the top 25% of donors described themselves as ‘very religious’ (33% of Baha'is surveyed answered affirmative to being ‘very religious’) compared to only 11%

(20% in the Baha'i survey) of the remaining donor population."<sup>339</sup> Evidence that religion has an impact on benevolence seems to come from both the NSGVP surveys as well as this survey sample of a Baha'i community.

There are many different ways of making charitable donations. The NSGVP surveys request Albertans to select a method from a group of options. These same options were presented to the Baha'i community surveyed here. Comparison is made between the Baha'is surveyed and the Alberta general population. The Baha'i community shows itself to have a higher donation rate through all methods except that of paying to attend a charitable event (see Figure 9). The greatest difference is participation in donation

**Figure 9: Methods of Donating, NSGVP 1997 (Alberta General Population), Baha'i 2002**

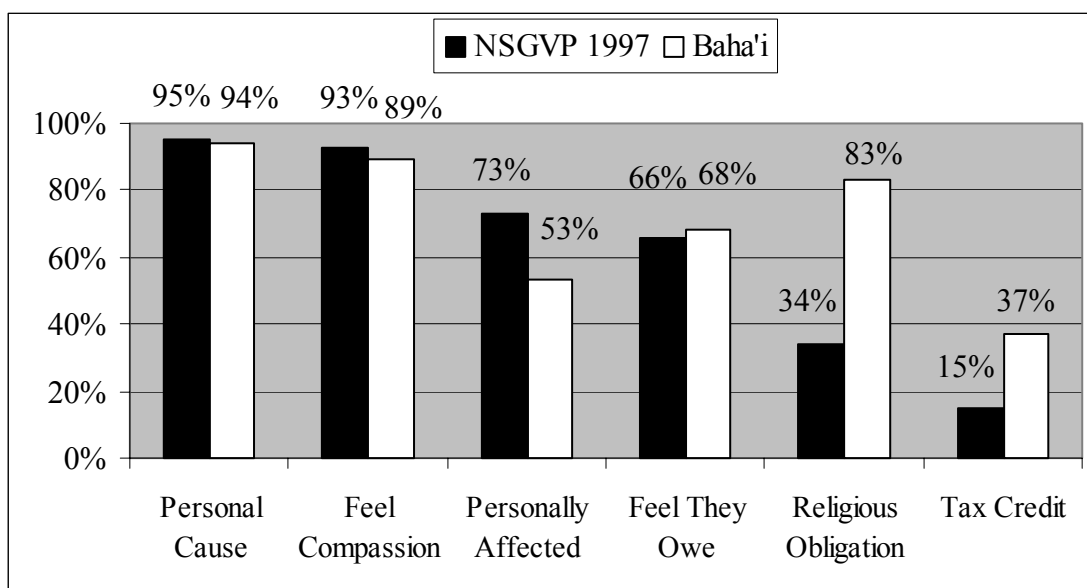


<sup>339</sup> Greenberg, Liane (2001:12) Giving and Volunteering in Alberta

through a place of worship: 80% of Baha'is claim this method of donation compared to 11% of the general Alberta population.

Inquiry is made into motivations for donating to charitable causes. The NSGVP asks respondents to agree or disagree with six possible reasons for contributing. This same question was posed to the Baha'i community approached in this survey. The Baha'i community stands out with a higher motivation rate in comparison with the general Alberta population mostly in the category of religious obligation, 83% vs 34%, and also somewhat in the tax credit area, 37% vs 15% (see Figure 10). Baha'is are somewhat less motivated than non-Baha'is to donate because they or someone they know have been personally affected by the cause supported.

**Figure 10: Reasons for Donating, NSGVP 1997 (Alberta General Population), Baha'i 2002**

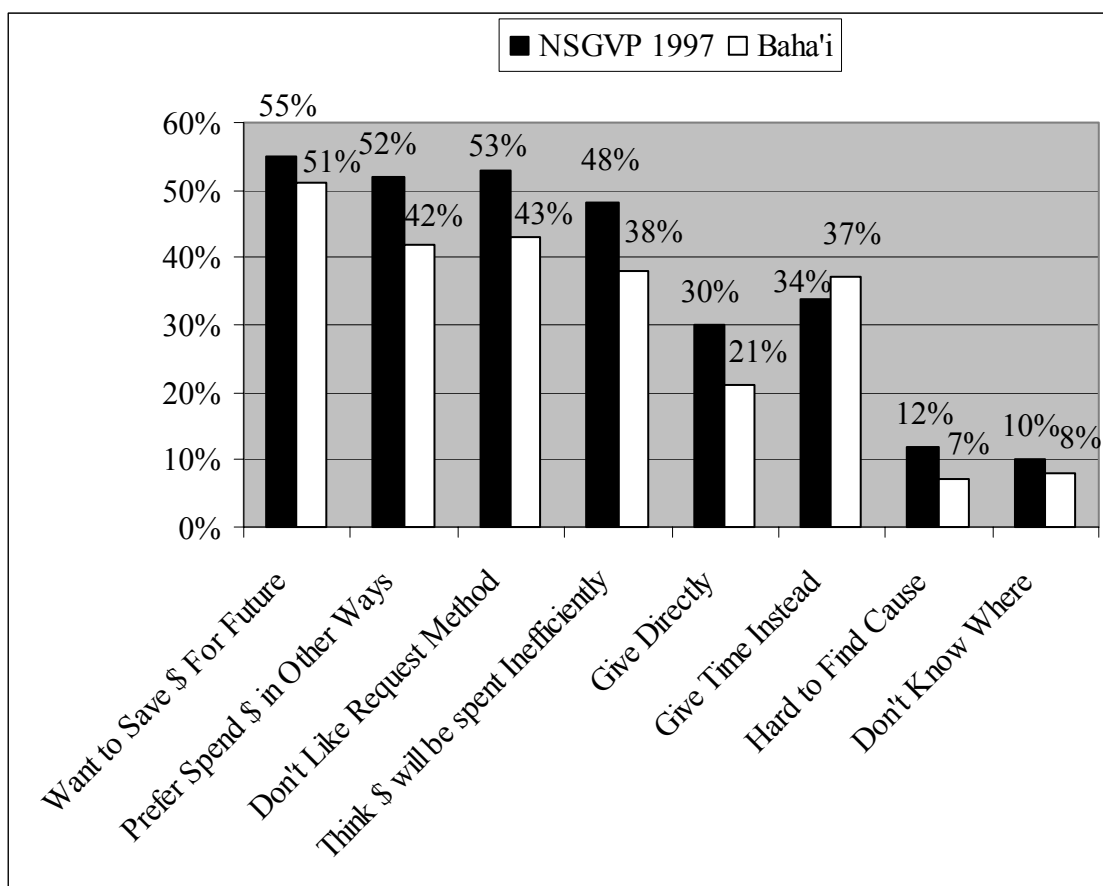


Questions about reasons for not donating, or not donating more, when donations are made were posed to the NSGVP survey audience as well as to the Baha'i survey carried out here. NSGVP respondents show consistently higher rates for not donating or



not donating more except in the option suggesting time is given instead of money (see Figure 11). Both categories follow a generally similar pattern, where in the largest variation between them is no more than 10% in any category.

**Figure 11: Reasons for not Donating, NSGVP 1997 (Alberta General Population), Baha'i 2002**



### *Alberta Baha'i and non-Baha'i Volunteering*

Baha'is in this survey show a higher rate of participation in volunteer activity than the Albertans surveyed in the NSGVP, 63% compared to 40%, and a slightly larger average number of hours reported, 151 hours volunteered annually compared with 146

for the average Albertan represented by the NSGVP (see Table 8). Comparisons are made

**Table 8: Average Number of Volunteer Hours (AVH) and % of Total Number of Volunteer Hours (%TVH), NSGVP 1997 (Alberta General Population), Baha'i 2002**

	non-Baha'i AVH	Baha'i AVH	non-Baha'i %TVH	Baha'i %TVH
<b>Total</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Age</b>				
15-24	114	20	14%	1%
25-34	113	59	15%	9%
35-44	141	124	26%	16%
<b>45-54</b>	185	180	<b>24%</b>	<b>42%</b>
<b>55-64</b>	169*	185	<b>11%*</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>65 and Older</b>	200*	300	<b>10%*</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	151	126	45%	28%
<b>Female</b>	142	163	<b>55%</b>	<b>72%</b>
<b>Marital Status</b>				
Married / Common Law	154	144	71%	60%
Single, Never Married	111	40	18%	4%
Widowed	---	142	---	3%
Separated or Divorced	135*	238	5%*	33%
<b>Education</b>				
Less than High School	123	133	16%	5%
High School	118	69	15%	4%
Some Post-Secondary	171	n/a	13%	n/a
Post Secondary Dip/Cert	148	194	31%	41%
<b>University Degree</b>	178	141	<b>25%</b>	<b>50%</b>
<b>Household Income</b>				
Less than \$20,000	133	118	13%	10%
\$20,000 - \$39,999	159	195	24%	37%
\$40,000 - \$59,999	133	71	24%	9%
\$60,000 - \$79,999	147	172	19%	18%
\$80,000 or more	159	166	21%	27%
* Sample size limitations effect the reliability of estimates according to NSGVP				
--- Amount too small to be expressed according to NSGVP				

between the Baha'is and non-Baha'is of Alberta across demographic segments of the populations in Table 8. The difference between Baha'is and non-Baha'is in the realm of volunteering is not as marked as that in the arena of donations. The most distinguishing differences between Baha'is and non-Baha'is using percentage of total volunteer hours (%TVH) are in the over 45 years old bracket (75% Baha'i vs. 45% non-Baha'i), in the female gender (72% Baha'i vs. 55% non-Baha'i) and among the university educated (50% Baha'i vs. 25% non-Baha'i).

There was little change in volunteer rates between the two NSGVP surveys. The NSGVP of 1997, as compared with the 2000 survey, shows small change over the three year period, where “27% of the population volunteered ... a decline from the 31% ... in 1997”<sup>340</sup>. It is noted that comparisons made here are with the 1997 NSGVP for Alberta unless otherwise stipulated.

It is interesting to compare the Baha'i community internally in terms of the factors of satisfaction with life in general, Baha'i generation and ethnic background (see Table 9). It appears that those most likely to be represented as volunteers are those who feel somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with life, those in the first generation of Baha'i activity and those who consider themselves to be of Canadian ethnicity. The general lack of participation of third generation Baha'is, contrasts with the statement “the roots of volunteering are put down early in life”<sup>341</sup> when comparing Baha'is and non-Baha'is. This also presents an interesting contrast within the third generation and first generation Baha'is when compared with benevolence through donation as opposed to volunteering time (compare Table 9 to Table 5, above).

Who volunteers the most? The NSGVP reports point out repeatedly that the majority of volunteer hours, like donations, are given by a small group of. This pattern is

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<sup>340</sup> Hall, Michael et. al. (2001:11) *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians*

<sup>341</sup> Greenberg, Liane (2001:27) *Giving and Volunteering in Alberta*, Greenberg evaluates the links between early life experiences and volunteering.

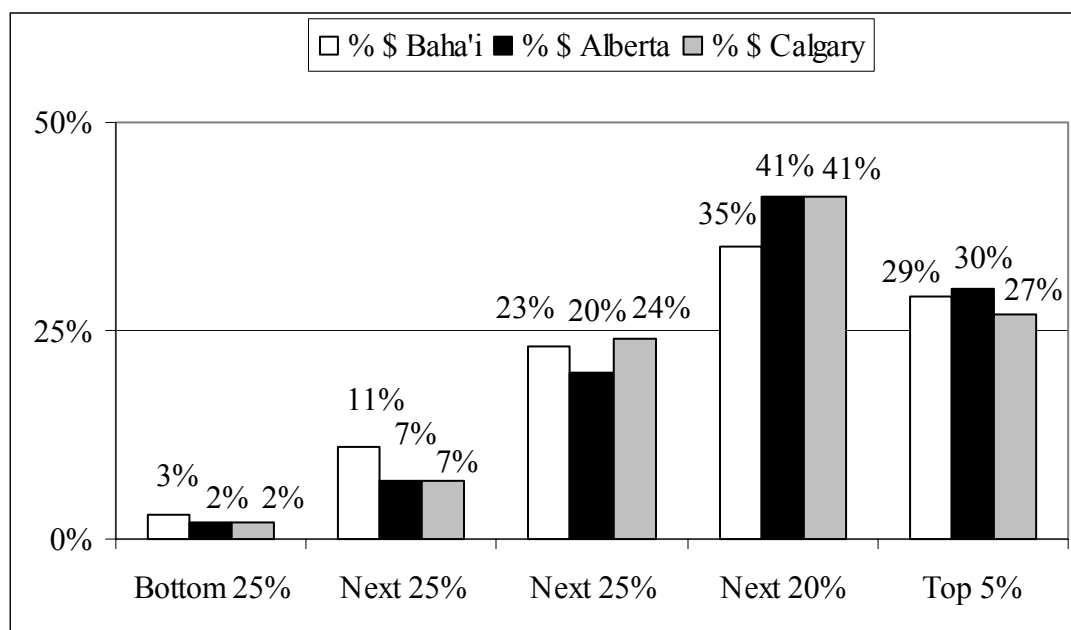
**Table 9: Average Volunteer Hours (AVH) and % of Total Volunteer Hours (%TVH), Baha'i 2002**

	<b>Baha'i AVH</b>	<b>Baha'i %TVH</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>100%</b>
Satisfaction Feeling Intensity; "Very Satisfied" or Other		
<b>Feels Other than "Very Satisfied"</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>71%</b>
Feels "Very Satisfied"	111	29%
Baha'i Generation		
<b>First Generation</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>55%</b>
Second Generation	109	16%
Third Generation	122	28%
Ethnic Background		
<b>Canadian ( inc. NA Indian)</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>52%</b>
Persian	119	29%
Other	133	19%

again almost identical in the Baha'i community surveyed here. The bulk of volunteer hours come from a small group of people, both within the Baha'i community and also in the general population in both the province of Alberta and the city of Calgary people (see Figure 12). The top 25% of essentially non-Baha'i Albertans account for 71% of the total volunteer hours and the top 25% of Baha'i Albertans account for 64% of the total volunteer hours within the Baha'i survey group. Distinguishing characteristics of the top Baha'i quartile, in comparison with the top 25% of the Alberta general population, are in the age bracket of 35 to 54 (69% Baha'i vs. 49% general population), in the female gender (77% Baha'i vs. 55% general population), and among those who have a university degree (62% Baha'i vs. 25% general population).

Reports on both NSGVP surveys make distinct reference to the influence of religion on both donation and volunteer rates; "religious beliefs are a hallmark of the

**Figure 12: Volunteer Distribution from Top Volunteer Hours to Bottom Volunteer Hours, NSGVP 1997 (Alberta General Population), Baha'i 2002**

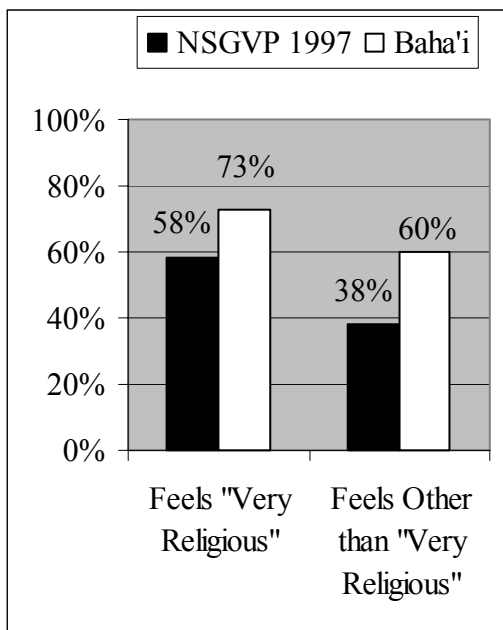


active volunteer and donor<sup>342</sup>. A comparison is made here between the Baha'i and the general populations and their volunteer participation as measured by volunteer rates and annual volunteer hours (see Figures 13 and 14). Baha'is have higher participation rates than the general population among those who either feel very religious or feel somewhat, not very or not at all religious. Though this higher level remains true in average annual count of hours for Baha'is who feel very religious, the Baha'is who feel somewhat, not very or not at all religious show a lower count of hours volunteered than the general population. Identifying with feeling religious thus appears to have a positive influence on volunteering.

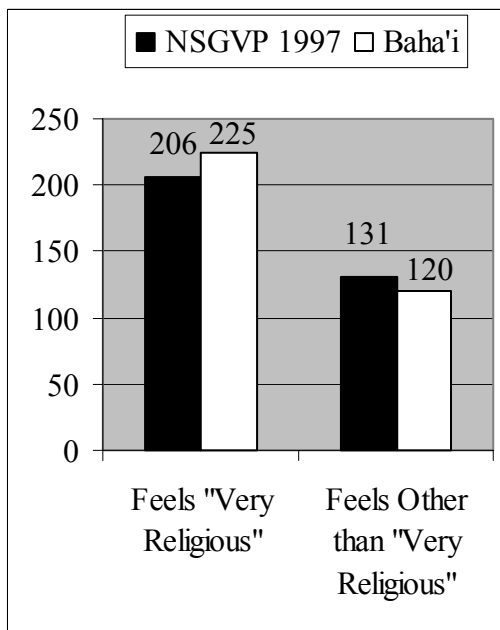
<sup>342</sup> Hall, Michael et. al. (2001:53) *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians: Highlights from the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating*, Cat. No. 71-542-XPE, Statistics Canada, Canadian Center for Philanthropy

The Baha'i community surveyed has been evaluated for its attitudes, beliefs and ideals towards wealth equity. Comparison has been made between the Baha'i and non-Baha'i communities of Alberta in the realm of benevolence through donations and volunteer time for potential influence on wealth redistribution. Gender equalities and differences are considered next.

**Figure 13: Volunteer Rate According to Intensity of Religious Feeling, NSGVP 1997 (Alberta General Population), Baha'i 2002**



**Figure 14: Average Volunteer Hours According to Intensity of Religious Feeling, NSGVP 1997 (Alberta General Population), Baha'i 2002**



***Gender: Differences and Equality***

A look is taken here at the indicators of gender equality that may be detectable through the results of this survey. Discussion here revolves around issues where there are

noticeable response differences between the genders, or a lack of difference where one was expected.

An interesting and unexpected result was the proportion of women respondents. Women completed over 60% of the responses to this survey. This compares with the 1189 persons responding to the NSGVP 2000 survey in Alberta, 56% of whom were women. This gender division is addressed by van den Hoonaard who states “Women always offer a better response rate than men – in all research”<sup>343</sup>, perhaps suggesting a greater propensity among women for participation in unpaid social activities.

Further to the comparisons already made available in the demographic segments of female and male, there are some differences between the two genders’ responses in attitude towards the measures of social justice being evaluated in this study.

There is something of a gender difference in the opinions on extremes of poverty and wealth in Alberta. Among those responding with their level of agreement to the existence of poverty and wealth in Alberta, 79% of women agree or strongly agree, and 65% of men agree or strongly agree, while 58% of women and 41% of men believe that there are extremes of poverty and wealth within the Alberta Baha’i community.

Of the seven options presented as being the ‘best’ answer to the problem of disparity of wealth in Alberta, most received almost equal responses from the two sexes. For one of them, however, there exists a notable difference between genders. When asked if “encouraging all people to work” is the best way, 75% of men and 49% of women agree or strongly agree on this option being the method of choice

Questions addressing the meaning of wealth, where wealth is intended to be understood either as material possessions and income or as spiritual values, show something of a gender split. When asked if wealth is a measure of income and

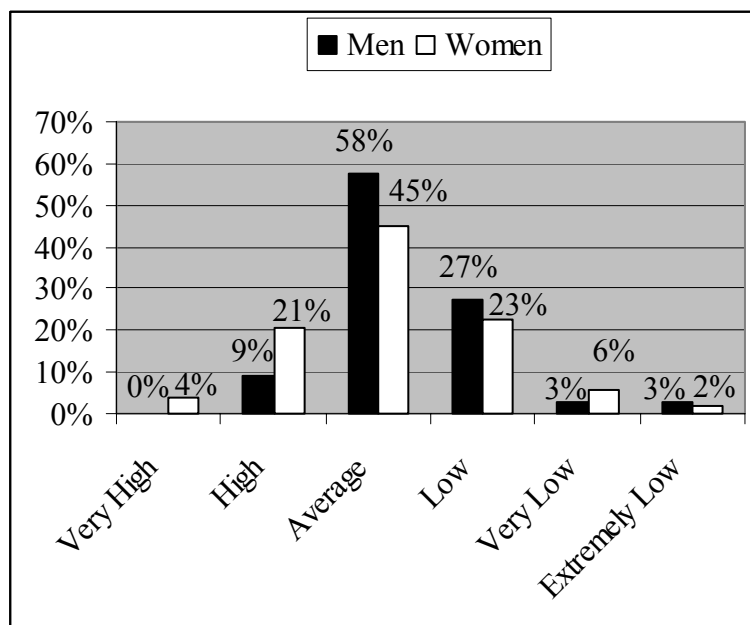
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<sup>343</sup> van den Hoonaard (2003) His reply, through personal correspondence, where a results summary of this questionnaire survey was submitted to him for comment.

possessions, 42% of men and 33% of women agreed or strongly agreed. Conversely, when asked if wealth (intended to mean non-material wealth) is a measure of spiritual values and virtues, 74% of women and 56% of men were in agreement. It appears from this that women may be less interested in the material and more interested in the spiritual.

The questions focusing on Baha'i beliefs when comparing their own wealth to the wealth of others shows a gender split. When the respondent is asked whether their family is wealthy "compared to families around the world", 81% of women and 59% of men agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. When asked to categorize their household income (see Figure 15) "in comparison with the rest of Alberta households", in the three most frequently occurring responses of high, average and low, 21% of women and 9% of men considered their household to have a high income, 58% of men and 45% of women indicated their belief that their household income was average and 27% of men and 23% indicated their belief that their household income was average and 27% of men and 23%

**Figure 15: Respondents Categorization of their Household Income Compared with Others in Alberta, According to Gender, Baha'i 2002**





of women agreed their household income was low. It appears that women tend to see their families as wealthier than men do.

When the respondents were asked if they “ever worry about not having enough money in the future” , 57% of women and 47% of men responded with a yes. Of those saying yes, 23% of women and 6% of men agreed that they worry “a lot”, and 52% of women and 38% of men agreed that they worry “a moderate amount” while 23% of women and 56% of men only worry “a little”. It appears that women in this survey worry more about their future financial situation than men.

Also of interest to this study is a comparison of the Baha'i population to the general population in their inclusion of women within the community. Comparisons between genders have been pointed out in results of this questionnaire survey oriented towards wealth equity. A brief discussion is made here about other ways women may be compared to men in the realm of a representative Baha'i model of society compared with its non-Baha'i counterpart.

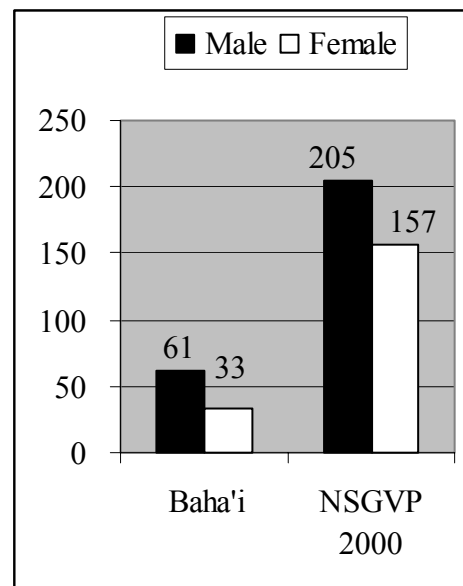
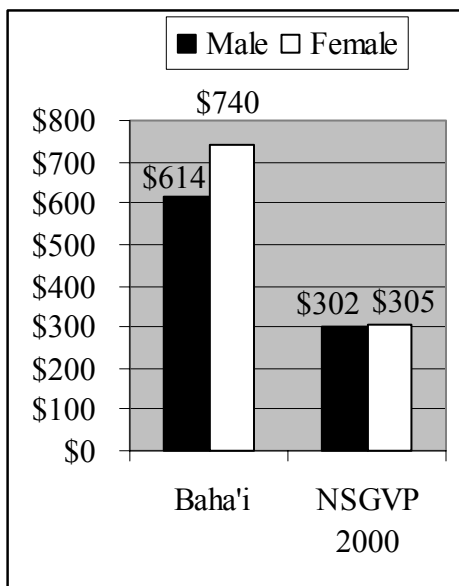
When surveying the Baha'i attitude, consultation, understood to be a process more familiar to women and, as well, a Baha'i taught method of coming to group consensus in the family decision-making process, is one claimed to be practiced in the majority of Baha'i households. Of those surveyed here, 87% agree or strongly agree that consultation is the manner of making family decisions in their households. This seems to suggest a strong inclusion of women and their views and opinions in the Baha'i model of family life.

Are women more benevolent than men? One of the problems of this survey is that questions are posed at a household level which may involve benevolence carried out as a family. Bearing this in mind, the two genders were separated by their marital status using both data from this survey and NSGVP 2000 data, with only single, divorced or widowed persons being considered. Comparisons between unmarried men and unmarried women show an almost identical average annual donation amount, according to the Alberta

NSGVP 2000, while there exists an apparent higher donation rate for single, divorced or widowed Baha'i women compared with Baha'i men (see Figure 16). When comparing average annual volunteer hours (see Figure 17), unmarried men both in the Baha'i community and in the non-Baha'i community appear to volunteer more than their female counterparts.

**Figure 16: Average Donation According to Gender of Single, Divorced or Widowed, NSGVP 2000 (Alberta General Population), Baha'i 2002**

**Figure 17: Average Volunteer Hours According to Gender of Single, Divorced or Widowed, NSGVP 2000 (Alberta General Population), Baha'i 2002**



When it comes to representation of women on decision-making bodies, the Baha'i model's administrative system can be compared to that of the general population. The results of this survey show that 17% of Baha'i men and 18% of Baha'i women are currently serving as members of LSA's (Local Spiritual Assemblies). Also, 49% of men

surveyed and 33% of women surveyed have now or ever been a member of an LSA in Alberta.

Current gender representations of members of Baha'i LSA's in Alberta can be compared with current secular administrative bodies. Perhaps the least biased comparison, considering that a very small population may have a skewed gender representation, is in the two major cities of Alberta, Calgary and Edmonton, where the number of people of either gender available for election is greatest, especially for the relatively small Baha'i communities. At the time of this survey, the LSA of Calgary was composed of 5 women and 4 men, while that of Edmonton included 4 women and 5 men. This gives an exact 50% representation of each gender within the Baha'i community for these two cities. The secular city councils for these two cities at the time of this survey were made up of 28% women. Including five of the municipalities represented in this survey (where 98% of the responses to my survey came from), the two large cities mentioned as well as the two smaller cities of Airdrie and Cochrane and the municipal district of Rocky View, an almost identical representation of the female gender, 31%, can be found on secular administrative bodies. Within the Baha'i LSA's for these five areas, there is a 56% rate of representation of the female gender on these decision-making bodies in this current sample of the Baha'i model of society.

Other comparisons available on a provincial, national and global scale suggest comparable differences. The regional Baha'i council of Alberta, elected annually, was made up of five men and four women, 44% women at the time of this study. At a national level, the NSA of Canada has had a representation of 55% female for the years 1994 to 1998<sup>344</sup>. The provincial/territorial and national governments of Canada have a 20% representation of women in their parliaments<sup>345</sup>, showing the current position of the

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<sup>344</sup> Echevarria, Lynn (2000:Appendix 10) Working through the Vision

<sup>345</sup> Vengroff, Richard et. al. (2001:16) Electoral System and Gender Representation

secular administrative bodies. Women appear to be better represented at the provincial and national level when compared with secular Canadian decision-making bodies.

These gender counts represented on decision-making bodies have been presented in contrast and comparison with those of the current secular model of essentially non-Baha'i Albertans. The Baha'i model of society appears to have a better representation of women than the non-Baha'i society in this province of Canada.

### ***Wealth Distribution Comparisons***

Further comparisons can be made between the Baha'i community surveyed in my study in an effort to uncover differences in wealth distribution between the Baha'i model of society and wealth distribution in those who subscribe to society at large.

To represent household income distribution, I calculated a Gini coefficient<sup>346</sup> of 31.9 from the 76 completed replies to the household income question for the Baha'is of Alberta. "The Gini index measures inequality over the entire distribution of income ... A value of 0 represents perfect equality, and a value of 100 perfect inequality"<sup>347</sup>. A Gini calculated for Alberta using 'economic family' *total incomes*<sup>348</sup> in 2000 was 40.1, while historically the Gini reported by Statistics Canada from the same source has fluctuated little since 1980, with a low of 35.9 in 1981.<sup>349</sup> A Gini calculated using 'economic

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<sup>346</sup> Rashid, Abdul (1998:13) Family Income Inequality, The most widely known and used measure for the purpose of measuring income inequality is the Gini coefficient.

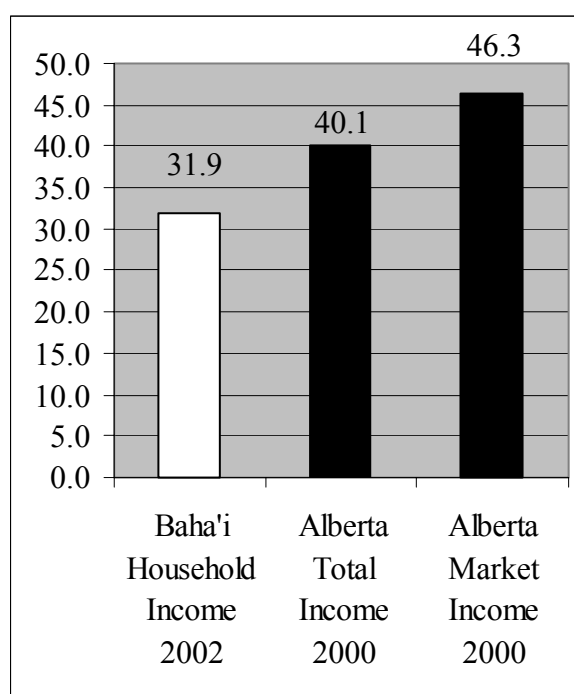
<sup>347</sup> United Nations (2002:197) United Nations Human Development Indicators 2002

<sup>348</sup> Yalnizyan, Armine (1998:128) The Growing Gap, "Total Income includes Market Income plus transfers from Government such as Unemployment Insurance benefits, Social Assistance payments, Family Allowances/Child Tax Credits, Pensions"

<sup>349</sup> Statistics Canada (2001) Income Trends in Canada, Series 700

family' *market incomes*<sup>350</sup> for Alberta for the year 2000 is 46.3. Assuming that households and economic families are comparable, the Baha'is of Alberta, in this limited survey, are compared with the rest of Alberta (see Figure 18). Data from this survey show a lower income disparity within the Baha'i population in comparison with the general Alberta population.

**Figure 18: Gini Coefficients: Alberta  
General Population 2000, Baha'is 2002**



A Gini calculated using the metro Atlanta Baha'i summarized data (a less accurate number using the published household income groups<sup>351</sup>) gives a Gini of 37.9, showing a

<sup>350</sup> Yalnizyan, Armine (2000:1) Canada's Great Divide, "Market income is the totality of what a family makes through wages, salaries and self-employment, as well as income flows and returns from investments, including realized capital gains."

<sup>351</sup> McMullen, Michael (2000:29) The Baha'i: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity

possibly higher disparity of income wealth than that of the Baha'i population of Alberta. This, however, may be a reflection of the national differences between Canada and the United States, where the United Nations reports an income Gini of 31.5 for Canada (survey year 1994) and 40.8 for the United States (survey year 1997)<sup>352</sup>. The Baha'i Gini for metro Atlanta is lower than the national figure for the United States, but this comparison is less meaningful than the one being made here between Alberta Baha'is and the Alberta general population for reasons of data accuracy – Atlanta data is published as income ranges, while my survey allows use of data at an individual household level – as well as geographic scope of comparison.

An alternative way of measuring wealth disparity is by calculating a ratio of the highest income decile to the lowest income decile<sup>353</sup>. Using the household income data collected through this questionnaire, this ratio is 10.4 to 1. A comparable ratio in the literature has been calculated for Albertans' family market incomes (before tax family incomes) for several years back to 1981, when, at 14.2<sup>354</sup>, it was the lowest measure found through research for this study. In 1997, the ratio was 22.0, it was lower in 1995 at 21.4, but as high as 68.4 in 1992<sup>355</sup>. The measure of income distribution within the Baha'i community taken through this survey appears to be more equitable than that of the general population of Alberta in any years reported, by this measure also.

Another measure of comparison can be made using housing wealth as a yardstick. Some Baha'is are home owners and have reported the values of their houses. These house values can be compared to the average house values in the enumeration areas (see Figure 19), as defined by Statistics Canada for the 1996 census, in which these houses are

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<sup>352</sup> United Nations (2002:194) United Nations Human Development Indicators 2002

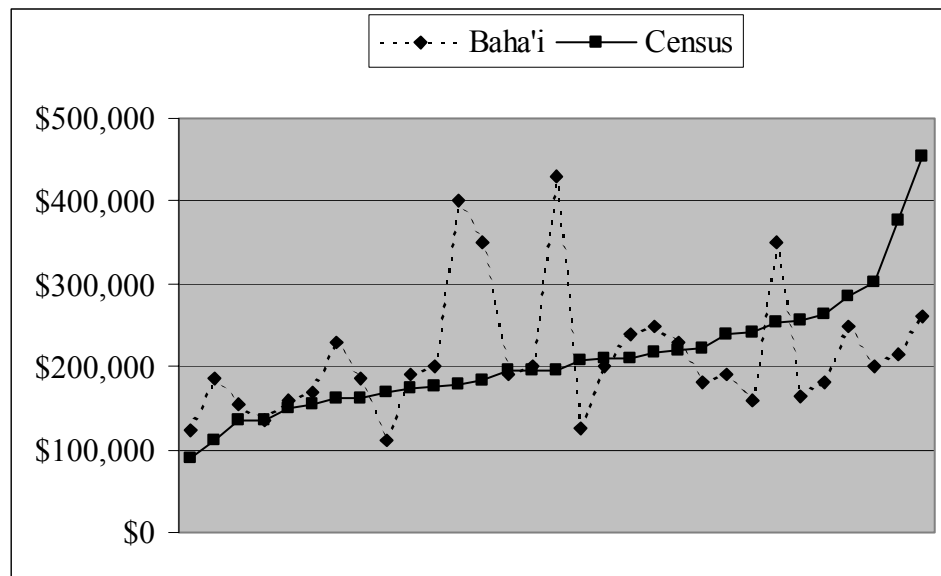
<sup>353</sup> Lawrence, Patricia (2001:10) Advantage for Whom?; United Nations (2000) United Nations Human Development Reports, See these sources where this method is used.

<sup>354</sup> Lawrence, Patricia (2001:2) Advantage for Whom?

<sup>355</sup> Yalnizyan, Armine (2000:32) Canada's Great Divide

located. The May 1996 housing values have been converted to October 2002 dollars using average house values for those two time periods as reported by the Calgary Real Estate Board. As average housing values apply to Calgary, only Baha'i data for Calgary is considered. The average house value in the general Calgary population census is \$211,000 while the average house value in the Baha'i population is \$213,000. Also, if the highest housing value decile is used to calculate a ratio with the lowest housing value decile, the non-Baha'i and Baha'is communities result in almost equal ratios of 3.38 and 3.31 respectively.

**Figure 19: Housing Values: General Population of Calgary 1996  
Census converted to 2002 prices, Baha'is 2002**



What is interesting in this comparison is the pattern that is evident showing Baha'is living in the approximate top third of high housing value areas to occupy houses of lower than average value and those Baha'is living in the approximate bottom two thirds of lower housing value areas to live in higher than average value houses. If these data are divided into equal thirds, it shows the highest valued third of non-Baha'i houses

marketing at \$289,000 compared to \$215,000 for Baha'is, the middle third valuing houses at \$202,000 for non-Baha'is versus \$262,000 for Baha'is, with the lowest valued third averaging \$147,000 for non-Baha'is in comparison with \$167,000 for Baha'i house values. It is possible that the Baha'is in the upper third of an apparent housing wealth distribution who have attained the wealth levels necessary to live in high housing value areas are, rather than being interested in purchasing extra large houses in these areas, content with living in lower than average valued houses. It is also possible that they were influenced to do so by the teachings of the religion, the Baha'i Faith, they adhere to.

It is also of interest to note the position Baha'is, who have a globally focused religion, portrayed when comparing their material wealth with that of other families around the globe. The survey carried out here shows that 73% of Baha'is agree or strongly agree that they are wealthy when compared with other inhabitants of the globe. Canada has a Gross Domestic Product per capita, adjusted for purchasing power parity, of \$27,840US<sup>356</sup>. A comparison can be made with the average global GDP per capita of the world, which I calculated to be \$6400 US, a number that agrees with Delong's<sup>357</sup> published calculation. It seems the Baha'is in this survey, considering that they live in Canada, are in fact over four (4.4) times as wealthy as the average inhabitant of this planet, when comparing these two GDP (PPP\$) figures. It is interesting also to note that the GDP per capita in Iran, where 42% of the Baha'is of Alberta originate from, has a GDP of \$5884<sup>358</sup> (PPP\$), very close to the world average. Baha'is responding to this survey appear to be wealthy in comparison with other people when looked at from this perspective. In a global context, then, Alberta Baha'is have well above average wealth. I suggest that knowledge of this wealth as well as religious teachings with a global outlook may be what motivates Alberta Baha'is to donate more than other Albertans. At the same

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<sup>356</sup> United Nations (2002:Canada) United Nations Human Development Indicators 2002

<sup>357</sup> Delong, Brad (1998) Department of Economics, University of California

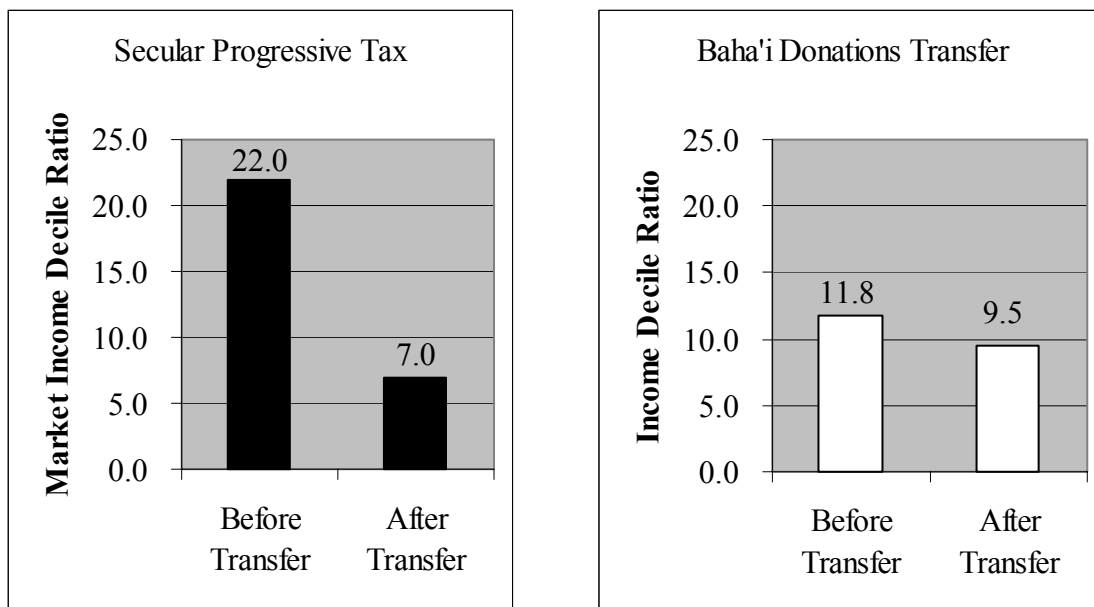
<sup>358</sup> United Nations (2002:Iran) United Nations Human Development Indicators 2002



time, considering the 2.5% average donation of Baha'i household incomes, this appears to also suggest a certain lack of benevolence of the globally well above average Alberta Baha'i community towards other world citizens who are less wealthy.

The Alberta Baha'i belief or attitude towards differential taxation as a method for eliminating poverty and wealth is of interest, where only 37% of the community agree or strongly agree that it is the 'best' method. The differential or progressive taxation system of Canada has a large measurable impact on redistributing income wealth in the nation. Though "the province of Alberta does much less than other (Canadian) provincial governments to even out the income distribution"<sup>359</sup>, the table below Lawrence's statement shows the 22.0 to 1 ratio of highest market income decile to lowest market income decile in Alberta to drop dramatically to 7.0 to 1 (see Figure 20) when it becomes

**Figure 20: Income Wealth Transfer: Secular Progressive Taxation vs. Hypothesized Baha'i Donations, Alberta General Population 1997, Baha'i 2002**



<sup>359</sup> Lawrence, Patricia (2001:10) Advantage for Whom?

after-tax market income. This shows that the Canadian income tax system is having a large measurable effect on wealth redistribution in Alberta.

For comparison, a hypothesized situation can be created where the donations of the decile of Baha'i donors with the highest incomes in this survey are transferred to the decile with the lowest incomes to simulate a situation where this is the only purpose of the donations. The ratio of the decile with the highest incomes to the decile with the lowest incomes in the Baha'i community surveyed was 11.8 to 1 when only those donating are included. If the donations of the top income decile are transferred to the bottom income decile, the ratio drops to 9.5 to 1. Even in this best case scenario for wealth transfer through donations, the transfer appears to be much less than the present tax system makes available. The progressive taxation system of Canada, likely very similar to that suggested by Shoghi Effendi of the Baha'i Faith, currently appears to be more effective in wealth redistribution than the spiritual purpose of life taught by the religion, suggested here to be represented by benevolence.

## Chapter 6 – Results Summary

I will now endeavor to sum up what I believe my survey study has established regarding the influence of Baha'i on social justice.

Baha'is, in the population surveyed in Alberta, appear to be markedly more generous with financial donations than the rest of Albertans in the communities in which they live. They are also perhaps slightly more generous with their volunteer time than the non-Baha'i members of those same communities. The Baha'i Faith distinctly teaches benevolence and generosity to its followers, and it may well be that the differences in donation rates and volunteerism which we have found represent the Baha'i ethic in action. In comparison with the average Albertan, Baha'is seem to be strongly motivated to donate financially by their feelings of religious obligation and they stand out distinctly as donating to their place of worship in comparison with non-Baha'i Albertans. This suggests that a large part of their donations go towards Baha'i funds, although this was not independently measured. It also helps to confirm that the religious teachings cause the donations to be made. Third generation Persian Baha'is, as well as people somewhat or not satisfied (as defined in one of my questions), stand out in association with higher levels of financial donation. Somewhat or not satisfied Baha'is also stand out as volunteers. The NSGVP surveys show that religion has an influence on donations of both money as well as volunteer time and the results of this survey of Baha'is supports this. Baha'is in my survey of Alberta do not, however, believe benevolence to be the best answer to the problem of disparity of wealth, a problem which they do recognize in both their community as well as the broader non-Baha'i Alberta community.

Third generation Baha'is have been isolated in this survey, with the notion that that they would have the longest experience living with Baha'i values and teachings. They stand out as being even more educated than other Baha'is, though this may be effected by their immigration requirements for entering Canada, participant observation

having disclosed the recent arrival to Canada of most of this group. They stand out for financial benevolence, though not in volunteer time, but this may be due to a cultural difference in understanding of what volunteer time is. They are mostly of Persian or Iranian background, mostly immigrants to Canada in the last twenty or so years, and perhaps the most personally ambitious group of Persian Baha'is for this reason. In fact, in this study, the results may have been unduly influenced by the distinctive presence of the large number of third generation Iranian-born immigrant Baha'is, and it might be thought possible that their distinctive social profile is not typical of Baha'is generally in Canada and the world. A survey done in a comparable cultural setting to that of Canada, that of Australia, may have addressed this question in a study of the differences between Australian Baha'is, expatriate Iranian Baha'is and a control group of non-Baha'i Australians. Including such value domains as hedonism, benevolence and spirituality, the statistical study states "the two Baha'i groups were much more similar to each other than the unselected Australian group was to the Australian Baha'is or the expatriate Iranian Baha'is."<sup>360</sup>

With no regards to ethnicity, within the Baha'i community, there are varying levels of participation across the community in the benevolent activities of donating and volunteering. In fact, there is really no difference between the Baha'i and non-Baha'i communities when this variation is measured in two different ways. In the first measure, a small focused group of people give most of the financial donations as well as the donations of volunteer time. In this case, it may be that this small group is acting a role of leadership by example for the rest of each community. In the second measure, looking only at financial donations, people in lower income brackets donate a higher percentage of their incomes than those in higher income brackets, in both the Baha'i and non-Baha'i

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<sup>360</sup> Feather, N. T. et. al. (1992:101) A Comparative Study of the Value Priorities of Australians, Australian Baha'is and Expatriate Iranian Baha'is

models of society. It can be safely said, however, that the bar has been raised within the Baha'i community, where donation rates of the aggregate community are higher, but the variation within or distribution of these two measures remains the same in both the Baha'i and general population. The improved benevolence rate of rich Baha'is, potentially encouraged by religious teachings, appears lacking in practice. This pattern appears to be true both at a local level, where the higher income Baha'is in comparison with the lower income Baha'is are classified as being wealthy, as well as in a global context, where all Baha'is living in Alberta in comparison with the rest of global citizens are considered to be the wealthy ones. Within the Baha'i community of Alberta, it is a select few who volunteer their time and donate a part of their financial incomes to benevolent causes. High income Baha'is, though they donate more than non-Baha'is, still donate a lower percentage of their incomes than less wealthy Baha'is.

Baha'is are very well educated compared to the general Alberta population. This agrees with both the 1994<sup>361</sup> survey done of the metro Atlanta Baha'is and the 1991 survey of the Baha'is of the United States. Reasons for this high level of education are perhaps as McMullen suggests, the attraction of educated people to the Baha'i Faith, or perhaps also the following of the Baha'i teaching on the importance of universal education. Baha'is of Alberta are about three times as well educated with a university degree as their non-Baha'i fellow Albertans. Data here show progression to higher levels of education in later Baha'i generations, suggesting Baha'i teachings may be of influence in Baha'is seeking out education, as well as being an attractor to those already educated. First generation Baha'is may have been already educated people seeking out a religion, but second and third generation Baha'is are more likely to have become educated because of the teachings of the religion. Discussion in Chapter 2 addressed education as being a potential source of gender equality, and also a source of extra economic value for women.

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<sup>361</sup> McMullen, Michael (2000:19) *The Baha'i: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity*

The economic gender gap was also pointed out in Alberta. In conjunction with the equalization of gender biased incomes, I suggest that higher levels of education contribute to lower disparity of wealth within this Baha'i community surveyed. This can be shown as a likely conclusion empirically. Using all respondents to this survey, and measuring wealth disparity with a ratio, the highest income decile to lowest income decile results in a ratio of 10.4 to 1. If only the university educated Baha'is are used to calculate a ratio by this same method, it is reduced to 8.3 to 1. Formal education does appear to lower disparity of wealth. This analysis concurs with a secular source, stating "the higher the level of education, the lower the likelihood of having a low income"<sup>362</sup>, which would tend to group incomes into a tighter setting. The Baha'i teaching that education allows all to earn a living appears to apply to the Baha'i community, which may in turn contribute to lower wealth disparity within the community. The Baha'i teachings, do appear to have a positive influence on formal education.

And it is universal education which Baha'is in this survey are most in agreement upon as the answer to the problem of material wealth disparity. I believe it has been shown that the Baha'i Faith has influenced people to become educated, though it is questionable whether this activity can be considered as spiritually motivated, strictly speaking. It might also be concluded that educated people are attracted to the Baha'i Faith with its lack of religious leaders, encouragement of independent investigation of the truth and other factors. Formal education stands out as the single most distinct demographic factor of the Baha'is in this survey.

Women appear to be somewhat more spiritually inclined than men. If women are given more influence in a community, this would suggest that the community would become more feminine and spiritual. In this survey, Baha'i women have been shown to be more aware of wealth disparity, both globally and locally. Along with this view, they see

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<sup>362</sup> Canadian Council on Social Development (2000:4) The Canadian Fact Book on Poverty

themselves as being more wealthy in comparison with others, suggesting an awareness of their own wealth, in a wealthy part of the world. They see spiritual values as being more representative of wealth than material possessions. Women are more represented in the top 25% of both volunteers and donors. Women in single adult households donate more financially than men in single adult households, though they give less formal volunteer time. In this study, women have the same ideals in measures of housing wealth disparity as men in their view of a future ideal Baha'i community, when I would have expected them to see the community with less disparity than men.

The genders are seen to be more equally represented in decision-making administrative bodies when comparison is made between the current Baha'i model of society sampled here and non-Baha'i secular administered society. Baha'is surveyed here elect a higher proportion of women in their community to administrative bodies than their non-Baha'i counterparts. The basic Baha'i teaching on gender equality appears to be evident in community behavior in this context. Also, Baha'i women and men have equal levels of formal education, education being a factor suggested in the literature to be a primary method of attaining gender equality. There is no real difference between the Baha'is and non-Baha'is when it comes to gender equality in the realm of formal education when comparison is made between the two communities. Overall, however, the Baha'i Faith does seem to have a positive influence on gender equality.

The Baha'i teachings for change are expected to be mutually supportive, each enhancing the others in a change towards the Baha'i world order. This suggests a view of the entire system being at work influencing all parts of that system. Education may have an influence on allowing women to acquire material wealth as well as giving them equality with men. Equality of the two genders, especially the equal representation of women, may have an influence on wealth disparity. If the Baha'i model of society, in its entirety, is to represent one in which extremes of poverty and wealth are to be eliminated, the influence of many factors within this ideal model may be having an influence on that

change. Baha'i publications repeatedly suggest that all components of the Baha'i new world order must be implemented to achieve the desired results. Perhaps the equalization of genders has an impact on wealth equity. It is wealth equity that was most easily measured in a quantitative manner, at least in this study.

Disparity of wealth, as measured in the Baha'i community surveyed appears to be measurably lower than that of the non-Baha'i community. It is speculated here that the combination of all Baha'i teachings may be having an influence on this measured level of lower income disparity. However, if three measurements were considered, education, benevolence and gender equality, it seems the single most likely factor to be influencing this lower disparity measure would be formal education, as mentioned above. The idea that education of women may be an influence also would concur with literature reviewed suggesting this to be a valid method of eliminating poverty. Benevolence as measured here, though higher than average, by Baha'i attitude as well as donor amounts, is speculated to less likely be of influence on disparity of wealth. It is suggested here that a spiritual cause for a lowered disparity of material wealth, where spiritual cause is suggested to be represented by generosity and benevolence, is difficult to show.

Benevolence was theorized here to be a partial solution to wealth disparity. It is of interest that Baha'i adherents responding to this survey have agreed in a large manner that benevolence is the least likely method, of those options given, to be utilized in the elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth, and rather that it can best be eliminated through universal education. In spite of this attitude shown to be prevalent within this community, the Baha'is studied here distinctly show a higher level of benevolence through donations to charitable causes than any non-Baha'i group, including other religious groupings available for comparison. This evidence compounds on and concurs with the NSGVP findings that religion in general shows a positive correlation with benevolent behavior, especially among those actively involved.



## **Chapter 7 – Conclusions, Speculations and Directions for Further Research**

In this final chapter, I draw conclusions from the data collected, its analysis and the ensuing results that have come from this study. I also make some suggestion towards possible extensions of this study in other potential research. It is hoped that this chapter will address the thesis question directly, supplying supporting evidence, as well as suggest other ways that same question may be further investigated.

### ***Conclusions***

Is there a spiritual solution to the problems of social justice? I hope to have carried out a review of some measures of indicators of social justice, as social justice is represented by wealth equity and gender equality. Using these indicators as measures, improved levels of social justice have been shown to be apparent in the Baha'i religious community surveyed, when juxtaposed in comparison with the general population in whose midst it exists.

Wealth appears to be an arbitrary and relative term. Who are the wealthy, and what are the limits of the extremes of poverty and wealth? It has been shown that the country of Canada and the Baha'is living there are much more wealthy in a material sense than the average citizen of the planet. As well, within the Baha'i community, those Baha'is at the high end of the income scale are more wealthy than those at the lower end of that income scale; making the perhaps self-evident point that there is a range of wealthier and less wealthy Baha'is. The Baha'is of Alberta agree that the extremes of material poverty and wealth have yet to be removed from both the Alberta Baha'i and Alberta non-Baha'i communities.

It has been discovered in this study that the distribution of wealth within the Baha'i community in Alberta is more equitable than the distribution of wealth in the non-Baha'i community of Alberta. The vast majority of the Baha'i community of Alberta

believe the meaning and purpose of life to be spiritual, while only about a third see wealth as a measure of income and possessions. However, with a focus on benevolence, which was speculated to be a good measure of spiritually influenced behavior that could be motivated by beliefs resulting from Baha'i teachings, we don't have evidence from which to conclude that changes to material wealth distribution are happening primarily for this proposed spiritual reason. That remains to be proven, if that is possible. This study, together with the NSGVP studies, shows religion to have an influence on benevolence, but not, I would conclude, by an amount that is likely to be significant in effecting measurable wealth redistribution. The secular taxation system in a country such as Canada remains as a much more effective method of redistributing income wealth at this time. The level of benevolence, though higher than that of the non-Baha'i community, remains as one of the less important factors to the Baha'i community both in belief and in practice. Thus, the spiritual solution to economic problems, or the elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth, is difficult to demonstrate conclusively in this part of this study. If the Baha'i model is to develop into a spiritually motivated model of society solely on the grounds of voluntary sharing of time and resources, for the rest of the world to emulate, it does not appear to have developed very far towards that end at this point in its history.

Two very interesting patterns have been determined in this study, patterns that show up in both the Baha'i community as well as in the general population. In the first measure, a small focused group of people give most of the financial donations as well as the donations of volunteer time. Possibly fitting in with the Baha'i teaching that humanity is evolving socially, I speculate that it may be that this small group is playing a role of leadership by example for the rest of each community, perhaps an indicator of typical human nature. Another measure, people in lower income brackets donate a higher percentage of their incomes than those in higher income brackets, in both the Baha'i and the general population models of society, also seems to be a persistent pattern of what

may be basic human nature, perhaps of the lower animalistic nature as opposed to the higher spiritual nature, as human nature is portrayed by Baha'i.

Speculating again about human nature as Baha'is describe it, perhaps human social evolution is currently progressing at an earlier developmental stage. Looking at the entire globe which the Baha'is see as their realm of potential influence, Alberta Baha'is have well above average material wealth. I suggest that knowledge of this wealth as well as religious teachings with a global outlook may be what motivates Alberta Baha'is to donate more than other Albertans. At the same time, considering the 2.5% average donation of Baha'i household incomes, this appears to also suggest a certain lack of benevolence of the globally well above average Alberta Baha'i community towards other world citizens who are less wealthy. It may be that the lower animalistic side of human nature maintains a greater influence in 2002 in the Alberta Baha'i community, and that the virtue of generosity has potential for further influence by the higher spiritual side.

How does 'love for Me'<sup>363</sup> fit into the conceptualization of wealth from a Baha'i religious understanding and belief? The attitude of the Baha'i community studied in this research appears to be one of agreement that wealth can be a measure of spiritual values and virtues, and that as well, the purpose of life is fundamentally spiritual. Benevolence has been considered here to represent the spiritual virtue of generosity. Especially viewing second and third generation Baha'is, and assuming they have been exposed to Baha'i teachings early in life, the Baha'i community studied appears to be more generous with monetary donations. Though they cannot by themselves eliminate disparity of wealth, higher levels of benevolence within the Baha'i community indicate a slightly higher level of spiritual wealth in society, by this measure, than the level of spiritual wealth measured by benevolence in the general population. I conclude that the Baha'i community has a slightly higher level of spiritual wealth than the general population.

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<sup>363</sup> See the epigraph at the beginning of The Spiritual Purpose section of Chapter 4.

The measured difference in wealth distribution within the Baha'i community also shows that there is a measurable trend towards the ideal of wealth equity in that community. As noted, the most likely cause of this more equitable distribution of income is the much higher level of formal education within that community as compared with the population as a whole. However, as I do not believe that differences in education can completely account for the measured lower wealth disparity in the Baha'i community, I conclude that spiritual motivation may possibly be having a slight effect.

The Baha'i community of Alberta also shows differences in the area of gender equality, with higher percentages of women filling community decision-making positions, and it is suggested these differences can be attributed to Baha'i teachings, beliefs and values. If, as some feminists believe<sup>364</sup>, women generally have a more spiritual and caring nature, then the greater number of women in positions to make decisions could be a key factor contributing to measures of other areas of social justice, such as the lower measure of wealth disparity within the Baha'i community. A simple example of the more spiritual or social outlook of women is the added affinity for women to respond to unpaid surveys such as the one done here, with a 60% female response rate. Though Baha'i women in this study imagined a housing wealth distribution in the future equal to that of Baha'i men, this can perhaps be attributed to their tendency to be more household focused. It is my own personal observation that female Baha'is have an advanced participation rate in social-justice-oriented behavior when compared with Baha'i males and an increased participation in the Baha'i community. Considering all

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<sup>364</sup> Woodman, Marion (1989) *The Role of the Feminine in the New Era*; Woodman, Ross (1995) *The Role of the Feminine in the Baha'i Faith*; Ma'ani, Baharich Rouhani (1997) *The Effect of Philosophical and Linguistic Gender Biases*; Ray, Marilyn J. (1995) *Women and Men: Toward Achieving Complementarity*; Schweitz, Martha Leach (1995) *Of Webs and Ladders: Gender Equality*; Momen, Moojan (1994) *In all the Ways that Matter, Women Don't Count*; Aslaksen, Iulie (2002) *Gender Constructions and the Possibility of a Generous Economic Actor*

factors, I would suggest that women have been shown to be more aware of social injustices, to be more benevolent and to be more spiritual than men, and thus, they may have an added positive impact on social justice.

As alluded to in the last chapter, it is important to consider the possible influence of all of the Baha'i teachings as a whole on any measurable difference in social justice factors. I hope to have shown at the very least that there is a congruity between key aspects of Baha'i beliefs and social behavior, in the domains of wealth and gender equality and I personally believe that this congruity indicates a deeper causal relationship, namely that the beliefs motivate the behavior. Therefore, it may be the entire Baha'i outlook that is having an influence on the improvements of social justice within this example of the Baha'i model of society. This possibility may, in fact, represent the best argument that the Baha'i social ethic, made up of persons realizing a spiritual purpose, is a viable societal model that could conceivably bring about a new world order. If all factors considered, including formal education, can be classified as spiritually motivated, the idea that spiritual motivations can result in improved levels of social justice may be arguable. It is tentatively suggested here that the Baha'i Faith is on a path towards creating a model of society, however slowly, with advanced levels of social justice, caused by the beliefs instigated by Baha'i teachings and the resultant behaviors of Baha'i adherents.

A look will now be made at future possible studies that may further the understanding of the influence the Baha'is Faith or spirituality in general is having on social justice.

### ***Proposed Further Research***

With many Baha'i communities existing in North America including Canada, it would be of interest to confirm evidence of higher levels of benevolence through donations and its impact on wealth distribution, higher levels of female participation in

community and higher levels of education within these communities. It would also be of great interest to measure the disparity of wealth in these Baha'i communities in comparison with their surrounding neighbors. The two Baha'i clusters<sup>365</sup> of UBC/Vancouver and London, Ontario in Canada are now presented in Canadian Baha'i newsletters as Baha'i communities with extra levels of maturity. It would be interesting to compare survey data from these communities to the NSGVP data available in Canada as well as to Statistics Canada Gini measures of wealth distribution.

As well, the non-industrialized world may be a better place to look for religious impact. Mother Teresa, an advocate of helping the poor in India in association with religion, pointed out; "The spiritual poverty of the western world is much greater than the physical poverty of our people."<sup>366</sup> The Baha'is of India may be worth investigating. In other parts of the world, such as India, there may be more consolidated Baha'i communities. "It is claimed by the Baha'is themselves that in a number of Kerala (Southern Indian State) and other Indian villages an extensive conversion to Baha'i has taken place, so that these villages rightly might be called Baha'i villages"<sup>367</sup>. I have also discovered through this study that the Bribri natives living in Costa Rica live in a community that is entirely converted to Baha'i beliefs and principles. Perhaps the best method for choosing an alternative study location would be through the Baha'i global community internal comparisons, which show that "approximately 150 clusters worldwide have been identified as having attained conditions propitious for intensive growth"<sup>368</sup>, suggesting one of these more mature clusters may be ideal for research.

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<sup>365</sup> Note: The globe has recently been divided geographically into several thousand Baha'i "clusters".

<sup>366</sup> David Goa J. et. al. (2000:16) *Anno Domini: Jesus Through the Centuries*, Mother Teresa is described as the "Champion of the sick and impoverished in Calcutta... (she was) Awarded ... the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979"

<sup>367</sup> Warburg, Margrit (1986:223) *Conversion: Considerations Before a Field-Work in a Baha'i Village*

<sup>368</sup> International Teaching Center (2003:10) *Building Momentum: A Coherent Approach to Growth*

These other locations may show measures of influence the Baha'i teachings may be having on improved standards of social justice; “if an extensive conversion to Baha'i takes place in a village, it will be associated with a significant redistribution of power and wealth”<sup>369</sup>. Further studies of behavior influenced by teachings of the Baha'i Faith are suggested here to be of value in the interests of social justice.

If benevolence is possibly to play a significant role in contributing to the elimination of poverty and extreme wealth, it would be of great interest to carry out a study of the philanthropists that form the small group of people who donate the most. This group of persons appears to be at the leading edge of philanthropy, and with the idea that this benevolent attitude would contribute to the well-being of society in the future, they would be an excellent ‘community’ to evaluate for their potential contribution. The NSGVP studies, as well as this study, have revealed these groups of persons, and it would be of great interest, whether they be Baha’is or non-Baha’is, to inquire into their beliefs, attitudes and motives in carrying out this behavior. Whether they consider their behavior to be an investment in spiritual wealth would be a question to investigate as well as their views on the contributions it may have to social justice, the elimination of poverty and to the benefit of humanity.

Further studies of any type investigating the implementation of moral, ethical or spiritual beliefs and attitudes into pragmatic behavior and action in the interests of developing a role model of society that holds social justice with value, would be of revealing benefit to the social well-being of humanity as a whole.

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<sup>369</sup> Warburg, Margrit (1986:232) Conversion: Considerations Before a Field-Work in a Baha'i Village

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## **Appendix B: Household Interview Questions**

### **Interview Questions**

- 1) Please describe your understanding of the Baha'i Faith's teachings about the subject of equality of men and women.
- 2) Do you know of any quotes from the writings that apply to the topic equality of men and women?
- 3) Please talk about any examples of the equality of men and women that you know about in the Baha'i community that you live in and are a part of.
- 4) Can you please now describe your understanding of the teachings of the Faith that apply to poverty and wealth?
- 5) Do you know of any quotes from the writings that apply to the topic of how wealth is to be distributed among people?
- 6) Does wealth have any special meaning to you according to your beliefs and values in association with the Baha'i Faith?
- 7) Can you please describe any activities or projects happening in the Baha'i community that you are a part of that address your understanding of how wealth should ideally be distributed among people in the community.



## Appendix C: Survey Questionnaire with Summarized Results

### Baha'is of Alberta Survey

This questionnaire is to be filled out by an adult in your household who is a declared member of the Baha'i community. If you feel uncomfortable answering any question, you may skip it. Your personal identification is NOT requested.

To answer the questions in most cases simply put an "X" or check in the blank in front of the answer you want to give. For a few other questions you will be asked to write your answer in the space or blank provided. Please complete both sides of each page.

#### A. On Being a Baha'i

A1. How long have you been a Baha'i? (24.9 Av) years

A2. Please check "Yes" or "No" on the following questions. Yes    No

Are you currently a member of a Local Spiritual Assembly in Alberta? (18%)

Have you ever been a member of a Local Spiritual Assembly in Alberta? (39%)

Have you ever gone homefront pioneering in Canada? (31%)

Have you ever gone pioneering in another country? (31%)

A3. In the past 12 months, how regularly have you attended Nineteen Day Feasts?

(8%) Always (all 19 Feasts in the past 12 months)

(38%) Often (between 12-18 Feasts in the past 12 months)

(16%) Sometimes (between 6-11 Feasts in the past 12 months)

(19%) Seldom (between 1-5 Feasts in the past 12 months)

(19%) Never (did not attend Feast in the last 12 months)

B. Volunteering – this section deals with unpaid volunteer activities done as part of a group or organization (such as the Baha'i Faith) in the past 12 months.

B1. In the past 12 months, have you been active as an unpaid volunteer for an organization? (This may include: serving as an unpaid member of a board or committee; providing information or helping to educate others; helping to organize or supervise activities or events; doing any consulting, executive, office or administrative work; teaching or coaching; providing counseling or friendly visiting; collecting, serving or delivering food or other goods; maintaining, repairing or building facilities; volunteer driving or volunteering in any other way.)

(63%) Yes \_\_\_ No     If you checked (\_\_\_ No), go to section C. next.

B2. How many hours did you volunteer for groups or organizations, in the past 12 months?

\_\_\_\_\_ hours per week **OR** (151 Av) total hours in the past 12 months

**C. Financial contributions to charitable and non-profit organizations.**

C1. In the past 12 months, have you made any financial contributions to a charitable or non-profit organization (including the Baha'i Faith) in any of the following ways?

- 1) By responding to a request through the mail? (38%) Yes \_\_\_ No
- 2) By paying to attend a charity event? (49%) Yes \_\_\_ No
- 3) Through the Baha'i funds? (80%) Yes \_\_\_ No
- 4) By sponsoring someone in an event such as a walk-a-thon? (38%) Yes \_\_\_ No
- 5) 'In memoriam' or in the name of someone who has passed away? (18%) Yes \_\_\_ No
- 6) When asked by someone doing door-to-door canvassing? (53%) Yes \_\_\_ No
- 7) When asked by someone at a shopping center or on a street corner? (24%) Yes \_\_\_ No
- 8) By any other method of donation to a charitable organization? (55%) Yes \_\_\_ No

If you checked (\_\_\_ No) in **all** cases in question C1, go to question C4, on the next page.

**C2.** What was the total amount of your donations in the last 12 months **OR** in 2001?

\_\_\_\_\_ \$Dollars in the last 12 months **OR** (\$1393 Av) \$Dollars in 2001

**C3.** In the following statements, please agree or disagree whether each is a reason that you make charitable donations.

- 1) The government will give you credit on your income taxes. (37%) Agree \_\_\_ Disagree
- 2) You feel compassion towards people in need. (89%) Agree \_\_\_ Disagree
- 3) To fulfill religious obligations or beliefs. (83%) Agree \_\_\_ Disagree
- 4) To help a cause in which you personally believe. (94%) Agree \_\_\_ Disagree
- 5) You feel you owe something to your community. (68%) Agree \_\_\_ Disagree
- 6) You or someone you know has been personally affected  
by the cause the organization supports. (53%) Agree \_\_\_ Disagree

**C4.** People may not **donate or donate more** to charitable causes for a number of reasons. **If you do not donate**, from the list of reasons below, please agree or disagree whether each is a reason that you do not donate. **If you do donate**, please agree or disagree whether each is a reason why you do not donate **more**.

- 1) It is hard to find a cause worth supporting. (7%) Agree \_\_\_ Disagree
- 2) You want to save your money for your own future needs. (51%) Agree \_\_\_ Disagree
- 3) You do not know where to make a contribution. (8%) Agree \_\_\_ Disagree
- 4) You think the money will not be used efficiently. (38%) Agree \_\_\_ Disagree
- 5) You would prefer to spend your money in other ways. (42%) Agree \_\_\_ Disagree
- 6) You give voluntary time instead of money. (37%) Agree \_\_\_ Disagree
- 7) You feel you already give enough money directly to people on your own, not through  
an organization. (21%) Agree \_\_\_ Disagree

8) You do not like the way contribution requests are made. (43%) Agree \_\_\_ Disagree

#### **D. Your Dwelling and Your Housing Ideals**

**D1.** How many rooms are there in your dwelling? (**Include** kitchen, bedrooms, finished rooms in attic or basement. **Do not count** bathrooms, halls, vestibules and rooms used solely for business purposes.)

(5.7 Av) <Number of rooms

**D2.** How many of these rooms are bedrooms?

(2.9 Av) <Number of bedrooms

**D3.** How many people aged 15 years and older live in your household?

(2.2 Av) <Number of people

**D4.** How many people under the age of 15 live in your household?

(0.5 Av) <Number of people

**D5.** For OWNERS only: If you were to sell your current dwelling now, for how much would you expect to sell it? (\$215,000 Av) \$Dollars

**D6.** If you were to imagine an ideal Baha'i community including all of Alberta, what would the most expensive house in Alberta cost?

(\$19,066,000 Av) <\$Dollars for most expensive house

(\$901,000 Av) <\$Dollars for most expensive house *Excluding \$1Billion Answer*

**D7.** What would the least expensive house cost?

(\$78,000) <\$Dollars for least expensive house

### E. Your attitude as a Baha'i

E1. Please answer the following questions by checking the blank corresponding to whether you **strongly agree**, **agree**, **are unsure**, **disagree** or **strongly disagree**.

<u>Statements:</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Unsure</u>	<u>Dis-agree</u>	<u>Strongly Dis-agree</u>
1) There are extremes of poverty and wealth in Alberta.	(51%)	(23%)	(14%)	(19%)	(2%)
2) There are extremes of poverty and wealth within the Baha'i community of Alberta.	(21%)	(31%)	(25%)	(15%)	(8%)
3) Contributing to Baha'i funds is the best way to eliminate extremes of poverty and wealth in Alberta.	(10%)	(17%)	(24%)	(39%)	(9%)
4) Paying Huququ'llah is the best way to eliminate extremes of poverty and wealth in Alberta.	(10%)	(26%)	(21%)	(35%)	(8%)
5) Encouraging all people to work is the best way to eliminate poverty and wealth in Alberta.	(19%)	(40%)	(20%)	(19%)	(2%)
6) Universal education is the best way to eliminate extremes of poverty and wealth in Alberta.	(28%)	(56%)	(11%)	(5%)	(0%)
7) Differential taxation is the best way to eliminate extremes of poverty and wealth in Alberta.	(3%)	(34%)	(40%)	(17%)	(6%)
8) Teaching the Baha'i Faith is the best way to eliminate extremes of poverty and wealth in Alberta.	(15%)	(47%)	(16%)	(18%)	(3%)
9) Donating money and volunteering is the best way to eliminate extremes of poverty and wealth in Alberta.	(2%)	(30%)	(28%)	(36%)	(3%)
10) Wealth is a measure of income and possessions.	(6%)	(31%)	(17%)	(31%)	(15%)
11) Wealth is a measure of spiritual values and virtues.	(26%)	(40%)	(10%)	(8%)	(15%)
12) Regarding income and material possessions, your family is wealthy compared to families in the world.	(24%)	(49%)	(15%)	(10%)	(2%)
13) Consultation is the manner of making family decisions in your household.	(37%)	(50%)	(6%)	(7%)	(0%)
14) Contentment and peace can best be acquired though personal wealth.	(5%)	(7%)	(15%)	(44%)	(29%)
15) The meaning and purpose of your life is fundamentally spiritual.	(43%)	(53%)	(1%)	(3%)	(1%)
16) The meaning and purpose of your life is to seek out pleasure and entertainment.	(1%)	(6%)	(5%)	(56%)	(31%)

**E2.** Regarding **income**, you consider your household, in comparison with the rest of Alberta households, to be (mark the best answer):

(0%) extremely high income

(2%) very high income

(16%) high income

(50%) average income

(24%) low income

(5%) very low income

(2%) extremely low income

**E3.** Do you ever worry about not having enough money in the future?

(53%) Yes (39%) No (8%) Don't know

**E4.** If Yes, would you say that you worry ...?

(15%) A lot (42%) A moderate amount (40%) Only a little (4%) Don't know

## **F. Personal Background**

**F1.** What is your age? (44.1 Av) years

**F2.** Sex: (39%) Male (61%) Female

**F3.** Marital Status:

(20%) Single, never married

(58%) Married, If you are married, is your spouse a Baha'i? (61%) Yes (39%) No

(19%) Divorced or separated

(2%) Widowed

**F4.** To which ethnic or cultural group(s) did your ancestors belong?  $n=86$

(34%) Canadian (42%) Persian (2%) North American Indian (22%) Other (specify):

**F5.** Are or were your parents Baha'is?

(47%) Yes, both (10%) Yes, mother only (1%) Yes, father only (41%) No, neither

**F6.** Are or were any of your grandparents Baha'is?

(25%) Yes, all (8%) Yes, one (1%) Yes, two (4%) Yes, three (4%) Yes, four (57%) No, none

**F7.** What certificates, diplomas or degrees have you ever obtained?

- (6%) None
- (13%) High school graduate
- (30%) Non-university certificate or diploma
- (35%) Bachelor's degree
- (11%) Master's degree
- (2%) Degree in medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine or optometry
- (2%) Doctorate

**F8.** How satisfied are you with your life in general?

- (35%) Very satisfied
- (56%) Somewhat satisfied
- (3%) Somewhat dissatisfied
- (3%) Very dissatisfied
- (2%) Don't know

**F9.** Do you consider yourself to be ...?

- (26%) Very religious
- (64%) Somewhat religious
- (6%) Not very religious
- (3%) Not at all religious
- (1%) Don't know

**F10.** What is your Postal Code? \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

**F11.** What is your best estimate of your total household income before taxes in 2001?

Please include the income of **all household members** from all sources in 2001.

- (4%) Less than \$10,000
- (12%) \$70,000 to \$79,999
- (8%) \$10,000 to \$19,999
- (8%) \$80,000 to \$89,000
- (12%) \$20,000 to \$29,999
- (5%) \$90,000 to \$99,999
- (14%) \$30,000 to \$39,999
- (5%) \$100,000 to \$109,999
- (8%) \$40,000 to \$49,999
- (3%) \$110,000 to \$119,999
- (11%) \$50,000 to \$59,999
- (5%) \$120,000 or over
- (5%) \$60,000 to \$69,999
- (0%) Please write income if over \$120,000

**Appendix D: Introductory Telephone Protocol****Baha'is of Alberta**

- 1) Hello, can I speak to \_\_\_\_\_ please? [name associated with phone number]
- 2) My name is Les Kuzyk.
- 3) I am a graduate university student involved in a University of Calgary study of the Baha'i community of Alberta. I got your number from the Calgary LSA (Local Spiritual Assembly).
- 4) How are you? [Listen to response]
- 5) I am wondering if you are a Baha'i? [If not, are there any Baha'is there?]
- 6) I am wondering if you would be willing or interested in having an anonymous survey questionnaire mailed or emailed to you in the next couple weeks that takes maybe 15 minutes to answer?
- 7) The survey is part of a scientific study on the topic of social justice in the Baha'i community. The results of the survey will be used to compare equality of men and women, as well as economic equity, between the Baha'i community and the Alberta community as a whole.
- 8) You are free to participate or not, I hope you don't feel any pressure to, but I would really appreciate it if you would have time to fill it out.
- 9) Can I mail or email you a survey questionnaire?
- 10) Do you have any questions?

Thank you for your time.



**Appendix E: Follow-up Telephone Protocol****Baha'is of Alberta**

- 1) Hello, can I speak to \_\_\_\_\_ please? [name associated with phone number]
- 2) My name is Les Kuzyk.
- 3) I am a graduate university student involved in a University of Calgary study of the Baha'i community of Alberta. I got your number from the Calgary LSA (Local Spiritual Assembly).
- 4) How are you? [Listen to response]
- 5) I spoke with you (or another person in your household). My records show that a Baha'i Survey of Alberta questionnaire was sent to you in the mail (or email), and I was wondering if you had received it?
- 6) (If not) Can I send you another one?
- 7) (If so) Oh, do you think you will have time to fill it out?
- 8) Do you have any questions?
- 9) Thank you for your time.

Mark the condition (**a** or **b**) of the response to each phone call on the sheet provided. The possible conditions are:

- a)** If an adult Baha'i answers, or is available to speak, follow the protocol above.
- b)** If there is a telephone answering machine, leave a message including steps **5** to **7** and **9** in the protocol above.

## Appendix F: Ethics Approval



UNIVERSITY OF  
CALGARY

MEMO

### CONJOINT FACULTIES RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

c/o Research Services  
Telephone: (403) 220-3782  
Fax: (403) 289-0693  
Email: plevans@ucalgary.ca

To: Mr. Les Kuzky  
Department of Anthropology

Date: August 23, 2002

From: Dr. Janice P. Dickin, Chair  
Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB)

Re: **Certification of Institutional Ethics Review: Wealth Equity and Gender Equality – Baha'is and Non-Baha'is in Alberta**

The above named research protocol has been granted ethical approval by the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board for the University of Calgary.

Enclosed is the original of the signed **Certification of Institutional Ethics Review**. Please make note of the conditions stated on the Certification. A copy has been sent to your supervisor as well as to the Chair of your Department/Faculty Research Ethics Committee. In the event the research is funded, you should notify the sponsor of the research and provide them with a copy for their records. The Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board will retain a copy of the clearance on your file.

In closing, let me take this opportunity to wish you the best of luck in your research endeavour.

Sincerely,

Patricia Evans  
Executive Secretary for:  
Janice Dickin, Ph.D., LL.B., Professor  
Faculty of Communication and Culture and  
Chair, Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Committee

Enclosures (2)

cc: Supervisor: Dr. D. Hatt, Department of Anthropology  
Chair, Department/Faculty Research Ethics Committee



UNIVERSITY OF  
CALGARY

### CERTIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS REVIEW

This is to certify that the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board at the University of Calgary has examined the following research proposal and found the proposed research involving human subjects to be in accordance with University of Calgary Guidelines and the Tri-Council Policy Statement on *Ethical Conduct in Research Using Human Subjects*. This form and accompanying letter constitute the Certification of Institutional Ethics Review.

**Applicant(s):** Les Kuzyk  
**Department/Faculty:** Department of Anthropology  
**Project Title:** Wealth Equity and Gender Equality: Baha'is and Non-Baha'is in Alberta  
**Sponsor (if applicable):**

**Restrictions:**

**This Certification is subject to the following conditions:**

1. Approval is granted only for the project and purposes described in the application.
2. Any modifications to the authorized protocol must be submitted to the Chair, Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board for approval.
3. A progress report must be submitted 12 months from the date of this Certification, and should provide the expected completion date for the project.
4. Written notification must be sent to the Board when the project is complete or terminated.

  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
**Chair**  
**Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board**

  
**Date:**

**Distribution:** (1) Applicant, (2) Supervisor (if applicable), (3) Chair, Department/Faculty Research Ethics Committee, (4) Sponsor, (5) Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (6) Research Services

09/00



UNIVERSITY OF  
CALGARY

MEMO

CONJOINT FACULTIES RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

c/o Research Services  
Telephone: (403) 220-3782  
Fax: (403) 289-0693  
Email: plevans@ucalgary.ca

To: Mr. Les Kuzyk  
Department of Anthropology

Date: October 2, 2002

From: Dr. Janice P. Dickin, Chair  
Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB)

Re: **Ethics Proposal Modification: Wealth Equity and Gender Equity – Baha'is and Non-Baha'is in Alberta**

The Certificate of Ethical Approval issued on August 22, 2002 continues in force and extends to the modifications set out in your email request for approval, dated 1 October 2002. Your request to expand your sample to include several communities surrounding Calgary using the procedures previously stipulated is approved, and you should attach a copy of the documentation you provided in order to request this amendment, together with a copy of this memorandum, to the original Ethics Certification in your files.

Sincerely,

Janice Dickin, Ph.D., LL.B., Professor  
Faculty of Communication and Culture and  
Chair, Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Committee

cc: Supervisor: Dr. D. Hatt, Department of Anthropology  
Chair, Faculty/Department Ethics Committee



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Date: Tuesday, October 1 2002 02:57 pm

From: <lwkuzyk@ucalgary.ca>

To: jdickin@ucalgary.ca

Reply-To: lwkuzyk@ucalgary.ca

Subject: Addendum to Approved Ethics Review

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Dear Dr. Dickin,

Re: Ethics Approval: Wealth Equity and Gender Equality - Baha'is and Non-Baha'is in Alberta

On speaking with my MA supervisor, Dr. Doyle Hatt in Anthropology, and further to the approval of my above titled research protocol, I would like to request approval to use the approved procedure with an additional population set. Response from Edmonton has been minimal, and with the view of obtaining the required number of returned survey questionnaires for this research, I would like to use the Calgary procedure for several communities surrounding Calgary in an attempt to expand the number of households being surveyed. These communities would include a minimum of Cochrane, Airdrie, Rocky View MD and High River.

The excerpt from the letter addressing CFREB's concerns for this ethics approval, which was approved by CFREB, reads:

"The Calgary LSA has agreed to the use of their contact list, provided it is used in the manner described in their letter below. Specifically, I would be allowed use of the phone list to place a phone call solely for the purpose of asking permission to mail out, or email, the questionnaire. Questionnaires will thus only be sent to those agreeing to receive them."

I hope this note includes sufficient information for your review and decision to extend this ethics approval.

Sincerely,  
 Les Kuzyk  
 MA Student

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 Hello Les.

[https://webmail.ucalgary.ca/index.php3?ts=1034260612&s\[mailbox\]=sent-mail&s\[imap\\_f...](https://webmail.ucalgary.ca/index.php3?ts=1034260612&s[mailbox]=sent-mail&s[imap_f...) 2002/10/10

TWIG [Mail]

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The guidance from the LSA regarding the Baha'i contact list is that it is acceptable for you to contact individuals at the telephone numbers on the list but when doing so the Assembly asks you to keep the following in mind:

1. Make it clearly understood exactly what the study is all about and what it is being used for.
2. Make it clearly understood from the outset that individuals are free to participate or not and that there is no pressure on them to participate.

A suggestion would be for you to contact those individuals in the community who know you and might therefore feel more comfortable participating in this study.

Should you require any further clarification please contact the Assembly prior to proceedings.

Loving Baha'i Greetings,

Diana Shaw, Secretary  
Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Calgary

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