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Baha'ism: History, Transfiguration, Doxa

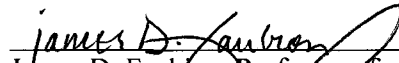
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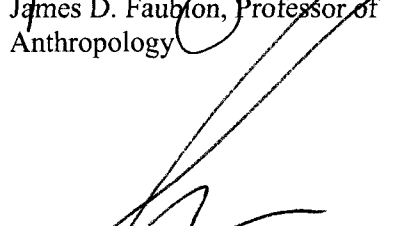
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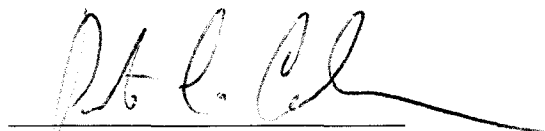
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ABSTRACT

Baha'ism: History, Transfiguration, Doxa

by

Hután Hejazi Martínez

Baha'ism originated in nineteenth-century Middle East. As this religious movement developed, it gained adherents outside the Middle East. In Spain, for example, it arrived in mid-twentieth century and gained more adherents. This dissertation explores Baha'i cosmology, discusses Baha'i millennialism and millenarianism, analyzes conversion narratives, and delineates the coordinates of religious *doxa*. This dissertation hopes to bring to light and contribute to the literature that explores continuity within change on the one hand, and transfigurations as a mode of subjectivation, on the other hand, through the example of this particular religious movement.

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Millennial Promises and Millenarian Expectations: A Preliminary Study of the
Development of Baha'i Charismatic Authorities and Institutions as Revised
Reenactments of Twelver Shi'ite Sacred History¹

This chapter attempts to provide an introduction to Baha'ism²—*Ā'īn-i Bahā'ī*, (officially, “the Bahá'í Faith”)—by bringing forth a schematic history of the religious traditions that preceded it. Its first section is a broad outline of a specific Islamic branch and its sundry transformations beginning as a minority of various partisan groups (*Shī'ā*) in early Islam, then as an Imāmī Shi'ism (*Imāmīyya*) during the Islamic formative period,

¹ Footnotes in this chapter are used to comment and explicate Baha'i semiotics. By doing this, I am attempting to address Baha'i metaphysics (as the union between ontology and epistemology) that mediate in Baha'ism and that, sometimes, form its own language ideology. Footnotes are also used for general commentary on sources or points being made.

² The use of “Baha'ism” for a Baha'i readership is, as Michael M. J. Fischer correctly points out, not the usual locution among English-speaking Baha'is.

The preference of English-speaking Baha'is is “the Baha'í Faith,” a locution I find [...] mirroring a Christian setting: viz., “the Christian Faith.” By contrast, to speak of “someone of Jewish faith” marks the speaker as a Christian, not a Jew; similarly, while “the Muslim faith” is grammatically correct, it is idiomatically odd; even less likely is “someone of the Hindu faith.” “Baha'ism” is the more secular usage. I will use the two forms interchangeably (Fischer 1990, 222n1).

Furthermore, “Baha'ism” may for many Western natives today, resonate as an intellectualized term if used by a “non-Baha'í,” or a somewhat intellectualized (therefore “unspiritual”) and somewhat trespassing locution if used by an adherent. It is, in a sense, as if one (outsider or not) were trespassing a sacred space. This is indirectly but meaningfully linked to the Baha'í belief that the supreme institution is divinely guided through a “conferred infallibility,” which will be further discussed in this chapter. At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, this locution was not that unusual and we begin seeing a functional reevaluation of the categories. For example, a cherished Baha'í Frenchman, Hippolyte Dreyfus, would be the author of a widely read introductory book, *Essai sur le baháisme: Son histoire, sa portée sociale*, which was also translated into English as *The Universal Religion: Baháism, its rise and social import*. It would be under Shoghi Effendi's religious leadership (1921-1957), the last individual charismatic figure, that scripture became standardized. After Shoghi Effendi's death in 1957, and a temporary interim government, in 1963 the divinely guided supreme institution—namely, the Universal House of Justice (UHJ)—would serve as a collective institutional charismatic leader. Hence, Baha'ism's “official” name, “the Bahá'í Faith,” is also a locution that is linked to Shoghi Effendi—as well as other central charismatic authorities—and its UHJ. The common locution, when trespassed, may not only be a linguistic trespassing, but an institutional and religious trespassing too. Thus resulting in a language ideology in which even the abbreviation of the Universal House of Justice, as “UHJ,” may be inappropriate to some adherents. The same is true in Spain, where “baha'ismo” also represents similar connotations and is far from being a preferred locution.

and its final transformation into Twelver Shi'ism (*Ithnā 'Asharīya*). It is out of Twelver Shi'ism that Baha'ism emerged. This chapter then outlines the development and conflicts of eighteenth and nineteenth-century theological schools within Twelver Shi'ism: the conflict between the Akhbārī and Uṣūlī schools (leading to the latter's victory and religious monopoly); and the ensuing conflict between the Uṣūlī school and yet another theological school, Shaykhism. This last theological school would be the main source of inspiration to what would eventually become a completely different rupture from Islam, Babism. At the same time, Shaykhism and Babism form Baha'ism's more immediate background and inspiration. Finally, the second section will be providing a succinct history of Baha'ism through its three main (and hierarchical) figures (Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi) and explicating their basic ethics and theological formulations. This chapter will proceed to its second section, an outline of Baha'ism's contemporary cosmology in light of its religious predecessors and historical influences discussed in the previous section.

Whereas the first section of this chapter engages with and is informed by recent (and not so recent) scholarship dedicated in researching the aforementioned religions and schools, its particular focus is nevertheless different. This chapter is indeed an introduction, but it is also an arrangement of academic literature and an application of certain concepts that, at first, might seem contradictory: i.e. "millenarianism" (or "chiliasm")³ and "millennialism;" "heresy" and "revisionism;" or "utopianism" and "conservatism." This chapter follows millenarianism and millennialism as discussed by

³ "Chiliasm" is a term I found widely used by a circle of historians of Twelver Shi'ism and Iranian studies. In this chapter, "chiliasm" and Faubion's "millenarianism" are synonyms.

James Faubion (2001), which proves very helpful in elucidating the overall sundry transformations and their subsequent establishment as religions. These two concepts are taken in relation to each other and not, to use a structuralist vocabulary, as “binary oppositions,” or “dichotomies” that are alienated from or unaffected by each other. According to Faubion, millenarianism denotes a system of belief in which the convert presumes that the eschatological period is the period of his own generation and that he is part of the faithful elect that will see the final days through to their end. In contrast, Faubion distinguishes millennialism to denote any system of belief in the finitude and sacred redemption of the historical process regardless of whether the believer presumes that the end of that process is at hand and that he is among the agencies of its redemption. The main argument of this chapter is that millennialism, a concept that must be linked to the postponement of (but not limited to) the end of history, ultimately results in the institutionalization and establishment of a religious tradition. This postponement sometimes leads to a religious project, or a “civilizing” mission, that intends to accomplish a perfect or utopian society which cannot be fulfilled: thus prolonging its religious vitality. On the other hand, millenarianism, which interprets the end of history as imminent, disregards institutionalization and is consequently less effective in establishing its own tradition. As Faubion observes, millenarianism “[designates] the performative mapping of the climatic phase of the millennialist narrative on to the *here and now*” (Faubion 2001, 193n24; my emphasis). It is in this sense that focusing on the relationship between millenarianism and millennialism we are able to see more clearly

the dynamism of religious phenomena and, as in the Babi and Baha'i cases, the creation of distinct religions.⁴

It is also the goal of this chapter to follow the different configurations that millenarianism and millennialism entail and how they are differently placed in various religious movements. I am borrowing from Said Arjomand the following definitions of apocalypticism, messianism and millennialism. According to him, apocalypticism “denotes the imminent expectation of the total transformation of the world” (Arjomand 2002, 106); messianism is “the expectation of the appearance of a divine savior;” and millennialism is “used in the literal sense of the expectation of a radical break with the present at the end of a 1,000-year age and, by extension, of the calculation of the time of the end and related numerological speculations.” As we are about to see, these definitions are configured differently depending on the religious movement and historical context.

As we begin our discussion on Babism, other conceptual tools such as heresy and revisionism—terms I am borrowing from Harold Bloom’s (1997) theory of poetic influence—and utopianism and conservatism—which I also borrow from Kenneth Burke’s (1967) rhetoric—will be introduced in order to help us understand the dynamism of religious phenomena and, more specifically, the emergence and the establishment of religious movements such as Baha’ism. In this manner, the present chapter attempts to

⁴ This relationship is aptly expressed by one of Sana’i’s verses quoted by Abbas Amanat (2002, 1):
A thousand years I can await your boon,
Whenever you come, is a moment too soon.

show how heresy and revisionism, utopianism and conservatism, also seemingly in opposition to each other, may be understood as concomitant developments.

Finally, as we begin the second section, it is my goal to show how Baha'i cosmology is an attempt to avoid past religious "mistakes"—or wrong turns of Islamic sacred history, as Twelver Shi'ites would have it. This world-wide religious tradition, however, has successfully established itself—partly due to the condition in which it emerged—in contexts different from that of Twelver Shi'ism.

I

Shi'ism, Imāmī Shi'ism and Twelver Shi'ism

The routinization of charisma in Islam, following the death of the prophet Muḥammad (632 CE), became the basis of a permanent disagreement for a minority of Muslims. This process of routinization began with the problem of religious authority. For instance, should a state be established after the prophet's death even though Islam was a personal relation of men and women to God? "On [Muḥammad's] death, each group of men that had accepted Islam could be expected to find its own way to obey God; unless, indeed, God sent other prophets to be followed, as might well be anticipated. The Qur'ān referred to numberless prophets and gave no clear indication that Muḥammad was to be the last of them (Hodgson 1977, 1:197; my brackets).

Whereas some of the Bedouin tribes that accepted Muḥammad thought of themselves to be relieved from their duty (be there new prophets or not) and refused to pay taxes (*zakāt*) to Medina, others waited to see what the Anṣār (Muslims from Medina)

and the Muhājirūn (Meccan Muslims who migrated to Medina with Muḥammad) would do since the Quraysh [Muḥammad's tribe] remained too powerful of a force to dismiss (Hodgson 1977, 1:197). Initially, the most obvious solutions to the crisis of authority were suggested: the Anṣār and the Muhājirūn would choose their own leaders. However, a more ambitious and convincing undertaking that regarded the significance of Islam and the Muslim community (*ummah*) quite differently, overruled the previous propositions.

Islam was not merely a matter of each individual's obeying God; it was a compact in which all Muslims were bound to each other as well. This compact did not cease with the Prophet's death; the pattern of life he had instituted could be continued under the guidance of those who had been closest to him, the earliest Muslims. Any who separated from the core of the Muslims at Medina were in fact backing out of Islam itself; they were traitors to the cause of God for which Muḥammad and his followers had so long been fighting. That cause was still to be fought for, and demanded a single chief to whom all would be loyal (Hodgson 1977, 1:197-198).

Abū-Bakr (d. 634), Muḥammad's representative (*khalīfah*) or caliph, who was also the father-in-law of the prophet, and 'Umar (d. 644), who was at first also known by that term but later chose the title of commander of the faithful (*amīr al-mu'minīn*), are thought to be the chief promoters of the venture. They barged in as the Anṣār leaders were assembled and called for the unity of the two cities. 'Umar pledged his loyalty to Abū-Bakr and the Anṣār and the Quraysh followed their example (Hodgson 1977, 1:198). After Abu-Bakr's and 'Umar's reign, 'Uthmān's (d. 656) came along. Thus began what

would start as a loose association in the Ḥijāz to develop into an immense Islamic expansion administering a complex agrarian empire through the rule of a caliphate state that initially rested upon pious prestige (Hodgson 1977, 1:187). Nevertheless, a minority of the community who revolved around ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (599-661), the cousin and son-in-law of Muḥammad, believed that he was the one to have taken the position of power ever since the prophet’s death, as he was thought to be divinely appointed and endowed with supernatural powers to reign the community. Although it is difficult to “suppose that anyone thought of ‘Alī as the logical candidate at the death of the Prophet” (Hodgson 1955, 2), we must underscore that even when ‘Alī was neglected “under extraordinary circumstances[...] many of the most prominent of Muḥammad’s companions opposed ‘Alī’s rule, and other remained distinctly neutral.” This early rejection would nonetheless show the vitality of his minority of supporters (“the partisans of ‘Alī,” or his *shi‘a*).

The succession of religious leadership for the majority of Muslims (the *Jamā‘ al-Sunnīs* or Sunnis) also underwent a meaningful transformation at this early stage. It began as an urgent remedy to resolve for religious unity and bring together the administrative, political and religious structures under a single authority that depended upon pious prestige. When ‘Umar (a pious son-in-law and early follower of Muḥammad) died, a panel of Anṣār leaders chose the weakest contender, ‘Uthmān, in their discrepancies and jealousies (Hodgson 1977, 1:212). ‘Uthmān’s reign, in turn, was viewed by rival groups for its corruption and nepotism. Although he was among the first converts, he was also a member of the Banū Umayyah, a family that opposed Muḥammad under the leadership of Abū-Sufyān. His nepotism would begin to be resisted by the Anṣār families and the garrison towns began complaining about the financial system and

the distribution of the revenues (Hodgson 1977, 1:213). In 656, as the general dissatisfaction culminated in the murder of 'Uthmān by a group of Arab soldiers who were beguiled and arose in mutiny, the first *fitnah* (“temptation” or “trials”) began as a five-year period of civil war in which the control of the community and extensive territories were at stake (Hodgson 1977, 1:213-214). It was at this time that 'Alī was chosen by the Anṣār and the mutineers as the new leader. His leadership, even if in later history would be reckoned among the first four caliphs by Sunnis, was short lived.

Hated by the Khārijites, resisted by the Syrians and Mu'āwiyah's party, unloved by the Ḥijāzī supporters of Zubayr, abandoned by the neutrals of Adhruḥ, and not well supported even by the Kūfans to whom he could at least guarantee the presence of their treasure—nonetheless, 'Alī still had a zealous personal party (Hodgson 1955, 2).

'Alī was murdered by a faction (the Khārijīs, meaning “seceders” or “rebels”) that did not recognize neither his authority nor judgment (Hodgson 1977, 1:216). From here on the caliphs that followed, such as Mu'āwiyah (d. 680), would not enjoy the pious prestige of his predecessors although the coexistence of a majority that supported the caliphate and a minority of various groups of 'Alīd loyalists developed side by side. In fact, as Mu'āwiyah's reign (and thus the Umayyad caliphate) began to be established, “the caliphal state stood now as a more mundane imperial power, no longer based directly on Islam” (Hodgson 1977, 1:218). The development of these contending parties, between Shi'ites and the Umayyad caliphate, would turn out to be a tense period since the former groups considered the leadership under the caliphs illegitimate. This tension would not

cease until the 'Alid-'Abbasid coalition successfully overthrew the Umayyad caliphate during the mid-eighth century: right at the dawn of the formative period of Imāmī Shi'ism which begins in the mid-eighth century and ends in the mid-tenth century.

It is thus not without historical foundation that the *Shi'ā* (or Shi'ite) contemporaries of 'Alī would regard with hostility the majority of Islam since, even by the end of 'Alī's life, he seemed to have been neglected (for one reason or another) by the rest of Islam. Shi'ite hostility began at the early stages of routinization as it viewed its sacred history to have been usurped. This wrong turn would be corrected by the Mahdi (the "rightly guided one"), claimed by many ever since the death of Muḥammad as a messianic and millenarian title. Every time an Imam died, a crisis regarding the successor would arise and, naturally, different groups or sects would proliferate. For instance, although most 'Alīd loyalists considered Ḥasan, one of 'Alī's sons, to be the second Imam, some believed, as in the case of the Kaysānīya, that Muḥammad ibn al-Hanafiyya (d. 700-701), also another son of 'Alī, was the true heir of the sacred line and the Mahdi. Ever since, many Shi'ite groups believed in the imminence of the Mahdi and, as the Kaysānīya interpretation and expectation would have it, these groups may be considered millenarian. The imminence of the Mahdi—or the Qa'im, as it would be eventually referred to—would experience an important change during the formative period. It is in this period that we begin seeing a slow but meaningful shift from millenarianism to millennialism. In fact, the various groupings of Shi'ite millenarians would not really begin to unify into an actual sect until they become millennialists, as the transformation of Shi'ism into Imāmī Shi'ism seems to suggest.

To be sure, in Imāmī Shi‘ism (and later in Twelver Shi‘ism) the doctrine of occultation (*ghayba*) and its culmination in the parousia (*zuhūr*) of the Mahdi, had originated in early Shi‘ism under the Kaysāniya sect who “‘hoped for a revolution (*dawla*) that would culminate in the Resurrection before the Hour” (Arjomand 1996, 492)

When Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya died in the year 700, the Kaysaniyya maintained that he was in concealment or occultation in the Radwa mountains and would return as the Mahdi and the Qa‘im. When Muhammad’s son Abu Hashi in turn died childless in 717-18, some of the Kaysaniyya maintained that he was the Mahdi and was alive in concealment in the Radwa mountains. The idea of occultation was among the cluster of Kaysani beliefs, which included *raj‘a* (return of the dead) and *badā‘* (God’s change of mind), that entered Imami Shi‘ism (Arjomand 1996, 492-493).

As the imminence of the Mahdi’s revolution was postponed during the formative period, the consolidation of Imāmī Shi‘ism as the unification of different Shi‘ite groups becomes apparent.

The transformation of millenarian Shi‘ism into millennial Imāmī Shi‘ism was led by two crucial figures of sacred lineage, Muḥammad al-Baqir (d. 733) and Ja‘far al-Sadiq (d. 765), both of whom would later be reckoned as the fifth and sixth Imams. This transformation was an “‘impressive feat of unifying sundry pro-‘Alid groups into the Imami sect” (Arjomand 1996, 491). The leadership of the latter, especially, compared

with the revolutionary Kaysānīya, is characterized by his “peaceableness” (Hodgson 1955, 9n51), and the formation into an Imāmī Shi‘ite sect seems to be premised by such political aloofness (Arjomand 1996). But while that might be the case, we may also attribute this political shift to the messianic and apocalyptic postponement that this brand of millennialism entails. As it was mentioned earlier, according to Faubion, millenarianism “[designates] the performative mapping of the climatic phase of the millennialist narrative on to the here and now” (Faubion 2001, 193n24). During the formative period, the “here and now” is postponed: “[l]ike his father, Muhammad al-Baqir, Ja‘far denied that he was the Qa‘im and emphasized that the latter’s rising was not imminent” (Arjomand 1996, 493). Thus, while the historical and political circumstances surrounding the formation of the sundry Shi‘ites (or ‘Alī loyalists) into the more unified sect of Imāmī Shi‘ism is relevant, we may also add that a change towards a millennialist ethos was also concomitant. At this point, one may ask, how or by what principles was this accomplished? Since the Mahdi was no longer imminent and a final denouement had to be postponed, how was this attained?

It is under Ja‘far al-Šādiq’s leadership, more importantly, that the millennial transformation took place as three crucial principles were incorporated: the doctrine of *nass* (succession by designation); *ilm* or authoritative gnosis; and a formal disciplining in the shape of a vigorous dialogue on contemporary problems (Hodgson 1955, 8-13). The promulgation and legitimization of the doctrine of *nass* was elaborated on the nature of the Imams as privileged gnostic recipients. “By virtue of their ‘gnosis’ and their sacred lineage, they are the true interpreters of the scripture and the Traditions, and also, in effect, the perpetual receivers after Muḥammad of divine inspiration” (Amanat 2005, 10).

In addition to the first two principles, the imamate was invigorated as “elements of a protective discipline were being developed which ultimately accommodated the various speculations within the flexible limits of the conventional Islam of the time” (Hodgson 1955, 13). The three principles delineated by Marshall Hodgson do not only seem to agree with Faubion’s formulation of millennialism, but could also be understood as the structure of this particular form of millennialism as opposed to others that will be later discussed.

Imāmī Shi‘ism would also split in different groups as the succession of the Imams went along. Among the most significant for our purposes are the Ismā‘īlīs, who believe the imamate ended when Ja‘far al-Šādiq designated his son Ismā‘īl as the next Imam. Ismā‘īl, however, predeceased his father and finally, Mūsa al-Kāzim, another son of Ja‘far al-Šādiq, who was imprisoned at the time, became the seventh Imam. Those who believed that with Ismā‘īl the sacred line ended, were known as Ismā‘īlīs and those who believed the sacred line continued with Mūsa, and five other imams, would be known as *Ithnā ‘Asharīya* or Twelver Shi‘ites. The millennialism is both present in these two sects as the end of history, or the Day of Judgment, is postponed by the doctrine of occultation (*ghayba*): a doctrine that is also traceable as an idea of the Kaysānīya sect (Arjomand 1996, 492). We should keep in mind that the doctrine of occultation would not be popular among the Imāmī Shi‘ites until the seventh century, and it would not be assimilated into the belief system for another century (Amanat 2005, 10).

Since the middle of the eighth century, there would not be any significant changes on Imāmī Shi‘ite doctrine until the mid-tenth century. Even after the death of the

eleventh Imam, Ḥasan al-‘Askarī (d. 874), around one hundred years would pass to see a major change in Imāmī Shi‘ite tenets. This major addition would appear in the form of a doctrine:

[I]t is the belief that there are 12 Imāms, the last of whom remains in a state of concealment (*ghayba*) until his ultimate return as Mahdī, or Qā‘im. This *ghayba* is divided into two periods: a shorter, ‘lesser’ *ghayba* (*al-ghayba al-ṣuḡhrā*), lasting from [874] to [941], during which the Imām was represented on earth by four successive safirs; and a longer, ‘greater’ *ghayba* (*al-ghayba al-kubrā*), whose duration is known only to God. It is this doctrine which distinguishes Twelver Shi‘ism from the earlier Imāmiyya [Imāmī Shi‘ism] (Kholberg 1976, 521; my brackets).

Although the first references to a belief in a sacred lineage of twelve Imams are found in heresiographical literature, the major works that attempted to prove the plausibility of the doctrine of the twelve Imams would not appear until the mid-tenth century. Even the use of the term “Twelver Shi‘ism” (“*Ithnā ‘Ashariyyā*”) as such, would not make its first appearance until around 1000 CE (Kohlberg 1976, 521n2). Only at the end of the formative period Twelver Shi‘ism would begin to systematically make its case through early authors and scholars—closely followed by future generations—by relying on the following four main methods: arguments from the Qur‘ān; arguments from Shi‘i reports; arguments from Sunnī reports; and arguments from Judeo-Christian traditions (Kohlberg 1976, 524-528). It is by means of these four methods that we shall see later, in Baha‘ism, the same kind of arguments. It should be underscored, however, that even the belief of

two occultations did not originate from Twelver Shi'ism. "After the death of Ḥasan al-Askarī, one group among his followers claimed that he had not died but had merely disappeared, that he would reappear and be recognized, only to disappear again before finally emerging as the Qā'im. That group based its claim on traditions [reports] that the Qā'im would disappear twice" (Kohlberg 1976, 531; my brackets).

According to Twelver Shi'ism, Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Askarī, also referred to as the Hidden Imam (*imām-i ghā'ib*), went into lesser occultation (circa 873-874). During his lesser occultation, the Imam communicated through the guidance of "four deputies" or four successive individuals referred to as "gates" or *Bābs* (*al-abwab al-arba'a*). After the leadership of these four deputies or *Bābs*, the twelfth Imam went into greater occultation (circa 940-941) and the return of the Imam was thus indefinitely postponed. Although the reasons for his disappearance at this particular moment in history are difficult to know, several points may be adduced with some certainty: firstly, intolerable persecutions of Twelver Shi'ites by the 'Abbāsīd caliphate; secondly, these persecutions caused despondency among Imāmī Shi'ites who did not return to radical means for gaining ascendancy; thirdly, the elimination of single authority opened the way for a freer exchange of thoughts and ideas (Kohlberg 1976, 533). "For these and possibly other reasons, the living and present Imām had to give way to a hidden being, on whom all the messianic hopes and yearnings of a long-suffering minority could be focused" (Kohlberg 1976, 533-534). Thus, one may describe the transition from Imāmī Shi'ism to Twelver Shi'ism as an easy and a relatively smooth modification (Kohlberg 1976, 534).

The indefinite postponement of the return of the Hidden Imam led to the formulation of a feasible theory of occultation by Shi'ite scholars through which various current eschatological themes were put to use. At this point we see a further doctrinal process from millenarianism to millennialism:

[I]n contrast to the advocates of the impending *Zuhūr* [paraousia or advent], [Shi'ite scholars] tended to stress the apocalyptic preconditions essential to the release from suffering and the occurrence of the moment of deliverance. The Signs of the Hour came to occupy a large portion of the books of Occultation as more insurmountable requisites were placed in the way of the Imam's return. Speculations on the time of the Advent of the Imam were repudiated, and various evidence was presented to prove the longevity of the Imam in his state of nonterrestrial existence" (Amanat 2005, 11; my brackets).

We also need to take into consideration that during the formative period of Islam, in the "Perso-Mesopotamian melting pot [...] the Mahdi of Muslim eschatology acquired many features of his Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian predecessors" (Amanat 2005, 2). This process adopted prophecies of the Christian Second Coming, and the identification of the Mahdi with Jesus (*'Īsā*), among others. Messianic interpretations on key theological issues would eventually become the source of emerging esoteric schools of thought, such as Shaykhism in the nineteenth century (Amanat 2005, 2-18). Although, according to mainstream Twelver Shi'ism, the great occultation continues to the present day, while the Imam is still in control of the affairs of men and remains to be the Lord of the Age (*sāhib*

az-zamān). Due partly to the Şafawid dynasty (1503-1722), today most of the Twelver Shi'ite population is found in Iran and the region of the 'Atabāt, in Southern Iraq, which also form an important part of this Islamic branch.

The Akhbārī, Uşūlī and Shaykhī Schools

Almost a century after the fall of the Şafawid dynasty in 1722, and enduring long periods of political and social unrest, Iran emerged in the nineteenth century with two complimentary institutions: the Qajar dynasty (1785-1925) of Turkish origins and the consolidated Shi'ite clerical class or *'ulama* (Amanat 2005, 33). At this point, the development between a secular and a religious power was taking place. Whereas the first consolidated its power in urban centers by military and administrative presence, the second "strengthened their stand by exerting a religious authority that embraced a variety of judicial, educational, and executive functions" (Amanat 2005, 33). As Iran approached the nineteenth century, however, the Qajar presence began to recede presumably because of a relative sense of security. This was beneficial for the *'ulama* and by the nineteenth century it became a powerful urban force that held most of the religious monopoly.

The eighteenth century rendered victorious the school of jurisprudence known as the *Uşūlīya* or Uşūlīsm (*uşūl al-fiqh* "principles of jurisprudence") against its rival, the Akhbārī school, which emphasized not only scripture but also reports or traditions (*akhbār*): a corpus that is barely different from other reports or *aḥādīth* (Amanat 2005, 34-47; 35n2). The Akhbārī would consider the akhbār corpus as the only source for juristic investigation (Amanat 2005, 35). Although there is plenty of literature treating

the Akhbārī-Uṣūlī conflict (i.e. Cole 1985; Newman 1992), suffice it to say that “Uṣūlism, in its essence, facilitates the intervention of the religious authority in the affairs of the world, and hence provided a new outlook through which the ‘ulama justified their increasingly noticeable presence in the society” (Amanat 2005, 34). The ‘ulama’s presence would be noticeable throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century under different political transformations—from the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911, to Pahlavi Iran during the 1960s and 1970s (Fischer 1990). It should be underscored that Uṣūlism is the ideological precursor of the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979. This revolution established the controversial position of a “guardian jurist” (*wāḥī-yi faqih*), the supreme leader of the Iranian Republic. As Uṣūlism has consolidated power by means of the Islamic Revolution, some of the current political oppositions continue to challenge its legitimacy to this day by calling, for example, for “Islamic Protestantism” (Amanat 2007, 120-136).⁵ Overall, both of these schools seem to be millennialists as they do not particularly expect any return of the Mahdi.

Back to the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, another school also competed with the Uṣūlīs, Shaykhism. This school also emerged when European presence in the region became noticeable and Twelver Shi‘ism “in the early nineteenth century was in a state of flux” (MacEoin 1990, 326). Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā’ī (1756-1825) is thought to be the “founder” of this school although it is unlikely that he intended it to become a theological school (Corbin 1993). It would not be until the second and appointed religious leader, Sayyid Kāzīm Rashtī (1793-1844)—an appointment or succession in the

⁵ Regarding the *wāḥī-yi faqih* (or *velayat-e faqih*), see also Michael M. J. Fischer’s *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (1980, 151-155).

usual Shi‘ite fashion—that it became considered an esoteric theological school. In other words, Aḥsā’ī’s doctrines took the form of a school by the time Rashtī (Aḥsā’ī’s chief student) assumed leadership. With Aḥsā’ī, “Shi‘ism generated a synthesis essential for the later formation of the Babi thought” (Amanat 2005, 48). Shaykhism is in fact considered:

...the final outcome of a fusion of three major trends in post-Safavid Shi‘ism: (1) the Ṣadrā’ī theosophic school of Isfahan, which itself benefited from the theoretical Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabī, as well as the illuminist theosophy of Suhrawardī; (2) the Akhbārī Traditionist school of Bahrain, which traced its chain of transmission to the early narrators of ḥadīth and (3) the diffuse Gnosticism that was strongly influenced by crypto-Ismā‘īlī ideas as well as other heterodoxies of southern and southwestern Iran (Amanat 2005, 48).

Since Aḥsā’ī’s doctrines, this movement was gravid with particular millenarian expectations that became emphasized by the time Rashtī took control: the advent (*zuhūr*) of the promised one (*Mahdi*) seemed to be near and Rashtī—whose position he believed to be higher than that of the four deputies or bābs mentioned earlier, and viewed himself to be a “preliminary gate to the next bāb who would make his stand public” (Amanat 2005, 172)—refused to appoint a new permanent religious leader.

In the final years of his life, Rashtī tried to preserve unity within the school. Advising his students to guard their “unity and integrity” in the event of his death, he appointed Mullā Ḥasan Gauhar as temporary

caretaker head, at the same time affirming that the Advent of the Promised One was at hand. There is little reason to doubt the veracity of Qazvīn's account of a conversation between Rashtī and his followers: "Then someone asked, 'After you, with whom should we take refuge?' He [Sayyid Kāzīm] replied, 'With none, for it is not permitted. Stay for a few days around Mullā Ḥasan Gauhar, God shall not leave you in darkness. The truth is bound to appear.' Then he confirmed that Mullā Ḥasan's leadership would not exceed forty-five days, and at the end of that period he [the Promised One] would appear to enlighten the world with the eternal beauty of his light" (Amanat 2005, 154; brackets in original).

Following Rashtī's death in early 1844 several schisms appeared among the Shaykhīs and, by the end of that same year, one can point out three main divisions: a Kermānī branch under Mullā Karīm Khān Kermānī's leadership; a Tabrīzī branch under several leaderships; and a geographically diffused Babi branch under the Bab's leadership (MacEoin 1990, 325).

As the Ismaīlī (Hodgson 1977, 1:376-384) and Sufī millenarians (Amanat 2005, 71-83) show, the schisms brought forth by esoteric movements are nothing new in Shi'ite tradition in general and Twelver Shi'ism in particular. Indeed, there are other revivalisms, although not necessarily millenarian, of Sunni origins that have existed and do exist: the eighteenth-century Wahhabiyya in Arabia (Shi'ism's archenemy), movements led by Sayyid Ahmad Sirhindi in the seventeenth century, Rashid Rida in the twentieth century, the Muslim Brothers of Egypt, and Salafiyya movements which yearn

for the return of a glorious Islamic past of India and the Arab world, are some of the examples (Amanat 2005, xi). What, one may ask, would be so different in the Babi case apart from being a revivalist and revisionary movement with millenarian expectations?

Babism: Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī, the Bab

According to Hodgson, Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī (1819-1850) was “[a] young man of great theological and spiritual gifts [...] [who] won considerable following among [the Shaykhīs] and in the tradesmen classes of the town population generally”; he “proclaimed [...] a new and quite liberal Sharī‘ah, a new set of symbolisms to replace those of Shī‘ī Islam, and the expectation of a new prophetic dispensation of social justice soon to be realized among his followers”; and declared to be the gate (*bāb*), “the special spokesman of the Hidden Imam” (Hodgson 1977, 3:305). ‘Alī Muḥammad would thus be known by the title of the Bab, the mediator in Twelver Shi‘ism between the Hidden Imam and his followers—hence the eponym Babism. However, his religious mission was revealed gradually and his prophetic revelation moved from a millenarian revisionary movement that called for a return to “pure religion” (*al-dīn al-khalīṣ*) (Amanat 2005, xi) to a millenarian and heretical position in relation to Twelver Shi‘ism and Islam. To that effect, although Hodgson’s description is generally correct, we must look at this development more closely for our purposes. As we are about to see, it is due to the development of Babism from a revisionary stance into a heretical position that Amanat observes the uniqueness and importance of this religious movement: “[n]o other movement made such a clear and conscious break with Islam, or was potentially in a position to do so, at least in modern Islamic times” (Amanat 2005, xii).

Harold Bloom's (1997) conceptualization of revisionism and heresy in poetic influence helps elucidating the revisionary elements in Shi'ism and Babism that result in millenarian expectations. According to Bloom, "[t]he ancestor of revisionism is heresy, but heresy tended to change received doctrine by an alteration of balances, rather than by what could be called creative correction, the more particular mark of modern revisionism. Heresy resulted, generally, from a change in emphasis, while revisionism follows received doctrine along to a certain point, and then deviates, insisting that a wrong direction was taken at just that point, and no other" (Bloom 1997, 29). As we have mentioned earlier, Shi'ism is revisionary in that it interprets sacred history to have taken a regrettable wrong turn. In contrast to Shi'ism, we have the Bab's case in which revisionism is the ancestor of heresy as his mission gradually moved from revisionism to heretical claims that changed and abrogated the previous tradition of Islam. At first, the Bab called for a return to pure religion as opposed to the corrupt way of the *mujtahids* (practitioners of religious law): a concept very similar to the *Salafi* call for breaking from Sunni theological schools and returning to early Islam (Amanat 2005, xi). Here, the conceptual tools Kenneth Burke (1969) provides to think through ideologies help us elucidate this point too. According to Burke, there are utopian and conservative ideologies: the first denote a progressive and futuristic outlook; the second attempt to either preserve a status quo, or re-establish a previous social order. It is in these terms also that Babism began as a conservative ideology and then developed into the utopian counterpart.

Returning to the figure of 'Alī Muḥammad the Bab, we shall provide a very schematic biography in order to understand his own inclinations and his relationship to

the Shaykhi school before his proclamation, and the general ethos, that led to the plausibility of his religious claims. He was born on October 20, 1819 in Shiraz, Iran, from a family that lived there for generations, and he was the only son of a small merchant in the local bazaar. He was also a *sayyid* (a descendant of the House of Muḥammad according to Shi‘ism) and, at least for six generations, his ancestors were sayyids from Shiraz. It would later be claimed that his ancestry is traced back to Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī, the fourth Imam according to Twelver Shi‘ism. ‘Alī Muḥammad’s ancestry to Ḥusayn’s sacred lineage would prove to be meaningful as this particular Imam exemplifies in Twelver Shi‘ism the idea of martyrdom—i.e. suffering and sacrifice—and is commemorated every year during ‘Ashura’ on the tenth of Muharram (Cook 2007, 45-73). Undoubtedly, his lineage as sayyid would eventually help the credibility of his prophetic claims. The Bab’s father died when he was still a child and his mother’s family was from a renowned sayyid family from Shiraz as well. Whereas his father was a local trader, on his mother’s side they were big merchants (*tujjār*) who engaged in retail trade. The combination of retail trading and strong religious connections made social mobility accessible and ‘Alī Muḥammad’s childhood, education and his occupation in trade are a good example of the norms and values of these two traditions (Amanat 2005, 110-111).

Information about ‘Alī Muḥammad’s childhood is scarce apart from anecdotes regarding his character. He attended the Qur’ānic school (*maktab*) as most children of the urban middle-class did. His teacher, Shaykh Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (Shaykh ‘Ābid) was a simple schoolmaster and a follower of the Shaykhī school, as ‘Alī Muḥammad’s family was too (Amanat 2005, 111-113). Regarding ‘Alī Muḥammad’s formal education, one of his essential claims is that of “unlearned knowledge”—a point of disagreement between

his supporters and opponents. Although “[i]t is fairly clear that during his years in the maktab between ages five and ten, he hardly received a solid and regular education, even in comparison with the standard of his own classmates”, he is noted to be an unusually intelligent child according to different sources (Amanat 2005, 114). His teacher complained about the child’s worries with his imaginary worlds, which seems to be a sign of the difficulties the child had in dealing with a system which he would later call “archaic, monotonous and cruel” (Amanat 2005, 114)—a view also held even by Mullās, almost a century later, as is the case of Āqā Najafī Qūchanī who, according to Michael Fischer, “was worried by a clerical world archaic and decayed in knowledge and understanding, rife with false piety and with action based on facile theology or on no moral reasoning whatsoever” (Fischer 1980a, 87). ‘Alī Muḥammad’s disillusion with education seemed to have begun at that early stage as in the Persian *Bayān* condones the disciplining and flogging of children before the age of five. Some anecdotal but meaningful accounts relate that his teacher demanded he memorize a Qur’ānic verse “He is the Deliverer, the All-Knowing” (Qur’ān 34:25), but he was enraged as his student insisted in knowing the meaning. The stress upon knowing the meaning of scripture instead of mere memorization may be found in Babism and Baha’ism (Fischer 1980b). “In the early stages of his intellectual development, however, his thirst for learning seems to have been satisfied by a growing interest in esoteric and occult sciences as well as other, less-studied fields such as mathematics and astrology” (Amanat 2005, 118).

As ‘Alī Muḥammad grew older, becoming a merchant did not only earn him a livelihood but also served to pay more emphasis on moral standards which he felt to be declining: “standards that were for him idealized in the words and deeds of the Prophet

and Imams” (Amanat 2005, 128). In hagiographical accounts, his professional honesty and lack of formal schooling are complemented by other exceptional features. His “[a]scetism, devotion, revealing dreams, and prophetic remarks helped to create a picture of innocence and holiness, which more than any intellectual faculty led his followers to believe that the Bab’s mission was of a divine nature” (Amanat 2005, 131). Somewhere between 1840-1841 ‘Alī Muḥammad, who had been deeply taken by esoteric and ascetic practices and longed to visit the holy Shi’ite shrines in Iraq and attend the teaching circles of Rashtī, closed his commercial accounts after five years of trade in Būshihir (southeast of Iran) and left for the ‘Atabāt (Amanat 2005, 136). It seems that the year he spent in the ‘Atabāt “was sufficient to acquaint [him] with the Shaykhis, but hardly to imbue in him a deep sense of affiliation to the Shaykhi school” (Amanat 2005, 146). His family, anxious and displeased by ‘Alī Muḥammad’s sudden departure, pressured him to return to Shiraz, where he was married at the age of twenty three probably to persuade him against returning to the ‘Atabāt (Amanat 2005, 146-147). The two years prior to 1844, when he announced his religious mission, were of relative calm (Amanat 2005, 147). It should be said, however, that his ethics, austerity and singularity won him a reputation and local recognition as he became known as *Sayyid-i Zikr*—meaning “praying Sayyid” or “Sayyid of evocations” which, according to Amanat, “may suggest a magical mediatory connotation” Amanat (2005, 147n202)—and as *majzūb* (“ecstatic”)—a term “conferred on an unorthodox mystic” (Amanat 2005, 148n203).

At this point, we find the future charismatic authority as a spiritual virtuoso accepted within the exoteric religious tradition. He is neither a revisionist nor a heretic and may be easily accepted by Muslim terms like *Sayyid-i Zikr* or *majzūb*. In fact,

Amanat notes two definitions of *majzūb*. The first, according to ‘Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī, “‘is designated by God, and purified by the water of sanctity, and thus without suffering or striving or hardship could reach the highest spiritual positions’” (Amanat 2005, 148n203). The second definition is by Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Lāhijī for whom *majzūb-i muṭlaq* is “as the one who, after the stage of annihilation, ‘totally shuns reason and remains in the state of intoxication and unconsciousness... and there is no obligation for them since obligation applies to reason and they are divine insanes. And one cannot deny these people nor follow them’” (Amanat 2005, 148n203; ellipsis in the original). At this stage, the years immediately preceding 1844, we can consider ‘Alī Muḥammad as part of his religious tradition. During this period prior to ‘Alī Muḥammad’s proclamation, “[t]he nature of this mission and his own spiritual status remained unclear to him for some time” (Amanat 2005, 149). Although, it should be pointed out that, about a year before his declaration to his first adherent, he seemed to have confided his sincere beliefs to his family, “implying that he was a deputy of the Imam, or even the Lord of the Command (*Ṣāhib al-Amr*) himself” (Amanat 2005, 149).

In mid-May 1844, in Shiraz, after Rashtī’s death earlier that same year and amidst intensified millenarian expectations, Sayyid ‘Alī Muḥammad the Bab declared his religious mission to Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrū’ī, a prominent Shaykhi student of humble origins who is characterized by some sources as “unrelaxing vigilance” and “singleness of mind” (Amanat 2005, 170). After a short period of denying, at first, ‘Alī Muḥammad’s religious mission, and then gradually admitting the claims of the charismatic authority, Mullā Ḥusayn is thought to be the first Babi adherent and was later given the title of *Bāb al-Bāb* (“gate of the gate”). His adherence is thought to exemplify

that of others too since, “[a]t least at this early stage, recognition was less a commitment to a set of ideas and beliefs than devotion to the person of the Bab as a charismatic saint” (Amanat 2005, 173). This kind of adherence reinforces Michael Fischer’s point in terms of the prophet figure. The Babi (and Baha’i) stress on the prophet figure is a feature that is inherited from its Muslim context.

Take the prophet figure itself: neither Zoroastrianism nor Judaism left to themselves display much interest in their prophet figures. Legendry exists, but it exists with only anecdotal, or at most ad hoc didactic weight, not with any theological weight; it is only within a Muslim environment that each of these traditions has been forced to elaborate a single and central prophet (Fischer 1990, 239).

This feature found in Babism will also be crucial to the development of Baha’ism since, as we will see, it is built upon successive prophet figures—very similar to the designation among the Imams—in connection to a divinely guided supreme institution.

In addition to being a spiritual virtuoso, two of ‘Alī Muḥammad’s claims seemed to have led to Mullā Ḥusayn’s, and later other Shaykhis’, adherence. Firstly, he emphasized on Rashtī’s prophecies (Amanat 2005, 171); and secondly, his writing and “efficiency in producing and compiling numerous works” (Amanat 2005, 172). Regarding the former, ‘Alī Muḥammad viewed himself as neither the Perfect Shi’a nor another successor to Rashtī: his position was closer to a prophetic status (Amanat 2005, 171). Regarding the latter, according to Amanat,

This was the most positive proof, which he consistently presented as his incontrovertible miracle. No doubt this was postulated in direct reference to the saying in the Qur'ān that the Book that is “sent down” to the Prophet is the “sign” from God. First instances of the Bab’s unusual speed in uttering verses occurred in reply to some questions raised in a short tract that Mullā Ḥusayn had written on some Shaykhi topics [...] The speed with which he “revealed verses” particularly impressed Mullā Ḥusayn, who recalled: “Not for one moment did he interrupt the flow of the verses that streamed from his pen.” On another occasion Mullā Ḥusayn observed with “amazement” the commentary that the Bab wrote on the well-known ḥadīth al-Jāriya, recalling that Rashtī used to attribute the compilation of the commentary on this ḥadīth to the Lord of the Command [...] To Mullā Ḥusayn and the other early Babis, these works of the Bab were valued not as examples of conventional exegesis but because of their novelty, their admonitory style, and their messianic content (Amanat 2005, 172).

After Mullā Ḥusayn’s adherence, seventeen others followed the claims of ‘Alī Muḥammad the Bab. This first group, comprised of nineteen members including the Bab, was eventually known as *Ḥurūf-i Ḥayy* (“letters of the living”). This Babi nucleus, to use Amanat’s description, would become a form of a collective leadership that functioned as an organism that prepared the way and intensified millenarian expectations for the leadership of the promised one (the Bab). ‘Alī Muḥammad, by the end of May, 1844, finished one of the most important works of this early period, *Qayyūm al-Asmā*—a

commentary on the sura of Joseph, which he viewed, following some Shi'ite traditions on the Mahdi, as “the allegorical account of his own prophecy” (Amanat 2005, 202)—where he stressed the importance of his writing and its Qur'anic style and advanced his prophetic claims. This preparation of the promised one, however, seemed to be closer to a strict treatment of Twelver Shi'ism than a more liberal Shari'a since, 'Alī Muḥammad the Bab writes, ““God has made the laws of Muḥammad and his awliyā (i.e., the imams) binding in every book until the Resurrection....”” (MacEoin 1990, 328; ellipsis in the original).

Indeed, regardless of the Babi nucleus knowing or not the heretic claims that were to be proclaimed years later, the intensifying millenarian expectations during the first four years under the Babi nucleus were still within the bounds of Twelver Shi'ite tradition. However, as Babism progressed, in 1848, in Badasht (Iran), we begin to see the Twelver Shi'ite's millenarian expectations developed into a millenarian heresy through the abrogation of the Qur'an and Shari'a—“laying one foundation for the Muslim charges of apostasy and of the crime of creating dissension among Muslims thereby causing ‘corruption of the earth’” (Fischer 1990, 230). This is also the case, according to Denis MacEoin, who observes that, although it may be the case that the Bab's earliest works hinted to the possibility of a post-Qur'anic divine revelation, those claims during the first three years of Babism were overshadowed by less heretical claims. As he points out, an early Babi, Mīrzā Muḥammad 'Alī Zunūzī, states:

At the beginning of the cause [Babism], ['Alī Muḥammad] made himself known by the title *bāb* and ‘servant of the *baqiyat Allāh*’ (i.e., the hidden

Imam), so that, as people say, he was regarded as having been sent by the hidden Imam, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan... [The Bab] established his verses below the words of the imams, but above those of the Shaykh [Aḥsā'ī] and the Sayyid (Rashtī)... and gave himself out as an interpreter (*mubayyin*) and promulgator (*murawwij*) of the Qur'ān and Islam... while all his followers... regarded him as the gate of divine knowledge and as superior to the Shaykh and the Sayyid (MacEoin 1990, 328; my brackets).

'Alī Muḥammad's own works during this early period corroborate Zunūzī's view. MacEoin points out that 'Alī Muḥammad, in the *Ṣaḥīfa-yi 'adliyya*, describes himself as a “‘servant’ chosen by the hidden Imam ‘in order to protect the faith of God,’ regarding his own words as ‘utter nothingness’ compared to the Qur'ān and the utterances of the imams.” Moreover, 'Alī Muḥammad states that “‘since no change may be decreed for (the faith of God), this blessed sharī'a shall never be abrogated. Nay, what Muḥammad has declared lawful shall remain lawful to the day of resurrection, and what he has declared unlawful shall remain unlawful to the day of resurrection.’” Even his letters to the female member of the Babi nucleus in Iraq, Qurrat al-'Ayn, confirm this view: “‘Rest assured,’” writes the Bab, “‘that all the externals of the *sharī'a* are observed. Whoever neglects the least of its laws, it shall be as if he has neglected all of them.’” Although there is an element of dissimulation (*taqiyya*), in the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Kawthar*, he also writes that he is “‘merely a Persian chosen to protect the faith of the Prophet and the imams and a servant of God confirming the laws of the Qur'ān.’” Finally, in another source quoting a letter by Zunūzī, this early Babi explains how

[T]he Bāb “put desirable matters (*mustahabbāt*) in the place of obligatory (*wājibāt*) (i.e., he made *mustahabb wājib*) and undesirable matters (*makīhāt*) in the place of forbidden (*muḥarramāt*). Thus, for example, he regarded it as obligatory to have four tablets of the soil (from the shrine) of the prince of martyrs (the Imam Ḥusayn) on which to place the hands, forehead, and nose during the prostration of *namāz*; he considered the pilgrimage of ‘Āshūrā a duty; he laid down prayers and superogatory observances (*ta qībāt*); he proclaimed the obligation of Friday prayer...; and he fashioned amulets, charms and talismans such as are prepared among the people.... All his companions acted with the utmost circumspection according to the *uṣūl* [principles of religion] and *furū‘* [subsidiaries of faith] of Islam” (MacEoin 1990, 328-329; my brackets).

As the later Babi period begins with the abrogation of Qur’ānic and Shari’a—a shift towards a new dispensation that, as MacEoin explains (quite unconvincingly I must add), is due “to a sense of frustration about the possibility of implementing the practice of the true faith in its fullness” (MacEoin 1990, 329)—we begin to see the emergence of a new religion which would nevertheless remain millenarian and heretic in contrast to its millennialist parent tradition.

The syncretism and dominant notions of Babism have been explained quite effectively in Michael Fischer’s work (1990).⁶ According to Fischer, “[t]he rhetoric of

⁶ My use of the term “syncretism” is that of Michael Fischer. As he correctly observes, this term is not popular among Baha’is “who fear the implication that Baha’i formulations, doctrines, and beliefs be

this phase was a qualified egalitarian, politicized, and even revolutionary millenarianism” (Fischer 1990, 229) during a period of religio-political debate and intellectual engagement with British and Russian political powers (Fischer 1990, 229-230). He points out the Ismaili, sufi and mystic traditions that may be found in this religion as it proposed a reinterpretation that purified scripture from Shi‘ite exoteric interpretations. Some of these notions would also be appropriated by Baha’ism.

All Prophets reveal the same truth, but there is either a progressive unveiling of esoteric truth so that subsequent revelation is more complete, or ordinary understanding falls into decay and ancient perfect wisdom needs to be recovered through the guidance of the few (or the unique) perfect souls granted each generation or age. Resurrection does not refer to some literal other-worldly rising of the dead for a final judgment, but to the acceptance of a revelation which brings spiritual renewal and thus paradise. Hell, conversely, is the rejection of spiritual truths, and thereby condemns people to stagnate in unnecessary suffering. From the Shaykhi and Akhbari traditions, Babism took the expectation of an imminent return of the Mahdi, together with the need to prepare the way. The return of the Mahdi implied the institution of a just society, and thus Babism brought property rights, the taxation system, and the political hierarchy into question (Fischer 1990, 230).

denigrated as humanly fabricated, rather than as divine revelation” (1990, 222n2). For an example of an American Baha’i popular view on syncretism, see Robert Stockman’s “The Baha’i Faith and Syncretism” at <http://Bahai-library.org/articles/rg.syncretism.html> (accessed January 20, 2009).

Indeed, the Bab's movement proposed a revolutionary religious interpretation that presented "a mixture of progressive ideas and initiatives and reactionary theocratic ones" (Fischer 1990, 230-231). Whereas it demanded the equality of men and women; the laicization of the clergy; and the equitable distribution of land and wealth, it continued other traditional notions of a spiritual hierarchy (culminated by the Bab as the sole and privileged recipient of divine wisdom); it called for a holy war intended to create a pure Babi land; and, following an older Islamic law, it allowed for the expropriation of land owned by unbelievers and the consequent division of booty among believers. As in Islamic law, Babism too called for the help of the rich to the poor. Two elements of Babi rhetoric were also powerful in the Twelver Shi'ite milieu of Iran and the 'Atabāt: "the rhetoric of self-help and the rhetoric of martyrdom drawn from the Shi'ite stories of Karbala" (Fischer 1990, 231). During the last four years of the Bab's life, and at the apex of regional bloodshed and persecutions by scholars of religious law (*'ulamā*) and the Qājār government, the Babi upheaval became eradicated—an eradication that proved to be successful (roughly) by the end of the 1850s. According to Juan Cole, this alliance between the clergy and the State is "[t]he most significant episode of church-state collaboration in suppressing a dissenting religious group during the nineteenth century" (Cole 1998, 26). After the execution of the Bab in the summer of 1850, several Babi leaders and sects proliferated: "Some were antinomian, declaring all laws and restraints on behavior abolished, whereas others looked to the Bab's holy book, the *Bayan*, for guidance. Some followed one or another prominent disciple of the Bab, though by 1852 most of these were dead" (Cole 1998, 27). Babism's strong millenarianism, however,

survived, as it prophesized the rise of another charismatic authority that was soon to appear.

The Babi movement, in conclusion is millenarian since it “[designates] the performative mapping of the climatic phase of the millennialist narrative on to the here and now” (Faubion 2001, 193n24; my brackets). Its apocalypticism is performed on to the here and now through its revolutionary call, and so it is its messianism through the figure of the Bab. However, it is doubly messianic, as it prognosticated the arrival of another charismatic figure. This messianic savior is not to come in the far future—in a one thousand-year period—because the next savior is to appear within a nineteen-year period. In a tablet written by the Bab to *man yuzhiruhu allāh*, Arabic for “he whom God shall make manifest” (the next charismatic authority), he writes: “Shouldst Thou dismiss the entire company of the followers of the Bayan [Babis] in the Day of the Latter Resurrection by a mere sign of Thy finger even while still a suckling babe, Thou wouldst indeed be praised in Thy indication. And though no doubt is there about it, do Thou grant a respite of *nineteen years* as a token of Thy favour so that those who have embraced this Cause may be graciously rewarded by Thee” (Bab 1978, 6; my emphasis). Babism is consequently not millennial in Arjomand’s sense nor in Faubion’s. Moreover, politically, ‘Alī Muḥammad the Bab remains within the Islamic tradition in which being either, a charismatic authority or mediator between the Hidden Imam and his followers, means to have a claim to a theocratic rule of the state. This will change with the Baha’i dispensation.

Baha'i Cosmology: Baha'u'llah (1817-1892), 'Abdu'l-Bahā (1844-1921), Shoghi Effendi (1892-1957) and the Universal House of Justice (1963-)

Fischer's anthropological account is again very helpful as a general diagnosis of the shift occurring between Babism and Baha'ism. Baha'ism indeed "developed a more quietistic and syncretistic rhetoric" (Fischer 1990, 233). In the words of Nurullah Akhtar-Khavari, Fischer's friend and informant:

The difference between Babism and Baha'ism is quite profound, different approaches for different times. Babism arose within the expectant messianism of Islam, and the early Babis behaved as would any strong Muslim who believed the Mahdi had come: they preached in public and fought. Baha'u'llah, however, stressed like Christianity that it is better to give one's life for what one believes than to take someone else's life. Fighting was made unacceptable and the emphasis was placed on teaching: if someone does not accept your teaching you pray for him (Fischer 1990, 229).

Moreover, the differences between Babism to Baha'ism encompass not only proselytizing practices but also political, ethical, institutional.

The near eradication of the Babi upheaval by the Shi'ite clergy and the Qajar⁷ government provoked bloodshed, persecutions but also, exile. This was the case of Mīrzā

⁷ We should keep in mind that even if the Qajar government and dynasty arose against the Babi movement, Babism appealed very strongly to at least some members (mostly women) of the Qajars. This is probably due to the Babi support for the emancipation of women. For instance, my own grandfather, Sayyid 'Abd

Ḥusayn ‘Alī Nūrī (1817-1892), a prominent Babi. He would be eventually known as Baha’u’llah (Bahā’ullāh; “glory of god”), the prophet-founder of Baha’ism, and a successful claimant of what the Bab referred to as *man yuzhiruhu allāh* “he whom God shall make manifest.” Baha’u’llah’s father was a high government official who served in the Qajar court. He was also married into the royal family but, as he was disfavored by a new Shah who acceded in 1834, he died “a broken man” in 1839 (Cole 1998, 27). Baha’u’llah’s younger half-brother, Mīrzā Yaḥyā (also known as Subh-i Azal), and his full brother, Mīrza Mūsā, adhered to the Babi movement. Since Baha’u’llah was eventually considered the promised one by many Babis, he is considered by Baha’is to rank higher than the Bab.

Because of Baha’u’llah’s prominence, and because a death warrant had already been once issued against him [due to his Babi activities], great care was taken to avoid putting him in the spotlight as leader of the Babis; even the letters of the Bab came addressed to his little brother, Mirza Yahya. Baha’ullah, one of the Bab’s secretaries, and Mirza Yahya agreed that the younger Nuri would be put forward as a *mirror* and focus of Babi leadership, so as to protect Baha’u’llah from reprisals (Cole 1998, 28; my brackets).

The Babi upheavals provoked, after the Bab’s execution, an attempt on the life of Nasiru’-d-Din Shah in 1852, and Baha’u’llah, “who opposed such militancy” and was

al-Ḥusayn Ḥijazī Qājārī, was a Sayyid from his paternal family and a descendant of the Qajar dynasty through his maternal family. His maternal family was from Qazvin, Iran, and they spoke Turkish. It seems that his mother was the first Baha’i, in a family that (at least the women) were Babis.

“summering with the brother of the prime minister” (Cole 1990, 28), was falsely inculpated and incarcerated in Tehran (Iran), where he had an epiphany. Although he was later exonerated, in 1853 he was to be exiled to Ottoman Baghdad, Iraq.

As Babism became an underground movement, Babis looked upon Subh-i Azal’s leadership in Baghdad. During the 1950s, however, Baha’u’llah was writing works on his own and, by “invoking both the themes of Babi millenarianism and those of Sufi ethics and ecstatic worship,” he began building a following of his own among Iranian Babis. As he became increasingly popular among Iranian pilgrims to Baghdad, the Iranian government pressured the Ottoman authorities to exile him further away. “As a result, Sultan Abdülaziz issued a firman, or edict, early in 1863 calling Baha’u’llah to Istanbul” (Cole 1998, 28). In April of that year he privately declared in Baghdad to be the promised one the Bab prophesized—a declaration that was opposed by his half-brother, Subh-i Azal, and caused bitter confrontations between proto-Baha’is (which seemed to be formed by a majority of Babis) and proto-Babi-Azalis (a minority). As Baha’u’llah arrived in Istanbul and did not curry favor he was again exiled to Edirne (Adrianople), where he resided from December 1863 to August 1868 (Cole 1998, 29). As the confrontations between proto-Baha’i and proto-Azali intensified, the charismatic leadership split. Baha’u’llah declared, this time publically, his status as the charismatic authority of the new dispensation prophesized by the Bab, and the split resulted in the separation of “Baha’is” from “Babi-Azalis” (roughly around the end of the 1860s).

According to Juan Cole, “[d]uring [Baha’u’llah’s] last years in Baghdad, and then in Istanbul and Edirne, under the close supervision of the Ottoman sultan and ministers,

Baha'u'llah began grappling with a new approach to relations between religion and state, different from that envisaged in Shi'ite Islam or in Babism" (Cole 1998, 29; my brackets). Baha'u'llah's declaration in Ottoman Baghdad in 1863, "would have implied, in traditional Islamic political theory, that Baha'u'llah himself now had a right to become a theocrat and to demand the acquiescence of the civil governments to his authority, on the model of the Prophet Muhammad or of Imam 'Ali." But he did not embrace any claims of that nature. In fact, according to Cole's compelling argument, Baha'u'llah's outlook on government was probably influenced by Sufi traditions like the Ni'matu'llahi, who viewed authority to be separated between the spiritual and civil—an outlook that developed during his exile into something similar to a constitutional monarchy or parliamentary democracy (Cole 1998, 191). Once again, Baha'u'llah, along with Subh-i Azal, were exiled one last time. The first was sent to the prison-city of Akka, Palestine (present day Israel) and the second to Cyprus (present-day Greece). Baha'u'llah would die in 1892 under house arrest near the city of Akka, where he is buried to this day. His charismatic leadership is usually dated from his private declaration of his religious mission in Baghdad, in 1863, to the day he died in 1892.

After the death of Baha'u'llah, in 1892, his son 'Abbās Effendī, known as 'Abdu'l-Baha (1844-1921), took over the leadership and led the religious community from 1892 to 1921. This is a revised reenactment of Twelver Shi'ite sacred history as the Baha'i prophet, Baha'u'llah, delegates 'Abdu'l-Baha the leadership in the same manner Muhammad delegated to the first Imam, 'Alī. Surely, as Hodgson pointed out, "[i]t is by now well known that Shi'ism was not at first, as orthodox Twelvers and even Sunnis would have it, a consistent cult of the twelve imams one after another, from which

various dissident Shi'ite groups diverged in favor of one or another alternative claimant.

The early Shi'a is no longer to be viewed from the standpoint of later Imamism..."

(Hodgson 1955, 1). In contrast to Twelver Shi'ite sacred history, this revised

reenactment hopes to avoid the usurpation of sacred history, through other groups or individuals, by explicitly designating the charismatic inheritor and son, 'Abdu'l-Baha.

This was done through scripture or testaments left behind by Baha'u'llah, as in the case of the *Kitāb-ī Ahd* ("book of the covenant").⁸ In it, Baha'u'llah states that "[v]erily God hath ordained the station of the Greater Branch [Muhammad Ali] to be beneath that of the Most Great Branch ['Abdu'l-Baha]" (Baha'u'llah 1998,326; brackets in the original).

This designation, however, would not go unchallenged every time designation took place:

'Abdu'l-Baha's brother, Muhammad Ali, would negate his brother's leadership. In the same manner, once again, when 'Abdu'l-Baha died in 1921, he designated his grandson Shoghi Rabbani, known as Shoghi Effendi (1892-1957), to lead the religious community.

Shoghi Effendi led the religious community from 1921/22 to the day he abruptly died in London in 1957. Every designated charismatic inheritor, since Baha'u'llah, would have similar or higher powers in comparison to the Imams and exclusive access to the divine.

'Abdu'l-Baha would be considered Baha'ism's perfect exemplar, a figure that is similar to the *al-Shī'a al-Kāmil* (the "perfect Shi'a") in Shaykhism but of a higher divinity than that of the Imams. Shoghi Effendi, again, would also have exclusive access to the divine

⁸ Due to the disputes and splits that have ensued in the history of Twelver Shi'ism (regarding the doctrine of designation from one Imam to the next) and Baha'ism (from one charismatic authority to the next charismatic figure), Baha'is must, according to the laws and ordinances outlined by Shoghi Effendi in *Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitāb-i-Aqdas, The Most Holy Book of Bahá'u'lláh*, write a testament or will (Effendi 1973, 46). In case of intestacy, Baha'u'llah (1993), in the *Kitāb-i-Aqdas*, and Shoghi Effendi (1973), in the *Synopsis*, provide an outline to mediate and hopefully avoid disputes about inheritance.

except that it would be lower in rank when compared to his grandfather. Both of these religious figures are understood to be infallible and perfect interpreters of Baha'u'llah's vision. We should keep in mind that at every designation, including Shoghi Effendi's, an opposition would form claiming the charismatic office and, no matter how allegedly explicit these designations were, there was some space for these differing interpretations to be plausible. Consequently, the recurring hierarchical disputes that emerged among the Imams, ever since the Imam 'Alī, would not be completely avoided by the explicit designation exemplified by Baha'u'llah's written will to 'Abdu'l-Baha and so forth.

Baha'i Institutions

An interesting turn, as it regards Baha'i institutions, is taken after the abrupt death of Shoghi Effendi in 1957. This religious figure, referred also by Baha'is as "the Guardian," was expected to have children and designate the person to take the role of guardianship—a role similar to that of Twelver Shi'ism's belief on the continual presence of the Imam through divinely inspired individuals who represented his will through either deputyship (*niyāba*), gateship (*bābīyā*), or guardianship (*wilāyā*). A line of guardians would thus lead the religious community hand-in-hand with an elected organism comprised of nine members called the Universal House of Justice (UHJ). Effendi, although married, did not have children and, according to a majority of core Baha'is, there was no one to take his position. An interim government assumed leadership in 1957 until, in 1963, the UHJ was elected for the first time through an electoral college—an institution that would hold elections every lustrum. The electoral college is in turn elected through a process involving religious institutions, or "spiritual assemblies," at the

national (or secondary) and local levels. The nine members of national and local institutions, which are elected every year, must be Baha'i men or women and be at least twenty-one years old. The UHJ is, according to mainstream Baha'ism, the sole supreme religious institution: an institution that is given a "conferred or acquired infallibility" and is divinely guided by its prophet-founder, Baha'u'llah.

At this point, there are several elements here at work enabling Baha'ism to move away from its Twelver Shi'ite tradition and introduce itself more effectively to the West. On one hand, there is a discontinuation of the prophet figure through the end of the guardianship since it eliminates an individual monopolization of divine access. Its local and national churches (or institutions) are comprised in principle of non-professional clergy that are elected by the believers: thus making its administration to be comprised of democratic, collective and integrative institutions. The divine access is then allocated and limited to a specific sphere: it is allocated on a collective institution, such as the UHJ, which is thought to be infallible regarding laws that are not explicitly addressed in scripture: "It is incumbent upon the Trustees of the House of Justice to take counsel together regarding those things which have not outwardly been revealed in the Book, and to enforce that which is agreeable to them. God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth, and He, verily, is the Provider, the Omniscient" (Baha'u'llah 1998, 235). This infallibility is, in practice, not limited to that specific sphere and most Baha'is today believe in the UHJ's overall infallibility regarding any decision made.

With the beginning of Baha'ism, we have a shift from the previous Babi millenarianism to a Baha'i millennialism in Faubion's sense. In Arjomand's sense,

things also shift drastically. Baha'ism is millennial as it prohibits the revelation of another charismatic authority before a thousand years have passed: "Whoso layeth claim to a Revelation direct from God, ere the expiration of a full thousand years, such a man is assuredly a lying impostor" (Baha'u'llah 1994, 346). Therefore, its messianism is also postponed to the end of time. However, in Baha'ism, apocalypticism, as an "imminent expectation of the total transformation of the world" (Arjomand 2002, 106), is not postponed to a millennial period or messianic advent: it is the imminent and sudden realization of the truth of Baha'ism by the majority of the world. This imminent and sudden realization may, in time of crises—mostly originating outside the community—trigger a certain aspect that is close to Faubion's millenarianism: not of the millennialist narrative on to the here and now *but the apocalyptic promise on to the here and now*.⁹

⁹ The following quote from a document "supervised" or "commissioned" by the UHJ, titled *A Century of Light*, and published in 2001, illustrates this point:

The image by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to capture for His hearers the coming transformation of society was that of light. Unity, He declared, is the power that illuminates and advances all forms of human endeavour. The age that was opening would come in the future to be regarded as "the century of light", because in it universal recognition of the oneness of humankind would be achieved. With this foundation in place, the process of building a global society embodying principles of justice will begin.

The vision was enunciated by the Master in several Tablets and addresses. Its fullest expression occurs in a Tablet addressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Jane Elizabeth Whyte, wife of the former Moderator of the Free Church of Scotland. Mrs. Whyte was an ardent sympathizer of the Bahá'í teachings, had visited the Master in 'Akká and would later make arrangements for the particularly warm reception that met Him in Edinburgh. Using the familiar metaphor of "candles", 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote to Mrs. Whyte:

O honored lady!... Behold how its [unity's] light is now dawning upon the world's darkened horizon. The first candle is unity in the political realm, the early glimmerings of which can now be discerned. The second candle is unity of thought in world undertakings, the consummation of which will ere long be witnessed. The third candle is unity in freedom which will surely come to pass. The fourth candle is unity in religion which is the corner-stone of the foundation itself, and which, by the power of God, will be revealed in all its splendor. The fifth candle is the unity of nations—a unity which in this century will be securely established, causing all the peoples of the world to regard

Leaps of Faith: From Conversion to Adherence

Religious conversion is usually understood in terms of its derivation from the Latin verb *converto*, “to turn back or around, to change, to translate, to turn in a particular direction, to direct, to devote” (Faubion 2001, 21) or, in missionization contexts, as “a more or less dramatic transformation of the person” (Keane 2002, 65).¹⁰ It is not surprising then that when I left Houston to conduct fieldwork in Madrid (and other Spanish cities) during 2005-2007, I expected to gather not only narratives on conversions from Spanish Baha’is but also narratives that would enable me to think through such transformations. I was, however, puzzled by the fact that all the subjects I interviewed did not see themselves as going through any such transformations.¹¹ For this reason, the title of this chapter attempts to differentiate between “conversions” and “adherences.” The former suggests a radical (and usually canonical) transformation, such as Saul on the road to Damascus (Faubion 2001, 21). There are also Babi-Baha’i canonical

themselves as citizens of one common fatherland. The sixth candle is unity of races, making of all that dwell on earth peoples and kindreds of one race. The seventh candle is unity of language, i.e., the choice of a universal tongue in which all peoples will be instructed and converse. Each and every one of these will inevitably come to pass, inasmuch as the power of the Kingdom of God will aid and assist in their realization.

*While it will be decades—or perhaps a great deal longer—before the vision contained in this remarkable document is fully realized, the essential features of what it promised are now established facts throughout the world (See *Century of Light*, commissioned by the Universal House of Justice and published in 2001, pages 127-128; brackets and ellipsis in the original; my emphasis).*

¹⁰ As I began to write this dissertation I realized that fieldwork on Baha’ism in the missionization context would have been more relevant. It would have helped me study more clearly the differences and similarities Baha’ism has with Protestant denominations and modernity.

¹¹ I also did not expect to find sharp differences between those who first accepted Baha’ism and those who were Baha’is by tradition. Overall, first generation Baha’is during the 1960s and 1970s were able to express the relevance of Baha’ism more clearly. In contrast, those born within the tradition would be more likely to echo Baha’i ideology (scriptural or cultural).

conversions: Mulla Husayn Bushru'i, Mulla Muhammad 'Ali Barfurushi (Quddus) and Qurrat al-'Ayn (Tahira) (Effendi, 1974; Nabil 1996; Balyuzi 1973); as well as those found in *Memorials of the Faithful*, written by 'Abdu'l-Baha (1971).¹² The latter, on the other hand, is less a transformation than a finding one's place in the world. It is an "adherence" in that it is not necessarily comprised of a dramatic transformation of the person, but an alignment of one's own beliefs that find their expression within one's interpretation of a movement. I would tentatively define adherence as *a displacement of elective affinities*. Indeed, it is not surprising that Baha'i missionizations may be found in so-called third world countries,¹³ since Baha'i religious missions would prove to be very similar to the Protestant evangelization, as in Keane's *Sumbanese Calvinists* (2002). But, one must wonder, how is Baha'ism able to missionize or proselytize in Euro-American contexts?

Baha'ism was first brought to Spain in 1946, through the proselytizing efforts of an American, Virginia Orbison (1902-1985), following the aftermath of the (last) Spanish Civil War (1936-1939).¹⁴ General Francisco Franco had, by this time, eliminated the progressive and liberal Second Republic of Spain and established a Fascist regime (*Franquismo*) which was ideologically legitimated by the Catholic Church. His regime would last about 40 years and Spain would become a democratic parliamentary monarchy by the end of the 1970s. Baha'ism's national and a few local organisms were more or

¹² Broadly put, these three religious figures—Mullā Husayn, Quddūs and Tāhira—usually symbolize three conversion approaches: an intellectual approach, a conversion by means of an exemplar, and a conversion through dreams, respectively.

¹³ Perhaps, in the future, one of my ethnographic projects will be dedicated to studying Baha'ism's missionization in a so-called developing country.

¹⁴ I put "last" between parenthesis because the Carlist Wars during nineteenth-century Spain were, after all, civil wars.

less established by the beginning of the 1960s.¹⁵ Its community began to grow substantially during the 1960s and 70s and today there are about 4,000 members in the Spanish community.¹⁶ During fieldwork I interviewed actors from different parts of Spain and discussed their adherences during those decades. The overall characteristics of the actors that I thought I would come across during fieldwork were evident. Generally put, most actors would either be from the “losing” side of the Spanish Civil War—that is, adherents that were closer ideologically to socialism, communism, anarchism or, broadly put, the Spanish Republic—or actors that were neither part nor close to the center of power. Although I had interviewed and recorded about fourteen people during fieldwork, I discuss only a few of them in order to give a general idea of the adherents’ narratives.

Fernando, a Spaniard in his early 50s, and a philologist by training, would be among those closer to a socialist or Republican ideology. We had never met before but one of my aunts, and another informant, had mentioned him to me earlier. He knew my family and I was able to set up a meeting very easily. We met in April 2007 in the south of Spain, in Málaga. It was a rainy day that seemed to confirm, even in Southern Spain, the Spanish adage: “*En abril aguas mil.*”¹⁷ It did not feel like we were in Andalusia, but in the north, in Asturias. Fernando, a tall and elegant Andalusian picked me up and drove

¹⁵ There are no rigorous sources that study the development of Baha’ism in Spain. Statistics on its growth are not easily available. There is, however, literature published for Spanish Baha’i readership. One of them is a history of Baha’ism in Spain written by Navid Mohabbat titled *Brisa en el amanecer* and published by *Editorial Bahá’í de España*. During my ethnography I became aware that this work was not reliable, so I have not used it in this chapter. It is nevertheless a valuable document that reflects many of the beliefs and interpretations that are popular among the religious community inside and outside of Spain, such as the predestination of global Baha’ism through the help of God.

¹⁶ According to some of my informants, the Spanish community experienced some growth during the early 1980s through Iranian Baha’i refugees escaping the Iranian Revolution in 1979.

¹⁷ Literally, “In April, a thousand waters.” It refers to April’s rainy season.

me to his house, in Mijas, near Málaga, where I met his wife and one of his daughters. When we began talking, I asked him about his conversion and he responded with a very meaningful scene from an Indiana Jones movie.¹⁸ In that scene, Indiana Jones must walk across an apparent precipice in order to reach the other side. In other words, he must risk his life and take a step onto the precipice—as a literal “leap of faith”—to find out that, in fact, there is no real precipice and he can walk across it quite easily. We were in the living room and as we sat down comfortably on the sofas, he lit up a cigarette and continued to explain to me what I unwittingly called a “conversion process”:

[It's] a personal process [...] but... to me in particular the [Baha'i] Faith is something that came to me through reason [...]. I did not really convert to a religion. I did not go through a process of religious conversion. I went through a process of committing to a perspective on life, with a [particular] perspective on human history and the meaning of life. [...] I did not only identify with a utopian idea that was worth living for. Instead, I identified [Baha'ism] with what I had always believed in, but better expressed. [...] I did not accept a religion, I accepted a way of life.¹⁹

It was not the spiritual doctrines Baha'ism offered, regarding the soul and the afterlife, that attracted him most. It was the “administrative order,” the workings of the religious

¹⁸ Possibly *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989).

¹⁹ Fernando's words are very close to Effendi's understanding of Baha'ism. Particularly in the following instance: “For [the Baha'i Faith] is not a system of philosophy; it is essentially a way of life, a religious faith that seeks to unite all people on a common basis of mutual understanding and love, and in a common devotion to God.” (Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 75; my brackets).

institutions that governed the community that caught his attention: a system that was not structured around a rigid hierarchy of clergyman—as in Iberian Catholicism—but through an integrative system of institutions that were democratically elected and based on the individual’s personal qualities, not on party affiliations. This is understandable as in the 1970s Spain was still in political isolation under a regime that was quickly losing the ideological legitimacy the Spanish Catholic Church provided. By that time, however, the Church’s ideological and political legitimacy had scarred many of those who were on the “losing” side of the Spanish Civil War.

Fernando’s “disenchantment” of the world was not of course his own sudden discovery of the power of the Church and its hierocracy. He came from a family with socialist inclinations and was consequently well aware of the implications of such hierocracy. As Weber explains, “[e]verywhere hierocracy has sought to monopolize the administration of religious values” (Weber 2001, 282). Even before the Spanish Civil War, Spain had found herself faced, for quite some time, with what Michel Foucault described as the problematic of government in the sixteenth-century Europe:

There is a double movement, then, of state centralization, on the one hand, and of dispersion and religious dissidence, on the other. It is, I believe, at the intersection of these two tendencies that the problem comes to pose itself with this peculiar intensity, of how to be ruled, how strictly, by whom, to what end, by what methods, and so on (Foucault 2000, 202).

It is out of this double movement that, I would suggest, a similar but ultimately erroneous thesis of “the two Spains,” *las dos Españas*, may be traced: one liberal and secular, the

other conservative and Catholic. An overall misleading thesis that is comparable to the “two-world concept” discussed in David Kertzer’s study of the Italian Communist Party and the Catholic Church in a communist *quartiere* (Albora) during the 1970s in Bologna. A misleading thesis and concept “if it is taken to mean that the social universe is neatly divided into two camps, one Catholic and the other Communist” (Kertzer 1990, 4). As we are about to see, such neat divisions are difficult to keep separate when we take a closer look.

Fernando’s father came from a family that was for many generations part of the military, but whose political inclinations were not fascist. In his youth, during the Second Republic, he formed part of the *Juventudes Socialistas* (“Socialist Youths”). Fernando’s liberal family continued to be so even during Franco’s dictatorship, “When I became involved in [socialist] politics [during Franco’s regime], my family did not like the idea, but they didn’t say anything.”²⁰ He explained to me that his father was part of the Air Force and, “at least in Spain, [those in the Air Force] were known to be more liberal and better educated.” Fernando, like generations before him, was to become part of the Air Force too. “I was fourteen or fifteen years old when I was preparing for the exams to join the Air Force Academy. But military instruction stopped me from joining. [People] would tell me about things that went on in the military and I could not stand it. It’s a good thing I left because I can’t stand violent institutions. I just can’t stand them. I would surely rebel against them.” When he was fourteen years old he began to read eagerly. “It’s interesting that I began to read because my family did not read. At home

there was a Bible and that was it [...] At sixteen I was reading Nietzsche and St. Thomas.”²¹ Although socialist and liberal, certain religious sensibilities did not dissipate. Indeed, he was close to his mother and, as she became older, Fernando tells me that she became more engaged with her Christian faith. “She chose a Christian lay movement [...] that celebrated Mass in the countryside and cut pieces of rural bread as Hosts—just as Christ did in the last supper.” He grew up therefore in a family with some religious sensibility that did not coincide with the Church.

Fernando’s position towards the Church was not merely due to his ideological background, they became confirmed as he grew up. He considers the Church, “not a religion, but a power.” He tells me that the educational system during Franco’s regime was handed to the Church. He recalls his school years as “a castrating,” “military-like,” “guilt [indoctrinating]” experience. He eloquently tells me, in a discourse that echoes his ideological past that “Franco was a fascist dictator, but he was not stupid. He needed to do something so freedom wouldn’t be possible. That is why he needed a solid apparatus to control future generations and thus prevent them from being free. It is called National Catholicism, which is the darkest thing one can imagine.” Thinking back he adds, “[priests] instilled hate in us [...] They hit us... The concept of sin is very broad and they distorted it... [but the question of] sex serves as a good example. [Sex] was taboo and a recurring theme [...] [Their bitterness to this theme is naturally due to] an institution that is formed by thousands of people who have no loving relationships—and I mean sex, for example. There is something wrong in the head when someone decides,

²¹ A philosophy teacher would scold him for reading Nietzsche. He would tell him “*¡esto es filosofía disolvente!*” [“this is dissolving philosophy!”].

for the rest of his [or her] life, to atrophy his [or her] sexual instinct voluntarily. A decision that is not due to illness. They end up screwed up in the head. That's the reason one is also exposed to their sexual deviations and insinuations. It's very unpleasant..."

Fernando is also disgusted by the Church's imagery of Christianity, "the image that they gave us of Christianity is lugubrious... dark..." The themes and images the Church preached made it that way: "death, resurrection, nails, one's sins [i.e. guilt], hell, the devil." When only six years old, "[priests] told us that the devil would put red hot pieces of iron under our nails for our mortal sins. They tormented us. They roused fear in us. The strategy is to scare us and thus control freedom [*libertad*]" "Some of us," he continues, "were born rebellious, or were made rebellious, and thus what [the Church] achieved was the opposite effect." At the age of twelve or thirteen, he was already very angry at the Church and he would even declare himself atheist or agnostic. "Today," he affirms, "I can say that I am an educated person even though I was ill-bred in a school ran by priests."

The naïve anthropologist, looking for some kind of transformation, would naturally ask if Fernando, being a rebellious person, changed his attitude after he adhered to Baha'ism. He did not and, as he explained to me, there are good reasons for it. "We continued to be rebels because even within the Baha'i structure... Well, I am going to say something rather risky but since you are a sociologist [sic] I will take that risk. Naturally, Baha'i institutions and society in general intermingle somehow, right? I

always remember what Emilio²² says, and it is true, and that is that, *to an extent*, what happens inside [Baha'i institutions] happens outside [society in general] and what happens outside happens inside. And of course, during *franquismo*, what type of Baha'is did we have? And I am not talking about political *franquismo*, but sociological *franquismo*. What do I mean, for example? I mean that the dictator himself or the official name of the State, do not worry me as much. What worries me is, what is permeating the social fiber? What models are being generated that are penetrating into the most basic social structures? Because those models are the ones generating the reality of everyday life. So, to give an example, when someone is the manager of something, what model is automatically assumed by this person? He assumes, without thinking, the prevalent model. That is, a *franquista* model, a violent model, and a military [*cuartelero*] model. And he takes himself as such, and he does not realize that he can take himself differently and thus get better results. But he does not think about that, because that is the standard manner—and a manner which provides social prestige—in terms of comporting oneself in a given office. Then, it's the sociological *franquismo*, which has nothing to do with the dictator himself, but with the structure of everyday life [...] Then, understandably, and what I really want you to understand is that the national assembly of

²² He is referring to a prominent Spanish adherent who had been, or continues to be, a “continental counselor.” During the period of Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi, these figures would appoint specific individuals they could personally trust to help other adherents with challenges and guidance regarding missionizations or Baha'i institutional life. These individuals were called “hands of the cause.” They were usually appointed for life unless they had to be shunned. However, according to mainstream Baha'ism, when Shoghi Effendi (1892-1957) died no other individual could take his office (the guardianship). The UHJ understood that since appointing hands of the cause was a privilege reserved only to charismatic figures, it created the body of continental counselors instead. In this religious institution the UHJ directly appoints individuals for at least four-year periods (unless they must be replaced), thus replacing the functions of the hands of the cause. Continental counselors function in either one of these two capacities: religious “propagation” or “protection” of the community.

Spain—and I want you to put this between quotes—was, in a sense, “*franquista*”. And that’s natural. And it’s possible that it was the right thing to do. [...] [Baha’i] institutions must be able have a relationship with the community. If an institution has nothing to do with the rest of the community, it could hardly form a relationship. This is why there is a mirroring between the inside and the outside [community], right?”

On a different note, although his ideology was confirmed by his experiences with the Church, his religious sensibility remained there even after he considered himself more of an atheist than an agnostic. “I remember the first time I experienced a certain sense of pure religiosity when, while walking on a street, I saw an unusual figure of a Virgin that was particularly graceful [*graciosa*]. She had been painted and well-decorated but without any ostentations. And a thought came to my mind... with a deep yearning...— even though at that time [twelve or thirteen years old] I had nothing to do with [religion] or with God—...I remember thinking ‘God, if you ever had a religion divested of things like... confession... I could, I would, be part of your religion.’”²³ This said, how did Fernando first encounter Baha’ism?

²³ Much like in Islam, Fernando is referring to Baha’u’llah’s prohibition of confessional practices as they are known to the Catholic Church or the Judeo-Christian tradition. In *Bisharat* (usually translated as “Glad-Tidings”), Baha’u’llah writes:

When the sinner findeth himself wholly detached and freed from all save God, he should beg forgiveness and pardon from Him. Confession of sins and transgressions before human beings is not permissible, as it hath never been nor will ever be conducive to divine forgiveness. Moreover such confession before people results in one’s humiliation and abasement, and God—exalted be His glory—wisheth not the humiliation of His servants. Verily He is the Compassionate, the Merciful. The sinner should, between himself and God, implore mercy from the Ocean of mercy, beg forgiveness from the Heaven of generosity and say... (Baha’u’llah 1998,210).

It was during his college years that Fernando went to a talk or recital where people would discuss literature written by Khalil Gibran.²⁴ He remembers then that, in the middle of the recital, the performer said “I am a Baha’i, and Baha’is believe in so and so, and he spelled out the Baha’i principles”.²⁵ It is probable that the following are among the principles spelled out during Fernando’s first encounter: 1) abandonment of all forms of prejudice; 2) equality between man and woman; 3) the elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth; 4) universal education; 5) independent investigation of truth; 6) a global common wealth of nations; and 7) harmony between science and religion.²⁶ When Fernando heard for the first time these principles, he thought Baha’is were somewhat confused.²⁷ “They were mixing up the extremes of poverty and wealth with the unity of mankind and so on.” “But some principles sounded very good to me, of course, because they are proper utopias, right?” Fernando explains, “And that’s why I approached them and talked to them. And in fact I thought of [the principles] as my own.” Fernando finds in Baha’ism how life has a *meaning*, “...because everything has a meaning in this life.” He would finally conclude that his “conversion was through reason, really, a dove did not come down from the heavens to me and converted me.” In other words, he did not consider himself as having a religious conversion as such. It was months later, after he

²⁴ Among other Baha’i proselytization methods, proselytizing through the use of arts has been one that is thought very effective. In *A Century of Light*, a document prepared by the UHJ, we have another indication of what Fernando is referring to: “As an international youth culture began to emerge in society during the late nineteen sixties and seventies, believers with talent in music, drama and the arts demonstrated something of what Shoghi Effendi had meant when he pointed out: ‘That day will the Cause spread like wildfire when its spirit and teachings are presented on the stage or in art and literature....’ (See *Century of Light*, commissioned by the Universal House of Justice and published in 2001, page 101).

²⁵ The person that said these words was Pancho Amenábar, a musician and a Baha’i from Chile that attracted many adherents to Baha’ism. He would be mentioned in several of the interviews I conducted.

²⁶ These “social principles” are to this day found in mainstream Baha’i websites as part of “core beliefs”: <http://www.bahai.us/core-beliefs>.

²⁷ The expression Fernando uses is “;Hostia qué empanada tienen estos!”

learned about Baha'ism, that he was casually asked, "Do you accept the Baha'i Faith?", and Fernando replied affirmatively.

During our conversations there were generally three aspects that helped his adherence: the Baha'i church (or administration), the religious community, and religious literature. As I have mentioned earlier, and discussed in an earlier chapter, the Baha'i church is integrative as it lacks a professional clergy and it is comprised, at the local, national and international level, of nine members who are chosen democratically through an electoral college.²⁸ In our conversations, Baha'is seemed to Fernando likeable because they were peaceful and an easy going group of people—"they transmitted good vibes." Finally, regarding literature, three books were the most meaningful to him during his religious adherence: *Baha'u'llah and the New Era* (Esslemont 1923), *Portals to Freedom* (Ives 1937) and *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Discourses by Abdul Baha Abbas During His Visit to the United States in 1912* (Abdu'l-Baha 1922). Fernando would also mention another book, *Thief in the Night*, by William Sears (1992), but he did not find it as meaningful as the other three. Other actors I interviewed also referred to the three first books, like María.

María was born in Cádiz. She is another Andalusian Baha'i and about five or six years younger than Fernando. She was born into a family that was politically active and involved with the Spanish Communist Party (PCE). Her father is from Seville and her mother from Cádiz. Her mother was raised Catholic and her father was an atheist—

²⁸ We must keep in mind that at the international level, the UHJ, is only comprised of men.

María's paternal grandfather and great-grandfather were also atheists.²⁹ In contrast to her father, María explains to me, "My mother did not have a strong ideological foundation." In contrast, her paternal family was deeply communist. As an interesting anecdote that shows her paternal family's dedication to the communist ideology, María's father was originally registered in his birth certificate by the unusual fist name of "Molotov." During *franquismo*, he could not keep that name so he had to change it to a more common name, "Juan." When María was born, since she was known to be the daughter of an atheist, the nuns in Cádiz forced her mother to baptize the newborn before she could leave the hospital: "Had she refused to baptize me," María explains, "[the nuns] would have kept me." "This is Spanish Fascism!" she laughs. She also explained to me that during *franquismo*, there was no right to assemble and no more than fifteen people could hold a meeting. Therefore, communists would use weddings and *paelladas* (retreats to the country where *paella* is cooked for lunch), in order to assemble. As her family's situation became even more difficult during *franquismo*, María's family decided to leave Spain and reside in France when she was about twelve years old.

²⁹ We must bear in mind that, at the time of the interview, her father was collecting documents of his family's history in prisons and executions. For example, María showed me a document of her grandfather's execution in the prison of Málaga by the police (*Guardia Civil*). Her paternal great-aunt, Carmela, was also imprisoned after the Civil War. When Eva Perón visited Spain, she gave a conference on "honesty and morality" to the women-prisoners where Carmela was also imprisoned. Carmela interrupted her speech and confronted Perón saying: "Madam, you are giving the wrong speech. There are no prostitutes or thieves among us. We are prisoners because of our ideology, because of our ideas. We are political prisoners." For her interruption, Carmela and another prisoner were put in a pitch black prison cell and stripped off their clothes. When she was released, after three months, the sun burned her retina, causing her near-blindness for the rest of her life. María remembers Carmela, after she was released from prison, as a very loving woman who worked at a fruit stand wearing unusual thick eye-glasses. The consequences of Franco's regime is still very vivid for those who fought against them.

When she was fourteen years old, she joined the communist youths (*juventudes comunistas*) and participated in their activities. She specifically remembers one campaign that took place somewhere around 1975-1976. “I remember [our activities], but I remember them critically. I remember a trip that was organized by the communist youths [...] and [the purpose of this activity] was to bring 100,000 young affiliates. This is very interesting because it shows how far [the communist party in France] would go to proselytize. And it was a fierce proselytism [*un proselitismo bestial*] [...] So, in order to get young people to fill out their affiliation cards, [the communist party in France] put together a campaign with a lot of money [...] and had a celebrated [and expensive] singer to perform at that event.”³⁰ She would explain to me that, at that campaign, communist youths would persuade other youths to fill out their affiliation cards. In fact, the communist youths would insist so much that “probably,” María says as she laughs, “some of the people were filling out their affiliation so we would leave them alone.” It was very ironic to her because she would recall the derogatory comments communists would make towards religious sects and their proselytism: “but they [the communists] would do the same thing, and even more fiercely!” In 1976 María and her family returned to Spain, and began to reside in Málaga, where the PCE would allocate one of its headquarters. A return that was due in part to the loss of political legitimacy Franco’s regime experienced during the 1970s. This marked the beginning of a political transition through which political parties became legalized.

³⁰ We cannot but notice the similar approach to proselytism (i.e. the arts being combined with ideology), in which the communist campaign brings a celebrated singer, and Baha’ism is introduced through the recital of Khalil Gibran’s works.

“So, [you may be asking yourself], what does this whole thing have to do with my declaration as a Bahá’í? Well, it has much to do with it,” she affirms. At the beginning, “[m]y coming near to the Bahá’í Faith does not have anything to do with spirituality or prayers—although they did influence in a lesser extent—but at the intellectual level, it had more to do with its organization [i.e. Baha’i administration].” As she became more involved with the PCE in Málaga, she found herself in a process of political “disenchantment.” At this time María began to question her own political inclinations. In her view, the PCE began to be led by a few party leaders that manipulated the party meetings. The attitude that she experienced among party members was that the means justified the ends. People were motivated by their own self-interests. In Seville, she recalls how a member of the PCE excused some dishonest party activities by saying that “since they were the good guys and they were right, foul play was justified. This was part of the philosophy of a lot of people,” María recalls. Moreover, the PCE became all the more fragmented. As she began questioning her affiliation, she also began to visit other political groups like the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT)—a party whose ideology is anarcho-syndicalist. But she did not like the atmosphere in those meetings. She was disgusted by fanatic attitudes that centered on personal leadership and hierarchy: “I did not like it when I saw that kind of authoritarian leadership, so I would leave.” She liked “true things [i.e. ideas]” and rejected lies and hypocrisy. She then approached other groups of the left, like the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE), but she was also disappointed. In the seventies, Church weddings were no longer the only means for legalized marriage, but those who opposed religion and publically proclaimed themselves to be atheists would continue to marry through the Church. “For me, a person who is a

militant in a revolutionary party, who wants to change society, and then goes off to marry in a church, is just pitiful.” The political atmosphere María recalls was that of fragmentation and dissension. “I would ask myself, why? Why so much disunity? If people like us want to change the society we live in, if we want Justice, a better and just workers’ conditions, if we want their rights to be respected, and there is so much disunity [...] how were we to change things? [...] It was a time of disillusion and desperation.”

It was amidst this political “disenchantment” that she would meet the person that introduced her to Baha’ism. He was also the person that would become her husband a year later. At that time, María tells me, “personal circumstances were also important,” when she learned about this new religion. She had broken up with her boyfriend and was going through a personal crisis. The combination of her “disenchantment” and personal crisis led her to live with a family that took care of her for about a month. This family was politically inclined towards Trotskyism and the family’s hospitality and warmth made her to be interested in Trotsky as well. She met one of the leaders of a worker’s party and he lent her books on terrorism. “Terrorism would enable us to at least boycott [unjust] actions against other countries [to show our solidarity].” María’s political frustration led her to entertain the idea of terrorism as an alternative to bring about social change. It was hard for her to think that there was anything wrong if, years earlier, she had helped setting bombs in American airplanes on their way to the Vietnam War. She would even make her first contact with *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (E.T.A.),³¹ the Basque terrorist group that fought against Franco’s regime and continue to fight for Basque independence to this

³¹ The *Basque Homeland and Freedom* or *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (E.T.A.) is a leftist Basque terrorist group that was formed during Franco’s regime and is still active in Spain.

day. “I began to adopt extreme [political] positions at this time.” But it was also around this time that she also met her future husband. They met for the first time at a conference held around 1979 in which Julio Caro Baroja (1914-1995)³² was the speaker and the theme of the conference was the speaker’s own uncle, Pío Baroja y Nessi (1852-1956), the renown Spanish author. “The first thing my husband explained to me about the Baha’i Faith was its administrative order [...] And when I heard [it] I realized that I finally knew what I was looking for.”³³

At that time, her husband was studying in Seville and María was eighteen years old. During his holiday breaks he would visit her in Málaga, and he introduced her to Málaga’s religious community—a community comprised mostly by young adherents (Fernando among them) and Virginia Orbison, the American Baha’i missionary. During his visits, however, he had to leave her to attend Baha’i meetings (*deepenings*) that were meant for adherents. The religious community made an exception, however, and let her attend one of these deepenings.³⁴ This made her all the more curious and thus began to be more interested in Baha’ism. When she had the chance to attend one of these meetings, what really caught her attention was how people from different walks of life met, discussed specific issues, and decided on the issues at hand.³⁵ In other words, the

³² Julio Caro Baroja was also a well-known Spanish anthropologist and historian.

³³ According to María, her husband had his own theories on *Rossicrucianism*, and other fraternities similar to it, during their first conversation on Baha’ism. She dismissed such theories but continued to be interested in Baha’i administration.

³⁴ Today, deepenings are usually open to adherents and non-adherents and people do not assume political positions. In fact, they are mainly used for religious deepening and an opportunity for proselytization. A “nineteen-day feast,” is a Baha’i “Mass” in which adherents meet every nineteen days according to the Baha’i calendar. These meetings are usually reserved for adherents.

³⁵ Baha’is usually call this process “consultation,” and it’s a highly regarded process. ‘Abdu’l-Baha stresses the importance of consultation repeatedly. For example, “In this Cause consultation is of vital

democratic, decentralized and integrative administration in which she found herself, led her to adhere to Baha'ism and envision a future society free of political disunity: a Baha'i world.³⁶ This is very similar to what Webb Keane recapitulates in missionary encounters: “As T.O. Beidelman observes, ‘Missionary views about the process of conversion ultimately amount to a theory of social change.’ More forcefully, in many cases missionaries and converts alike have been endowed with ‘a sense of the portentous, a heroic sense of making history—of precipitating *events*.’ (Keane 2007, 113; emphasis in the original).

But it was not merely Baha'i ideas on administration that led to her adherence, it was also the people in those deepenings. She remembers the amicable, relaxed and hospitable atmosphere she experienced the first time she attended a Baha'i meeting. It took place at Loles' apartment, another Baha'i from Málaga who I also had the opportunity to interview. When I asked her about her first Baha'i meeting she replied, “that meeting changed me. I didn't need any more proofs.” When she walked into that meeting, she says that she found what “[she] was looking for.” She felt as if her search came to an end. At that meeting María would come across something strange for her, prayer. “Praying was gibberish to me.³⁷ To me, the idea of talking to God was something inconceivable. God did not exist [...] To speak to someone that was not present physically was something...” —“Absurd?,” I interrupted her—“It could be

importance, but spiritual conference and not the mere voicing of personal views is intended” (Abdu'l-Baha 1982b, 72).

³⁶ In fact, what attracted her to the worker's party mentioned earlier on was that it tried to accommodate most leftist inclinations in order to preserve political unity. As María explained to me, party affiliates would express their concerns and inclinations during their meetings and would decide the best political program they were going to run that year.

³⁷ *Para mí la oración era hablar en chino.*

interpreted as absurd. But to me, because of the atmosphere at that moment, it did not seem absurd. It is as if, at that moment, I opened my mind to another possibility [...] And in fact, when I left that meeting, I had a deep feeling of being at peace.” After that deepening, they all went for a walk to *la escollera*, a breakwater or pier made out of big rocks. “I remember a feeling I had... that I should not step on the rock because I could fall into the water. It was slippery and it was at night. But then I felt like I was floating and it did not matter [...] So I stepped on the rock and I did not fall. But the feeling was as if I did not care if I died or lived. It was a feeling as if I was beyond life or death. It didn’t matter to me, because I felt as if I found something that opened a door into my heart. I could not tell you, ideologically or intellectually, what we talked at that meeting because it was more the atmosphere and the emotions that awoke in me that particular experience. I was aware that I still had to walk the intellectual path, but I knew that I finally found the path.”

Another aspect that caught particularly her attention was the manner in which those deepenings took place. She would explain to me that in these deepenings, they would decide the next issue that was to be discussed by putting it to a vote. One of the adherents would prepare a fifteen-minute presentation as if it were a conference. After the presentation, every person in the audience would assume a position: some would act as if they were communists, atheists, Catholics, and yet others as being *pasotas* or indifferent to the issue at hand. This would, according to María, spark a lot of interesting and lively discussions. The next week after her first meeting, she showed up uninvited but they let her in. As they were going to vote on the next issue to be discussed, María wanted to vote. They kindly told her, however, that those meetings were intended for

Baha'is only and that she would need to approach the local assembly to ask for permission. "I then asked the secretary [of the assembly]," she recalls, "and the local assembly of Málaga decided to meet me the next time they gathered." When the assembly met her, they asked her why she wanted to attend those deepenings. She replied that she enjoyed the contents of those meetings and explained to them that she wanted their permission to keep attending them. The assembly authorized her to attend and she continued to do so for two months. Meeting the assembly was "in a way," María explains, "another beautiful experience [...] It was a beautiful meeting." She recalls how, when she came into the room, all the assembly members stood up to receive her with kindness and warmth in order to discuss her petition.³⁸ She was well-aware that this was somewhat set up. She fully understands this process because, as she explained, one needs to decide at some point if one wants to join the religion. The religious community and the local assembly, as she recalls, "gave me the space to decide if I wanted to join them or not." As she saw it, it was this flexibility she witnessed that attracted her to this religion and one of the reasons she decided to join them: "I did not feel pressured in order for me to convert,"³⁹ she explains, "It was a subtle way of asking me if I was a Baha'i or not."

³⁸ According to other informants, this practice is also common in the Baha'i headquarters, in Haifa, among the members of the UHJ. Adherents that move to Haifa to volunteer their services are personally greeted at their arrival by the nine members of the UHJ.

³⁹ "To convert," is not a usual locution among Baha'is. María, however, is here using it because I previously explained to her that I was researching Baha'i conversions. The common locution is "to become a Baha'i," or "becoming a Baha'i." In some countries, like in the US, the Baha'i church requires that a card must be signed to join them. This card is referred to as "a declaration card." To that effect, Baha'is might refer to their conversion or adherence as "I declared ten years ago," for example. "Declaration" is thus another locution that refers to adherence.

Loles is also from Málaga, but when I interviewed her she was residing in Cádiz with her husband, Nacho, originally from Santander (in northern Spain) and their youngest daughter. They are all Baha'is and she is probably a bit older than Fernando. She comes from an upper-middle class family and her family was neither communist nor socialist. Her father is from Málaga and her mother from Pamplona, another city in the northern region of Spain. She did not really grow up with her family, however. As a child, she suffered from an illness that kept her away from the city, and grew up under the care of her nursemaid—*tata*, as she would call her—in a rural Andalusian village near Málaga. Loles grew up as a peasant until the age of seven. Her nursemaid came from a very poor rural village and lived with her mother, her married sister, her brother-in-law, their children, and another unmarried sister. The house had only two rooms and they all slept in mattresses made of carob tree (*algarrobo*) seeds. It was hard for her to adapt when she returned to a life in the provincial city of Málaga. She could not play with the housekeepers' children and began to have problems with her family in her adolescence. As a teenager, it was difficult for her to socialize with others because she did not share the same interests. She could not stand the hierarchy and prejudices that came with her parents' social class. She liked to read and spent most of her time doing so. She would either spend time at a friend's house, or at home, but she would not go out with her classmates because she was not interested in the way they spent their time, she tells me.

In the late 1960s she tried to join a group of socialist intellectuals, but she could not make it. Her family had ties with the local police and the Church and they would inform them of her activities. She then joined a hippie movement. They lived in communes in the coast of Málaga and she met with a lot of English, Dutch and German

foreigners. As she recalls, in these communes people talked more in English than in Spanish. This was a meaningful experience for Loles because “people did what they liked, but respected each other.” As her relationship with her parents became more difficult, she was sent, at the end of the 1960s, to live with her maternal grandmother in Pamplona. “She was a more open and more tolerant woman in spite of her being seventy-two years old.” During her stay in Pamplona, she befriended a Catalan communist and began to sympathize with that ideology. It was this ideological rapprochement that “helped me form a social consciousness,” she remarks. Her maternal grandmother was a Basque conservative nationalist and Loles became politically involved with a left-wing Basque nationalist circle of friends that sympathized with ETA. She recalls that by the time the events of May 68 took place in France, she lived in Pamplona.

By 1970-1971, she would hand out the first pamphlets printed out by the then illegal and exiled PCE. Retrospectively, in spite of her activism, she did not fully feel identified with that party. She felt as if the PCE lacked the spirit for which she longed. Loles would spend part of her time in Madrid, studying psychology, and in Pamplona. She had put a lot of hope in studying psychology but soon became disillusioned. “I thought [psychology] would help me understand the human soul, but it had nothing to do with that. It was a bunch of methods that attempted to bring back conflicted people into a society without conflicts. It was about solving the conflict, not the problem.” As she returned to Pamplona, she became part of a small circle of friends that was comprised of five people. Their activism revolved around boycotting meetings set up by the right-wing to speak with workers in factories. They would infiltrate these meetings and join the

workers as if they were part of the audience. They would then begin to whisper *asesinos* (“murderers”) and the workers would slowly join their whispers. The whispers would soon turn into loud chants and the meeting had to be called off. “But, of course, we were not the only ones infiltrating these meetings and there were those who would infiltrate the audience in order to report on the boycotters.” “One day,” she continues, “a friend of mine came to visit me from Málaga but I told him that I could not stay with him because I had to go to another boycott. He was so persistent that I decided to stay with him. They caught everyone. One of them would not make it out of the police station. The other had been so badly beaten that he was damaged for life. I collapsed when that incident occurred. I felt as if I had betrayed my friends. On the other hand, I felt fortunate that they did not catch me.” She became depressed and began to turn into a very antisocial and numbed person. Her situation became unbearable.

Back in Madrid, as she was exiting the subway at night, she looked at the sky and begged God for help. She thought, “I can’t continue like this on my own [...] If there is anyone up there, give me a hand.” She went back to the university’s dorm and found Betsy there, her Puerto Rican roommate. “I had a bad reputation around the dorm because I stole two boyfriends from two girls,” she explains. Betsy told her that she was going out with someone that was very handsome, kind and wonderful, and so on. He was very serious about her and he liked her much. “Don’t be naïve,” Loles replied, “he likes you as much as he likes the rest of the [Latin-American] women. He is just having fun with you and it will last three months at most. Give me three weeks and I will steal him from you. Betsy retorted to Loles that she thought of herself a heartbreaker, and viewed herself as being above the rest. So, they made a bet. If Loles was able to steal Betsy’s

boyfriend, Betsy would go with her to Málaga with all the expenses paid. If Loles was unsuccessful, Betsy would take Loles to Puerto Rico and pay for all her expenses. Two or three days later, Betsy told Loles that her boyfriend worked at a Jazz club called Bourbon Street, located in Diego de León street, and had invited all the girls from the dorm. She asked Loles if she wanted to join them. Loles liked Jazz music too and she found an opportunity to win the bet. It was then, when she arrived at the Jazz club, that she met Nacho, Betsy's boyfriend and the first Baha'i she met.

Nacho is from Santander and he is around the same age as Loles. His family was neither communist nor socialist. He moved to Madrid with his parents because his retired father was offered a job and he accepted it nevertheless. Nacho began to study chemical engineering in Santander and continued his studies in Madrid, but in his last years of college he dropped out. One day, he was on his way to the university campus and he was feeling as if there was a void in his life. There was a church close to his house and he went in. He thought to himself that there must have been something or someone better than the doctrines he had received. A few days later, when he was studying in Madrid he met, through a network of American students, a student that told him about Baha'ism. "And this happened thanks to that prayer," Nacho affirms. Although this student was not a Baha'i, she invited him to a gathering that was taking place at the house of Carlos (Charles) Ioas, an American Baha'i lawyer that worked at the American military base of Torrejón de Ardoz in Madrid. Nacho was very impressed at what he saw there. "It was a very large house and it was full of people," he remembers. "There were about thirty or forty people there, but I was not used to see that many people." This gathering impressed him very much because, as it was pointed out earlier, Spaniards were not allowed to

assemble in groups larger than fifteen people. “There were people of many races and different countries,” he says. “And then, the particular manner Mr. Ioas addressed me... with his affection... his warmth, with... I don’t know... A kind of love, but not a feigned love. It was not an artifice. It was not a sophisticated trap in order to get something out of me. It was something pure [...] It was like a dazzle,” Nacho remarks. He also met a young man from Chile, Pancho Amenábar, who was one of the two members of a music band called *Día Prometido* (Promised Day).⁴⁰ Nacho, not having heard about Baha’ism before, he became very interested. What he saw in it, he explains, is that he found a religion that was not as nationalistic and local as the Spanish Catholic Church. “It was like a sun that extended throughout the universe. It had a God for everyone [...] It was the return of Jesus, evidently, it couldn’t be otherwise [...] It was so clear to me that I accepted it very soon.” Baha’ism came across to him as an actual global religion that was free of nationalisms. He would speak to Pancho and Carlos incessantly about Baha’ism for one or two weeks and then decided to adhere to this religion. He would later interpret his encounter with Baha’ism as an answer from God to his prayer in that church.

Nacho was still in college and continued to work at a Jazz club, Bourbon Street, which was owned by his brother-in-law, to earn some money. This coincided with Madrid’s change of *comisario*. At the time, Diego de León, the street where the club was located, had a reputation: after three o’clock in the morning, it became a transvestite meeting place. The new appointed *comisario* warned club owners that if a single

⁴⁰ See footnote 16.

transvestite were to be found at a club, that club would close permanently. Thus, in order to avoid transvestites going to the Jazz club, Nacho and his brother-in-law resolved the situation with the following idea: they announced throughout the universities' dormitories that it was completely free for all women to enter the club after three o'clock in the morning. The club was thus filled with women and, as Nacho explained to me, transvestites would avoid going to his club. They did this for about two or three weeks and it was on one of these nights that he would meet Loles.

One of the things that caught Loles' attention was that Nacho did not drink alcohol. At first, she thought that it could be due to an illness, but when he told her that it was because he was a Baha'i, she was surprised. For Loles this was like "the magic word" and she thought that, for some reason, it sounded like "light [...], it was as an illuminating word." One of these nights they would spend the whole time talking about Baha'ism until the morning hours. I asked them what they talked about and, as far as they can remember, they talked about prophecies, the Trinity, the Book of Daniel, and a Baha'i well-known book on prophecies titled *Thief in the Night* (which will be discussed shortly). On a more "social" level, as Loles refers to it, she recalls having talked about Baha'ism's lack of clergy, or individual leadership, the elimination of extremes of poverty and wealth, universal education and the equality between man and woman. "When I heard about all these principles," Loles says, "I thought, oh my, this is like communism, but with meaning. What I thought communism was lacking was its meaningfulness. Where was it going? [Baha'ism] was truly going somewhere. It was worth it." She would later explain that what was meaningful to her was its spirituality and its transcendence. When I asked Loles about when the process of conversion began,

she replied: “My process began earlier on. I began to have problems at home because my parents were very conservative and very Catholic [...] and they had a lot of prejudices. I then began to realize that this kind of society was, somewhat, the society the Bible had described as the end of time. And I thought that Christ had either returned and was living among us, or had been among us recently. I also thought that if Christ was recognized only by twelve people at the beginning, [if he had returned] he would not have been recognized by most people either at this moment.” To conclude, what both, Nacho and Loles saw in Baha’ism was the return of Christ, an element lacking in María’s and Fernando’s narratives.

When I asked adherents with a stronger leftist background (i.e. Fernando and María) what Baha’i literature helped their adherence, they would usually refer me to the three books that were mentioned earlier: *Baha’u’llah and the New Era* (Esslemont 1923), *Portals to Freedom* (Ives 1937) and *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Abdu’l-Baha 1922). They would also discern two different aspects in their process as adherents. They were first drawn to Baha’ism for its ideology and, later, the affective component would take place. These three books help us understand the ideological and affective aspects of that process. The first book appealed Fernando for its “ideological” content. The other two books, which deal with ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s charisma and his speeches during his North American tour in 1912, helped Fernando with the affective aspect. In these books, ‘Abdu’l-Baha is represented as a Christ figure, which explains why the potential adherent may feel admiration and affection toward this figure. We should also underscore that these three books are written, in principle, for an English-speaking audience: the first was written by a Scotsman; the second was written by an American, a former Unitarian

clergyman that adhered to Baha'ism; and the third is a compilation of notes taken by American adherents during 'Abdu'l-Baha's visit to Canada and the United States in 1912. Perhaps, this literature, within the Spanish context of the 1970s—that of political isolation, but with the hope for a future democracy that would end its isolation—gave the sense of a global connection. We will discuss the first of these books succinctly to give a general idea of their contents.

Baha'u'llah and the New Era was written by Dr. John Ebenezer Esslemont (1874-1925) and is an introduction to Baha'ism and a first synthesis of the religious movement. It is a work of translation that is primarily intended to address a Western audience. From this book, the adherent (or potential adherent) may learn, to use Keane's terminology, Baha'ism's "sense of history," that is, "the perceived transitions between past, present and future" (Keane 2007, 114). Esslemont's book includes a moralistic narrative that is similar to the Protestant ethic as well as one of the more optimistic versions of modernity. Regarding Baha'i moral narrative, Esslemont presents the reader with a synthesis of its religious principles: devotion to God, search after truth, love of God, severance, obedience, service, teaching (proselytizing), courtesy and reverence, the sin-covering eye, humility, truthfulness and honesty, and self-realization. Moreover, regarding modernity, Keane points out that "the idea of modernity commonly seems to include two distinctive features: rupture from a traditional past, and progress into a better future" (Keane 2007, 48). It is in this sense that Baha'ism is modern. The Bab and Baha'u'llah are the charismatic authorities that signal the break of an old era from the beginning of a new one. But, "[t]he old era is not yet dead. It is engaged in a life and death struggle with the new. Evils there are in plenty, gigantic and formidable, but they are being exposed,

investigated, challenged and attacked with new vigor and hope” (Esslemont 1980, 3). The new is to replace the old, “[t]he old principles of materialism and self-interest, the old sectarian and patriotic prejudices and animosities, are perishing, discredited, amidst the ruins they have wrought, and in all lands we see signs of a new spirit of faith, of brotherhood, of internationalism, that is bursting the old bonds and overrunning the old boundaries.”⁴¹ Perhaps, Esslemont’s “new” is similar to what Slavoj Žižek suggests through the idea of reinventing utopia. According to Žižek, there are two false meanings of utopia: one is that of the ideal society which is known never to be realized; the other is the capitalist utopia in which one is not only allowed to indulge in new perverse desires but is in fact solicited to do so. The true utopia, on the other hand, is when the situation is so without issue that one is unable to solve it within the coordinates of the possible. Hence, in this situation, out of the pure urge for survival, one must invent a new space. I am not necessarily embracing the “false” and “true” utopias, however. But it seems that Baha’ism in this case provides those politically and religiously disillusioned with a utopian space that is at once modern and global. Baha’ism, through Esslemont’s work, also provides the reader with a *progressive* sense of history that is in tune with its modern and global religious tenets.

⁴¹ The struggle between the old (death) and the new (life), is discussed repeatedly throughout the book. These are a few more examples: “But, in the world of nature, the Spring brings about not only the growth and awakening of new life but also the destruction and removal of the old and effete...” (Esslemont 1980, 4); “To cling to the old remedy when the physician has ordered new treatment is not to show faith in the physician, but infidelity” (125); “During the period of transition from the old state of international anarchy to the new state of international solidarity aggressive wars will still be possible, and in these circumstances, military or other coercive action in the cause of international justice, unity and peace may be a positive duty” (172); and “All the signs of the times indicate that we are at the dawn of a new era in the history of mankind. Hitherto the young eagle of humanity has clung to the old aerie in the solid rock of selfishness and materialism” (209).

Esslemont's book shows how Baha'ism is a postmillennial and apocalyptic religion: it is postmillennial because its prophet and savior (Baha'u'llah) had already arrived; it is apocalyptic because Baha'is live in a temporality of *episodic* climatic crises.⁴² Much like Faubion's millenarians "millenarian temporality still leaves history sufficient length for events to unfold along their fateful and final course" (Faubion 2001, 105). But the final denouement of this millenarian temporality, within Baha'ism's sense of history, is not the end of time but the final victory of Baha'ism as a divine civilization inaugurated by a golden age. Baha'ism's sense of history in Esslemont's book is constructed through the Baha'i appropriation of the Babi movement: Babism is Baha'ism's "prehistory" (Fischer 1990, 229).⁴³ This appropriation is fully assimilated in Esslemont's book in order to produce its sense of history. With the Bab's private announcement of his religious mission to Mulla Husayn, the Baha'i calendar—which is Babi in its origins—begins in the year 1844. It is from that year on that the struggle between the old and the new had begun.

"Linked to moral underpinnings," Keane explains, "this narrative [of modernity] often is made up of another component too, a call for humans to *act* upon their history. Foucault, voicing Baudelaire, asserts that modernity involves an 'ironic heroization of the present' and demands that one produce oneself. With or without the Parisian irony, the heroic sense is widespread" (Keane 2007, 49; emphasis in the original). According to

⁴² These episodic climatic phases are referred to as *pangs*: "the death pangs of an old era and the birth pangs of the new" (Esslemont 1980, 2-3). Shoghi Effendi, in a letter dated March 11, 1936, would discuss these pangs in more detail elsewhere (see Effendi 1974, 168).

⁴³ Amanat would also agree with Fischer when he notes that "Baha'i interpretation tends also to reduce the Babi movement to an introductory episode, a prelude of predestined developments that harbingered the Baha'i revelation" (Amanat 2005, xvi).

Amanat, “[w]ith a powerful apocalyptic message and the social dynamics that Babi movement engendered, it is only reasonable to ask why it failed to supplant the prevailing order. Of course, one school of thought denies that there was any failure in the first place. The Baha’i narrative, as it was constructed during the four decades between the execution of the Bab in 1850 in Tabriz and the death of Baha’u’llah in ‘Akka in 1892, came to view the early Babi episode [...] as an heroic prelude to the advent of the Baha’i Faith” (Amanat 2005, xv-xvi). It is not only the Babi narrative that Baha’ism appropriates: it links Babi martyrdom and heroism to Western adherents through a “spiritual genealogy.” Shoghi Effendi had pointed out repeatedly that “[t]he community of the organized promoters of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in the American continent—the spiritual descendants of the dawn-breakers of an heroic Age, who by their death proclaimed the birth of that Faith—must, in turn, usher in, not by their death but through living sacrifice, that promised World Order, the shell ordained to enshrine that priceless jewel, the world civilization, of which the Faith itself is the sole begetter” (Effendi 1990, 7). This “transpiritualism” is not only bestowed upon the American continent. In time, the spiritual descendants would include all Westerner Baha’is. As Ruhiyyi Rabbani, Shoghi Effendi’s wife and hand of the cause would point out in her biography of her husband: “The Bahá’is of the West emerged from the experience of reading this history of the life and times of the Báb transfigured; it was as if some of the precious blood of those early martyrs had been spattered upon them. They caught a glimpse of the tradition behind them, they saw that this was a Faith for which one carried one’s life in one’s hand, they understood what Shoghi Effendi was talking about and what he expected from them

when he called them the spiritual descendants of the Dawn-Breakers”⁴⁴ (Rabbani 1969, 218).

The narratives that we find in the cases of Loles and Nacho are, in contrast, different from those of Fernando and María. Whereas they may have been drawn to the Baha’i church and its integrative administration, their narratives deal more with prophecies and Parousia. They specifically mentioned *Thief in the Night*, a book that deals with Biblical prophecies. We also have an imagery of light that is very similar to that found by Margit Warburg when, one of her informants in the Danish religious community, told her about her spiritual experience years before her adherence to Baha’ism: “One night when she was in deep prayer she saw a cone-shaped light pointing towards her chest, and she was filled for a moment by the Holy Ghost” (Warburg 2006, 72). These two forms of conversion narratives may be generally understood as two related but ultimately different forms of ideology: the first as “political,” the other as “religious.” Nevertheless, both forms seem to find a connection through Baha’ism that enables them to accommodate their ideologies.

⁴⁴ “Dawn-Breakers” refer to the first Babi adherents.

A Preliminary Study on Baha'i Doxa

In the first chapter I attempted to provide a basic outline of Baha'i cosmology and its institutions or, to use Louis Althusser's terminology, the "Ideological State Apparatuses" of Baha'ism. In the second chapter, I tried to explain, through what I called "leaps of faith," how actors viewed Baha'ism as an alternative utopian space through which they found their ideals realized. These leaps of faith are, in terms of what Michel Foucault outlined in his analytic of ethics, a mode of subjectivation, namely, transfiguration. Thus, the first two chapters attempt to show how Baha'is find a utopian space and how they consider their religion as a possible alternative to the ultimate realization of their ideals through Baha'i religious institutions, beliefs and practices. This said, the present chapter shifts its focus to ideology (or doxa), to show the sense of limits or sense of reality Bourdieu had observed. More specifically, this chapter explores the relationship between Baha'i scholars and fundamental doctrines, the Baha'i charismatic authority (Baha'u'llah), and Baha'ism's religious institutions.

Slavoj Žižek and Terry Eagleton have, among many others, revisited the concept of ideology. As Žižek observes, "[b]y way of a simple reflection on how the horizon of historical imagination is subjected to change, we find ourselves in medias res, compelled to accept the unrelenting pertinence of the notion of ideology. Up to a decade or two ago, the system production-nature (man's productive-exploitative relationship with nature and its resources) was perceived as a constant, whereas everybody was busy imagining different forms of the social organization of production and commerce (Fascism or Communism as alternatives to liberal capitalism); today, as Fredric Jameson

perspicaciously remarked, nobody seriously considers possible alternatives to capitalism any longer, whereas popular imagination is persecuted by the visions of the forthcoming ‘breakdown of nature,’ of the stoppage of all life on earth—it seems easier to imagine the ‘end of the world’ than a far more modest change in the mode of production, as if liberal capitalism is the ‘real’ that will somehow survive even under conditions of a global ecological catastrophe.... One can thus categorically assert the existence of ideology qua generative matrix that regulates the relationship between visible and non-visible, between imaginable and non-imaginable, as well as the changes in this relationship” (Žižek 1999, 1).

Others, as in the case of Pierre Bourdieu, have created a set of concepts such as “symbolic domination,” “symbolic power,” or “symbolic violence” in order to refurbish ideology and render it more precise (as well as reviving it). Another important notion operating under ideology is doxa. According to Bourdieu, “Every established order tends to produce (to very different degrees and with very different means) the naturalization of its own arbitrariness. Of all the mechanisms tending to produce this effect, the most important and the best concealed is undoubtedly the dialectic of the objective chances and the agents’ aspirations, out of which arises the sense of limits, commonly called the sense of reality, i.e. the correspondence between the objective classes and the internalized classes, social structures and mental structures, which is the basis of the most ineradicable adherence to the established order” (Bourdieu 1995, 164). The following chapter, as well as the chapters before, attempts to show that, contrary to what Žižek observed, there are religious movements like Baha’ism that strive towards an alternative social organization. Baha’ism attempts to build a “divine civilization” through the guidance and order of its religious institutions which are inspired by God. In fact,

Baha'is are convinced that, sooner or later, Baha'ism will become one of the major religions of the world while all other religions will become minorities. In this chapter we will discuss two essays that are representative of mainstream Baha'i scholarship and deal with scripture. Although these essays are written by mainstreamers, they can also be understood within the framework of Baha'i doxa since both mainstreamers and adherents outside the mainstream believe in the hierarchical status of their religious figures. This chapter is, therefore, an exercise through which I hope to show what the coordinates of doxa in Baha'ism are.

In "The Validity and Value of an Historical-Critical Approach to the Revealed Works of Bahá'u'lláh," John Hatcher discusses two theories of literary criticism (historical and objectivist criticism) and compares them to the scripture authored by Baha'u'llah. In comparing these theories, he attempts to highlight their adequacies and shortcomings in relation to scripture. He warns us at the beginning of the paper that "[b]ecause theories of literary criticism come and go according to how one formulates these components in relation to interpretation, it is not uncommon for theories to arise out of a reaction against previous approaches or else to reflect the tenor of an age or a social movement" (Hatcher 1997, 27). Moreover, and from the outset, Hatcher is already demonstrating one of the fundamental principles of Baha'i doxa in treating scripture as "revealed." Baha'u'llah, who is in Baha'i terminology a "Manifestation of God," is not merely the receptacle of God's revelation but "an other-worldly visitor" (Hatcher 1997, 29) who has come to educate humanity about the spiritual realm. Hatcher's understanding of scripture exemplifies one of the most cherished and widespread

symbols of Baha'i doxa. It represents one of the most fundamental principles through its unity in division (its hierarchy): the ringstone symbol.



Broadly put, this symbol represents the relationship between God, the Manifestation of God (or the prophet-founder), and humanity. The lower, middle and higher horizontal lines represent humanity, the manifestation of God (prophet-founder), and God respectively. The vertical line is the union or connection between the three. Thus, Baha'u'llah as being part of humanity per se: he is a step above humanity—and a step below God—and the intermediary between God and humanity. God, being unknowable and beyond the grasp of the human mind, can only be understood in terms of his prophet-founders or manifestations (i.e. Jesus, Mohammad, the Bab or Baha'u'llah). The two stars on the sides of the ringstone symbol are said to be the Bab and Baha'u'llah. Although the prophet-founder is not God, he is, for humanity, the closest representation of what God would be like.

As Hatcher explains at the beginning of his paper, objectivist criticism understands a work as constructing its own universe “and as having within itself the keys to meaning” (Hatcher 1997, 27). Hence, under the section “The Value of the Objectivist Approach,” Hatcher begins by comparing the objectivist approach to Baha'u'llah's revelation because, “[f]or the student of Baha'i scripture, it would seem that an objectivist approach with its emphasis on a close reading of text and its attempt to discern

various metaphorical and symbolic levels of meaning would be the appropriate critical approach...” (Hatcher 1997, 28). He continues to explain that not only are hermeneutics and exegesis valid approaches in scriptural study—since they explore different levels of meaning that are beyond the literal—but that even Baha’u’llah seems to prescribe such approaches as he warned about the different meanings of scripture. Hatcher quotes Baha’u’llah’s *Kitab-i-Iqan* to prove his point: “We speak one word, and by it we intend one and seventy meanings; each one of these meanings we can explain” (Baha’u’llah 1983, 255). Hatcher, following Baha’u’llah’s own interpretative prescription, also advocates for an independent contemplation of scripture which will inspire the reader to understand the different levels of meaning. We must bring, for a moment, our attention to the term “independent” which Hatcher mentions. This term is not so much that of a critical reader; rather, it denotes something similar to “personal” or “private.” Hatcher clearly states that there is another justification for an objectivist approach in scriptural study. Taken that adherents assume that Baha’u’llah is a divine emissary that has come to help humanity in order to create a global religious community, one must question the validity of knowing the historical circumstances that surround the production of scripture. Particularly, since it is the “essential truth” of scripture which adherents are challenged to discover and not the historical circumstances in which scripture was revealed. This assumption is confirmed, according to Hatcher, “by the fact that Baha’u’llah exhorts us to reflect independently on His words, a process of meditation and study which focuses on each individual’s personal and private relationship to the symbolic, allegorical or ‘hidden’ meanings” (Hatcher 1997, 28; my emphasis). He quotes Baha’u’llah, once again, to prove his point: “Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may

unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths”
(Baha’u’llah 1983, 136).

The movement from the justification of the objectivist approach to Baha’u’llah’s exhortation to reflect independently must not go unnoticed. It is a doxic movement through which the author assumes the Baha’i hierarchy and “confirms” his assumption “by the fact that” Baha’u’llah encourages independent reflection on his scripture.

Hatcher’s relationship to scripture is therefore mysterious in the sense that there are hidden meanings that must be unraveled. He follows Baha’u’llah’s warning regarding his own prophetic texts. He also follows, however, other views Baha’u’llah highlighted regarding secular theories and philosophies. When Hatcher notes that literary theories come and go as they react against each other, he is not only relativizing the validity of these approaches, he is also following the words of Baha’u’llah: “Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current

amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men. In this most perfect Balance whatsoever the peoples and kindreds of the earth possess must be weighed, while the measure of its weight should be tested according to its own standard, did ye but know it” (Baha’u’llah 1993, 56). Thus, Hatcher is weighting the objectivist and historical criticisms in contrast to scripture while knowing that both criticisms will ultimately fail.

In addition to a close and personal reading of scripture, Hatcher observes that we may find other helpful aspects within objectivist theories that enable the reader to interpret scripture. Following Baha’u’llah’s own prescriptions, he points out the search

for the essential meaning of words. He also highlights the relationship between the manifestation and his art. Hatcher, once again, expresses the aforementioned hierarchy in which Baha'u'llah is an other-worldly visitor by differentiating the relationship between Baha'u'llah and his art, on the one hand, and the human artist and his art on the other. According to Hatcher, whereas the human artist is predisposed to “all manners of subtle historical influence,” Baha'u'llah is “impervious to circumstantial or historical influences” (Hatcher 1997, 29). In other words, the human artist is a historical subject and the prophet-founder's revelation is not. There are other advantages objectivist criticism offers—and “perhaps the most weighty of all” (Hatcher 1997, 30). Why would the historical context of scripture matter if the prophet is not the author of his own scripture to begin with? Hatcher asks. According to him, every prophet-founder admits that nothing he speaks or writes is derived from his own volition but that the prophet-founder is subjected to the will of God.

There are a few points that seem unavoidable to put into question in Hatcher's paper. First of all, it would be difficult to imagine that any objectivist critic would claim that an author is impervious to historical circumstances. Furthermore, it would also be difficult to find an objectivist critic who would treat an author's text as being produced by another superior author. Finally, it must be noted, that historical critics do not disregard a close reading of any given text in order to emphasize historical circumstances of the work. This is not, however, a problem for Hatcher since, as we are about to see in his discussion of historical criticism in light of scripture, objective Baha'i scholarship is an endeavor meant to be carried out by its adherents and their particular religious interests. In other words, that objectivist and historical critics would not approach

scripture as he does is not a problem because they are not part of the Baha'i belief system.

Following his discussion on objectivist criticism, Hatcher begins a new section titled "The Role of the Manifestation in the Creative Process." He writes that there are indications in other authoritative Baha'i texts in which is stated that the prophet-founder may play a role in the production of scripture. He quotes Shoghi Effendi as regarding the Kitab-i-Aqdas "as the brightest emanation of the mind of Baha'u'llah" (Effendi 1974, 213). He also shares an idea that is widespread in the religious community in which adherents wonder if the imperative "Say," in scripture, is a divine command that Baha'u'llah directly quotes from God. This implies, in Hatcher's view, that the remainder of the scripture is "inspired paraphrase" (Hatcher 1997, 31-32). What Hatcher is referring to here may be explained in the following fragment written by Baha'u'llah in the Kitab-i-Aqdas: "O Pen of the Most High! Say: O people of the world! We have enjoined upon you fasting during a brief period, and at its close have designated for you Naw-Ruz as a feast" (Baha'u'llah 1993, 24-25; my italics). Baha'u'llah is usually interpreted by adherents as speaking in two voices: Baha'u'llah's voice and God's voice. Hence, what Hatcher observes regarding this dual voice is that it does not make much of a difference since, as I have noted earlier, God is unknowable and the closest representation of what God might be like is the prophet-founder. Nevertheless, although Hatcher made its case for objectivist criticism, he also pays attention to other parts of the Baha'i corpus that make the case for a historical critical approach. He writes that although there are many warnings against applying methods of historical criticism in scripture, there are some indications in other religious texts that render the historical

critical approach not only as relevant but indispensable (Hatcher 1997, 32). Hatcher suggests that there are four levels of “historical-critical information”: the manifestation as participant in history, the role of social and religious context in the revelation, the diversity and coherence of Baha’u’llah’s revelation, and the role of historical context in understanding topical allusions. To discuss at length the last two levels would be out of the scope of this chapter. We will discuss the first two levels since the points I would like to make may be applied to the other two.

On the first level of “historical-critical information,” Hatcher understands the prophet as “an integral and strategic participant in the ongoing educational process, the evolution of human society on our planet.” For Hatcher, the prophet has universal knowledge of the religious state of the world. In other words, the prophet is in this physical world with “full historical consciousness” (Hatcher 1997, 33). Moreover, he points out that although the “uninformed” might think of the prophets as “victims of history instead of its prime movers,” Baha’ism depicts prophet-founders as the impellers of history who, through their revelation, exercise their influence. This is another doxic movement through which Hatcher excludes authors who do not share the same belief system. The unbelieving authors, or the uninformed, are therefore excluded from the frame of acceptance in terms of the Baha’i belief and attitude towards history: a progressive and linear history in which the world is leaving behind adolescence and, with Baha’ism, it is beginning its adulthood. This is what he means by “the evolution of human society.” He is expressing in different words one of the most widespread analogies of Baha’i doxa. ‘Abdu’l-Baha expresses this in the following manner: “Act in accordance with the counsels of the Lord: that is, rise up in such wise, and with such

qualities, as to endow the body of this world with a living soul, and to bring this young child, humanity, to the stage of adulthood” (Abdu’l-Baha 1982a, 33). Furthermore, if we take Hatcher’s understanding of the uninformed as portraying charismatic authorities as “victims,” and not the “prime movers” of history, one cannot but wonder why he is pushing for this dichotomy. This “dichotomy” in Baha’i religious history goes back to the hierarchy mentioned above. Baha’u’llah, being above humanity, is also viewed as having god-like powers that shape the course of history. Ultimately, he is not the victim but the impeller of history forward.

We must make a short parenthesis to fully appreciate the consequences of such hierarchical belief. Since the charismatic authority is above humanity, and his scripture is understood as being mysterious (in the sense that it contains hidden meanings), the meaning of scripture is never fulfilled or realized. Thus, we should not be surprised that a particular exegetical temporality is attributed to scripture. The significance of scripture and its hidden meanings are therefore postponed to future research. This is the reason Hatcher, and many other Baha’i scholars and religious institutions, postpone the true significance of scripture to a future. For example, Hatcher notes, “[e]ven though we must await future scholarship to appreciate fully the ingenuity of the teaching techniques employed by Prophets...” (Hatcher 1997, 33). Again, Hatcher is following the words of Shoghi Effendi when the latter postpones the full appreciation of the adherents’ proselytizing efforts to a predestined future. In the first volume of *The Light of Divine Guidance*, Effendi asserts: “The extent of their future undertaking in both continents; their contribution to the Global Crusade to be launched throughout the whole planet; their particular and, in many ways, unique, reinforcement of the work, connected with future

Baha'i research and scholarship, in view of the characteristic qualities of painstaking thoroughness, scientific exactitude and dispassionate criticism distinguishing the race to which they belong,—these are too vast and complex to be assessed at the present time.”⁴⁵

There is also a similar case regarding Socrates in scripture. In a letter dated October 22, 1995, the Research Department at the Baha'i World Center in Haifa (Israel), and at the instruction of the UHJ, answers in the following manner a question regarding some scriptural statements on the Greek philosopher. Someone had asked the religious institution if it could confirm that Socrates had visited Israel. Baha'u'llah had mentioned it and 'Abdu'l-Baha had also made reference to it. Although both of these religious figures mentioned that Socrates had visited the Holy Land (Israel), the Research Department indicates that “[t]o date, we have no documentary evidence to support the Master's ['Abdu'l-Baha's] statement concerning what is 'recorded in eastern histories' about Socrates' visiting the Holy Land [Israel]. Baha'is accept the 'authority of 'Abdu'l-Baha on this matter', since we believe that He had 'an intuitive knowledge' and since He affirmed the source of the report. There is the possibility that historical 'proof may come to light through research in the future.’”⁴⁶ In this manner, whatever is mentioned in scripture is viewed by the adherent as true and if there is no scientific proof for it, it remains an unproven truth. The proof for the words of these religious figures is thus postponed to the future.

⁴⁵ This source is taken from a free digital library program, *Ocean Research Library* (ORL), where many religious works may be found. This particular quotation may be found by searching "Global Crusade." See <http://www.bahai-education.org>.

⁴⁶ ORL, search "Compilation on Socrates."

Returning to Hatcher's first level of historical-critical information, he concludes the section stating that if the study of Baha'u'llah's scripture is divorced from its "relationship to the continuity of human history, we may fare little better than amnesiacs, suddenly finding ourselves in the throes of adolescence and desperately trying to understand out of context the wisdom and guidance of a teacher whose every utterance alludes to past and present conditions of which we are sublimely ignorant" (Hatcher 1997, 34-35). Once again, we may find Baha'i doxa at work in this paragraph. The "maturation of human society" is understood as an evolutionary process that renders the past religious revelations as adolescent, and therefore inadequate, and Baha'ism as the culmination of such a process. Moreover, we must also pay attention to the transformation that Hatcher is indicating in this paragraph. Hatcher, as well as many other adherents, expects a sudden transformation of the world into adulthood through which Baha'ism becomes a worldwide religious majority.

The next level of historical-critical information is "the role of social and religious context in the revelation." He reminds the reader that Baha'u'llah relates everything he speaks or writes to his immediate social and religious context (Hatcher 1997, 35). He goes on to say that since Baha'u'llah addressed people of specific cultural backgrounds, his writings allude to their religious traditions: one cannot grasp the Baha'u'llah's scripture without understanding his allusions. In this instance, Hatcher is following Effendi, not historical-critical criticism per se. In a letter written on Effendi's behalf to an adherent, this religious figure highlights the importance of studying Islam to understand scripture: "First is the importance of the study of Islam—which subject is still new to the majority of the believers, but whose importance for a proper and sound

understanding of the Cause [Baha'ism] is absolutely indispensable” (Hornby 1994, 561; my brackets). Hatcher provides the example of Baha'u'llah's Kitab-i-Iqan which discusses Qur'anic verses in order to legitimize his religious mission. In Hatcher's view this is an important issue for scholarly research on religious history. For him, it is an understandable assumption that some scholars find these similarities and connections as being causally related, and they depict Baha'ism as a reaction to Islam or Baha'ism. According to Hatcher, this is “a post hoc fallacy” because unbelieving scholars fail “to recognize the true motive force and dynamic nature of human history, progressive and persistent divine intervention [...]” (Hatcher 1997, 35-37; my brackets).

Hatcher explains that scholarship by unbelievers is ultimately mistaken because they do not accept Baha'ism's “fundamental verities.” In other words, that history is divinely guided. To make his point he quotes an admired Baha'i scholar and former member of the UHJ, Adib Taherzadeh. “It is in consideration of this essential relationship that Baha'i scholar Adib Taherzadeh asserts, ‘There is no way by which a scholar, however unbiased and objective he is, can write a true version of the history of the life of Baha'u'llah, or submit an authentic appreciation of His mission, unless he be a believer in His Faith...The art of writing any history lies not merely in describing events, but in relating them to each other and putting them into their proper context. And in religious history the Revelation itself is obviously central—it cannot be left out’” (Hatcher 1997, 35-37).

There is something we must bear in mind at this point. Hatcher and Taherzadeh participate in a very similar scholarship that views the lack of adherence as a lack of

understanding. This lack of understanding is most of the time expressed in terms of a “spiritual” sphere which is overlooked by the unbelieving scholar. A very good example of this is Michael Fischer’s research on Baha’ism which, although highly relevant in academic circles, is almost completely ignored within Baha’i Studies. If not ignored, it is usually found in bibliographies that do not engage with his research but include it in order to give Baha’ism an academic legitimacy.

It is also not surprising that in Baha’i Studies this point on adherence has been highlighted. First of all, Baha’i collective memory regarding persecutions and repression throughout its history is very recent. At the present time, there are still different forms of exclusion that vividly go on in Egypt and Iran. This news is widely reported around the religious community and in some cases political activism is encouraged in order to pressure some governments to stop such persecutions and discriminations. Second of all, Baha’ism has also struggled with keeping certain homogeneity around the relationship between adherents and their institutions. For Baha’ism, much of its identity revolves not only around the charismatic authorities and religious figures but also around those of its religious institutions that are divinely guided, as it is the case with the UHJ. In this sense, the importance attributed to being an adherent, participating and following what the religious institutions have agreed on, plays an important role in its production of knowledge. In fact, Hatcher’s paper, in which he is comparing the objectivist and historical criticisms with scripture, follows one of the most cherished and widespread principles among Baha’is, namely, the “independent investigation of truth.” In a compilation gathered by the UHJ on scholarship, Effendi is quoted, in a response to an adherent, on this very principle of independent investigation of truth: “It is hoped that all

the Baha'i students will follow the noble example you have set before them and will, henceforth, be led to investigate and analyse the principles of the Faith and to correlate them with the modern aspects of philosophy and science. Every intelligent and thoughtful young Bahá'í should always approach the Cause in this way, for therein lies the very essence of the principle of independent investigation of truth."⁴⁷ Thus, Hatcher's paper is an example of what independent investigation of truth means (in part) to many adherents. He concludes that although there is no definite formula for understanding Baha'i scripture, adherents can infer from these theories of literary criticism which offer plausible tools for understanding scripture "because Baha'i scripture appears in an astounding variety of literary styles." Moreover, he explains that Baha'u'llah has brought to humanity different ways through which adherents can understand scripture, "a diversity analogous, perhaps, to the symbolic nine portals of the Mashriqu'l-Adkar [the Baha'i temple], whereby all humanity, regardless of background, may gain admittance to the new revelation" (Hatcher 1997, 46; my brackets). His analogy on Baha'u'llah's works and the nine portals of the Baha'i temple is, once again, an idea that is widespread among the religious community. Baha'ism, as a religion with universal claims, enables adherents to proselytize in a manner that accommodates many ways of adherence. Moreover, personal and scholarly interpretation is, within the bounds of the religious institutions, accepted and respected. In a letter written in April 1928 by Effendi to an adherent in Britain, he states that "no one has the right to impose his view

⁴⁷ ORL, search "Scholarship."

or opinion and require his listeners to believe in his particular interpretation.”⁴⁸ While this may be true, we must also bear in mind that only the UHJ is understood to be the official and authoritative interpreter for mainstream Baha’is and that there are some factions within Baha’ism that do not take part in this opinion—they might believe in the hierarchical status of their individual religious figures described above, but not on the status of the UHJ as we shall see in the next chapter.

In Baha’i scholarship this point is also made clear when it is stated that the contents are merely a matter of personal understanding. Nader Saiedi, for instance, writes in his preface that his book “is simply a tentative and preliminary exploration of possibilities. It represents only [his] own personal understanding of the writings of Baha’u’llah” (Saiedi 2000; my brackets). This said, we will begin discussing the second essay that, in my view, enables us to further understand the relationship between the adherent, his prophet, and the religious institutions.

Robert Stockman in “Revelation, Interpretation and Elucidation in the Baha’i Writings” explores these three notions mentioned in the title. By revelation, interpretation and elucidation he means the production of Baha’u’llah’s scripture, ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s and Shoghi Effendi’s writings, and the activity of UHJ respectively (Stockman 1997, 53). Due to the scope of this chapter, we will discuss Stockman’s understanding of revelation to compare it with Hatcher’s earlier paper. Stockman begins his paper by exploring what revelation might be according to Baha’u’llah’s scripture. He

⁴⁸ ORL, search “particular interpretation.”

writes that academics outside the religious community reject the concept of revelation. This concept has become “unfashionable” and when a well-known American divinity school nominated a new dean in 1985 many academics were surprised that the new dean believed in revelation. Stockman also points out that neither liberal scholars nor conservative Christians have developed a philosophical language to discuss revelation that is useful to Baha’is. He provides an example when he writes that “Charles Hodge, the great early 20th century Princeton theologian, believed that the original autographs of the Bible—now lost—were inerrantly inspired word by word, and that the circulating text of the Bible is close, though not identical to, the originals” (Stockman 1997, 53). To believe in revelation is, as we have indicated above, a fundamental element of Baha’i doxa. Stockman is, therefore, in the last sentence quoted above, selecting already what does or does fit within scripture. For instance, by selecting Charles Hodge and his view on the Bible, Stockman is supporting Effendi’s view on the Bible’s authenticity. In a letter written by Effendi in 1936 to the national religious institution he states that “[t]he Bible is not wholly authentic, and in this respect is not to be compared with the Qur’an, and should be wholly subordinated to the authentic writings of Baha’u’llah” (Hornby 1994, 501). The reasons for rendering the Bible as not wholly authentic are due to the view that Muhammad, the Bab and Baha’u’llah wrote their works directly, and their scripture is therefore more authentic than a scripture that was not written by Jesus. Thus, it is expected that Stockman would agree with someone like Hodge.

The following two paragraphs are also important since they tell us what the popular American Baha’i attitude towards scripture is. According to Stockman, the “popular conservative Protestant notion of revelation is that the biblical text itself is

inerrant” (Stockman 1997, 54). In other words, scripture is perspicuous in that it is plain and clear for anyone to understand “ and that the text is literal, that is, metaphorical interpretations are rarely necessary and should be avoided in favour of the surface meaning of the text.” Stockman then compares this notion to the widespread notion of American Baha’i adherents. He correctly observes that, although this notion among conservative Protestants and American Baha’is is similar, the major difference is that the latter assume that there is a central role of metaphor in Baha’i scripture. For most American adherents the text is literally true in that it does not contain factual errors. Moreover, scripture is perspicuous in that any adherent can read and understand the meaning of the text without any need of an intermediary (i.e. the Baha’i scholar).

There is something that must be mentioned about this observation, however. First of all, as we will see, Stockman is mostly preoccupied with some historical facts that Baha’u’llah mentions and which appear to be incorrect. Second of all, since Baha’ism does not have a permanent professional clergy, the responsibility to read and study scripture falls onto every adherent. The adherent, as it was discussed earlier, then feels that since the meaning of scripture may be approached by everyone, her or his interpretation is as valid as anyone else’s. This is, among other things, one of the reasons there is a certain anti-intellectualism within the religious community. But this personal approach is not particularly American and it is very common in other religious communities, as it is in the case in Spain. Moreover, among circles where such anti-intellectualism is not present, an adherent may welcome scholarly works, too, since scripture also encourages scholarship. For example, Baha’u’llah has highlighted the importance of scholars in his religion repeatedly: “Happy are ye, O ye the learned ones

in Baha. By the Lord! Ye are the billows of the Most Mighty Ocean, the stars of the firmament of Glory, the standards of triumph waving betwixt earth and heaven. Ye are the manifestations of steadfastness amidst men and the daysprings of Divine Utterance to all that dwell on earth” (Baha’u’llah 1993, 82). And in a different work he cautions: “Beware, O My loved ones, lest ye despise the merits of My learned servants whom God hath graciously chosen to be the exponents of His Name ‘the Fashioner’ amidst mankind” (Baha’u’llah 1998, 286).

Stockman then begins to explore whether the notion of a metaphorical perspicuous text is adequate. According to Stockman, religious study faces a few problems: “on the one hand one must not weigh ‘the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current among humanity’ [he is quoting Baha’u’llah’s *Kitab-i-Aqdas*]” But, on the other hand, “one must pursue an independent investigation of truth” (Stockman 1997, 54; my brackets). In addition, Stockman also highlights that, while the researcher must be rigorous and must show respect for God’s revelation, one must ask difficult questions from the unbelievers’ point of view—a point of view that does not ask questions from a perspective of faith. As we can see, there is an important difference between what Hatcher meant by “independent investigation of truth”—which is something personal and private—and Stockman’s, which seems to be referring to a mixture of honesty and respect while asking difficult questions from the perspective of a non-adherent.

Moving on to what might be an appropriate understanding of revelation, Stockman provides an example that occurred in the American religious community

during the first decades of the twentieth century. In his example he narrates how a prominent American adherent, Thornton Chase, is concerned with the adherents' approach to the religious figures. According to Stockman, Chase viewed the "earthly limitations that 'Abdu'l-Baha faced" because adherents did not share the problems their communities were having with 'Abdu'l-Baha (Stockman 1997, 55). Adherents believed that 'Abdu'l-Baha was omniscient and thought that, since religious figures have divine access, they were completely aware of their problems. This is also true among many adherents who view the UHJ as being divinely guided (or inspired) and feel that their challenges do not need to be reported. Stockman makes his point: why would the religious figures request pilgrims in Haifa for information and evaluations on people and places if they were omniscient? (Stockman 1997, 55-56).

Stockman is far from denying revelation and begins to formulate how revelation, or access to the divine, comes to the religious figures in flashes. He points out the difference between the *Kitab-i-Iqan* which is "masterful in the way it crafts and builds arguments logically" (Stockman 1997, 58) and the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* which he views as concatenated flashes of revelation because it does not seem to follow one paragraph to the next. He shows these flashes by quoting one part of the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*. While Stockman observes that there are four pronouncements in this specific part of the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*—"1) not to overburden animals, 2) what to do if someone unintentionally takes another person's life, 3) the exhortation that the world's parliaments select a universal language and script and 4) the prohibition of smoking opium" (Stockman 1997, 58)—he also observes that the prohibition of smoking opium and prohibitions regarding murder were stated in other places in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*. Following these observations he

concludes: “Certainly one cannot argue that Baha’u’llah was untidy and unsystematic in His presentation; the Kitab-i-Iqan is masterful in the way it crafts and builds arguments logically. Perhaps, for reasons best known to God, the revelation of the Aqdas came to Baha’u’llah in discrete flashes.” Here, we have a difference between Hatcher’s formulation and Stockman’s. According to the former, one of the advantages of objectivism was that the prophet was not the author of scripture. Stockman, in comparison, understands revelation in terms of flashes.

In viewing revelation as concatenated flashes, Stockman is able to make his point regarding the popular idea of a metaphorical perspicuous text. As we have mentioned earlier, Stockman is preoccupied with some historical references written by Baha’u’llah and which seem incorrect according to Juan Cole’s research. These references may be found in Baha’u’llah’s Tablet of Wisdom and their inaccuracies are summarized by Stockman. Baha’u’llah in that tablet seems to think that Empedocles was a contemporary of King David and Pythagoras a contemporary of Solomon. More recent research places King David’s reign between the years 1010 to 970 BCE; Empedocles roughly lived between the years 490 and 430 BCE and Pythagoras circa 570 to 500 BCE. In other words, modern research shows a four to five hundred year gap between the Greeks and the Israelis and reverses the order of the philosophers. According to Cole, Baha’u’llah did not follow Muslim historians either since Muslim historians placed David, Salomon, Empedocles and Pythagoras with only a few years to a decade apart. Nevertheless, Cole concludes that although these particular dates might be inaccurate, the central propositions in the tablet of wisdom are “infallibly and eternally true” (Stockman 1997,

61). Stockman also points out that Shoghi Effendi also warned about the contemporaneity of the four men and that they should not to be taken too literally.

Thus, in formulating revelation as being of two types, one being directly from God and the other allowing Baha'u'llah "to utilize earthly sources of knowledge in a divine way," renders scripture as being composed by an earthly source and a divine one. Its historical facts are understood as unimportant and—to use Cole's word—"the central propositions" are viewed as infallible and eternal. In this manner, the adherent's belief in Baha'u'llah is not dependent on historical facts, but in the belief that Baha'u'llah was divinely inspired by God in spite of these inaccuracies.

Hatcher's and Stockman's interpretations are definitely within the bounds of the mainstream religious institutions—as presided by the UHJ and which is broadly treated as an infallible organ guided by God through Baha'u'llah's metaphysical presence. Their interpretations on revelation would not be very different from other Baha'i "heretic" views which, in sum, constitute what Bourdieu called the universe of discourse and which will be discussed in the following chapter. Thus, in order to understand what might fall outside the bounds of mainstream Baha'ism, we would have to discuss the other competing possibles that constitute the field of opinion. As we shall see, their conflicting interpretations do not have anything to do with formulations on revelation. Both mainstream Baha'is and other sects within Baha'ism would indeed agree on the hierarchy of their religious figures: this is what constitutes Baha'i doxa or the universe of the undisputed. These conflicts of opinion have to do with the "right" succession of

religious institutions and not with the hierarchy of the religious figures. We will discuss in the next chapter some of the factions that oppose mainstream Baha'ism.

A Preliminary Research on Baha'i Competing Possibles

So far, we have discussed mainstream Baha'ism and Baha'i doxa. The first chapter delineated a religious history starting with Islam. For Baha'is, put broadly, Shi'ism had it ultimately right and Sunnis had it wrong. Moreover, the Baha'i understanding of Shi'ite history is very close to that of Shi'ism in terms of the Imamate—Baha'is believe that 'Alid loyalists and its transformation into Shi'ism was a continuous and clear development. Indeed, Baha'is view the Bab as the culmination and return of the Twelfth Imam. In the second chapter, the people I was fortunate enough to interview were also part of mainstream Baha'ism. They believe that the religious institutions they belong to are undoubtedly correct: Baha'u'llah, after his death, had appointed his son 'Abdu'l-Baha; 'Abdu'l-Baha had appointed Shoghi Effendi as the “Guardian”; and Shoghi Effendi, after his death, although he did not appoint anyone, had envisioned a Universal House of Justice (UHJ). Originally, Baha'ism would have been comprised of two supreme organs: the UHJ and the Guardianship. Shoghi Effendi's male offspring were meant to be the future guardians. That is, Effendi would have appointed one of his sons to be the next Guardian and so on very much like Baha'u'llah appointed 'Abdul-Baha and 'Abdul-Baha Shoghi Effendi. The third chapter attempted to delineate Baha'i doxa by discussing its essential hierarchy (God, the prophet-founder and humanity), which is also shared among Baha'is who are not part of the mainstream. This is a fundamental belief and a definite element that constitutes the universe of the undisputed or doxa. The present chapter will discuss other movements within Baha'ism and attempts to give the reader a sense of what constitutes the field of opinion and its competing possible discourses. Following this discussion, we will explore why would

Baha'ism renders other competing possibles as heretical—a rendering that has to do directly with its construction (spatial and temporal) of the sacred and the profane.

Baha'ism is not the only religion that has suffered crises every time there has been a shift in its religious leadership—we have seen, in the first chapter, that these shifts also caused crises among Shi'ites. These shifts have caused splits and confrontations since Baha'ism arose: Baha'u'llah, who was a Babi, challenged the leadership of his half-brother, Mirza Yahya, in order to lead the Babi community; Baha'u'llah then created a new religious movement (Baha'ism) and, after his death in 1921, his son, 'Abdu'l-Baha, faced the opposition of his half-brother Mirza Muhammad 'Ali; after 'Abdu'l-Baha's death in 1921, his grandson (and the first Guardian), Shoghi Effendi, was challenged again by 'Abdu'l-Baha's half-brother and members of his own family; following Effendi's sudden death in 1957, and leaving no offspring to which adherents could turn to, the Baha'i hierarchy was once again challenged and some well-regarded adherents claimed guardianship; in 1963 the UHJ was elected, and although it consolidated the majority of the religious community, its claim to religious leadership has continued to be challenged by some. As Pierre Bourdieu had already observed: “The truth of doxa is only ever fully revealed when negatively constituted by the constitution of a field of opinion, the locus of the confrontation of competing discourses—whose political truth may be overtly declared or may remain hidden, even from the eyes of those engaged in it, under the guise of religious or philosophical oppositions” (Bourdieu 1995, 168). The present chapter discusses other competing discourses within the Baha'i field of opinion in order to further delineate and confirm the coordinates of Baha'i doxa (the universe of the undisputed). We will discuss another Baha'i movement who calls itself the “Orthodox

Baha'i Faith" (orthodox Baha'ism) as opposed to "the Baha'i Faith" (mainstream Baha'ism). We will begin by discussing orthodox Baha'ism. This religious movement within Baha'ism is considered, from the mainstream's point of view, as heretic. Once our discussion on orthodox Baha'ism has concluded we will turn our attention to the gay Baha'i community.

To begin, I must admit that my fieldwork on orthodox Baha'ism in this respect has been entirely done online. There are a few good reasons for this. First of all, my research focused on mainstreamers since they seemed to constitute the majority of Baha'is. Second of all, my own background comes from the mainstream and anything outside it did not constitute "true" Baha'ism. To be sincere, I was not really concerned with other Baha'i movements because they did not constitute true Baha'ism, but because Baha'ism constitutes a religious minority in itself and I did not think it would be relevant if I discussed another minority within an already religious minority. I certainly missed the point and gave more importance to the quantitative aspect of this religion and forgot a more important aspect so far as anthropology is concerned, its qualitative aspect. Furthermore, from the mainstream point of view, it is not only that schisms are viewed as ephemeral and therefore ignored by the overwhelming majority of adherents, but also dangerous. Again, I was not so much concerned with such dangers but, at first, it did not seem to me that paying attention to them would be relevant. It turned out that I was wrong again on two fronts. First of all, I realized that to gain a fuller view on Baha'ism I had to spend some time researching these competing minorities. Second of all, although I did not think of such literature as dangerous, once I began reading it, I became aware that

I was somewhat uncomfortable reading them. I will discuss this in more detail in the next chapter.

Mainstream Baha'ism views these schisms as ephemeral because it forms part of one of its special characteristics promised by Baha'u'llah. 'Abdu'l-Baha states in this regard: "Were it not for the protecting power of the Covenant to guard the impregnable fort of the Cause of God [Baha'ism], there would arise among the Baha'is, in one day, a thousand different sects as was the case in former ages." (Abdu'l-Baha 1976, 357-358).

In this manner, the power of a covenant (or contract) with Baha'u'llah, which is understood to shift to 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi, and finally to the UHJ is, according to mainstreamers, a fundamental principle of their religion. As I mentioned earlier, Baha'ism has faced many challenges and every time its leadership shifted, those who did not recognize the claims of the mainstream have been shunned and expelled as heretics—or, to use a Baha'i expression, "they were declared covenant-breakers." Succinctly put, to acknowledge the possibility of a Baha'i schism would undermine Baha'u'llah's promise according to the mainstream. Those who opposed Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi or the UHJ continue to be a vivid part of the collective memory. We should not be surprised if heresy, or covenant-breaking, is viewed as dangerous and a threat to the adherent since it is usually compared to a disease. As Adib Taherzadeh discusses in light of 'Abdu'l-Baha's words: "['Abdu'l-Baha] often likened Covenant-breaking to a contagious disease: the only way to prevent it from spreading is to confine the patient and place him in quarantine. Infectious disease spreads rapidly and can affect a multitude. For that reason, He said, protecting the believers from this deadly disease was imperative and could be achieved only by cutting off association with the Covenant-

breakers” (Taherzadeh 2000, 237). Unsurprisingly, research on this subject is viewed as a dangerous task for most adherents: mainstreamers consider the orthodox not only as “non-Baha’is” but also as heretics since they represent a “spiritual disease.”

We must return to Bourdieu’s field of opinion, constituted by competing discourses, in order to approach Baha’i doxa. Bourdieu observes: “Orthodoxy, straight, or rather straightened, opinion, which aims, without ever entirely succeeding, at restoring the primal state of innocence of doxa, exists only in the objective relationship which opposes it to heterodoxy, that is, by reference to the choice—haireisis, heresy—made possible by the existence of competing possibles and to the explicit critique of the sum total of as a system of euphemisms, of acceptable ways of thinking and speaking the natural and social world, which rejects heretical remarks as blasphemies. But the manifest censorship imposed by orthodox discourse, the official way of speaking and thinking the world, conceals another, more radical censorship: the overt opposition between ‘right’ opinion and ‘left’ or ‘wrong’ opinion, which delimits the universe of possible discourse, be it legitimate or illegitimate, euphemistic or blasphemous, masks in its turn the fundamental opposition between the universe of things that can be stated, and hence thought, and the universe of which is taken for granted” (Bourdieu 1995, 169-170). Indeed, the theological formulations on revelation constitute Baha’i doxa since it essentially forms part of the universe of the undisputed. In other words, Baha’is believe that Baha’u’llah is a superior being and they are subjected to his religious mission and hierarchy. Although this discussion is written by mainstreamers, the orthodox would not have much to say against these formulations on revelation—they also accept the supremacy of Baha’u’llah as a superior being. Baha’u’llah is for both, mainstream and

orthodox adherents, the latest prophet of god that continues the Abrahamic tradition—it is the new revelation that closes the “Adamic cycle” (which lasted 6,000 years) and inaugurates a “Baha’i cycle” (which is to last at least 500,000 years). Both of these movements also believe that Baha’u’llah’s religious mission is genuinely modern in that it is progressive and renders religions of the past as adolescent and Baha’ism as the beginning of adulthood. What orthodox Baha’ism does not believe in is in the succession of leadership that shifts to the UHJ in 1963 after Effendi’s death in November 1957. This is, essentially, the most fundamental difference between the mainstream and the orthodox. The orthodox are in a sense similar to Shi’ites regarding the Sunni hegemony: Baha’u’llah’s will has not been correctly executed and it has been corrupted by a shift of religious leadership.

Effendi’s sudden death was to become another serious challenge to Baha’ism for two main reasons: firstly, there was no offspring to which adherents could turn to; secondly, and perhaps more importantly, Effendi died intestate. Baha’u’llah had prescribed to every adherent the writing of a will: “Unto everyone hath been enjoined the writing of a will. The testator should head this document with the adornment of the Most Great Name, bear witness therein unto the oneness of God in the Dayspring of His Revelation, and make mention, as he may wish, of that which is praiseworthy, so that it may be a testimony for him in the kingdoms of Revelation and Creation and a treasure with his Lord, the Supreme Protector, the Faithful” (Baha’u’llah 1993, 59). Baha’u’llah followed his own prescription when he wrote his own will and testament, the *Kitab-i-‘Ahd*, ‘Abdu’l-Baha was not an exception and he also wrote his will and testament,

usually referred to as The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Baha. The aforementioned “covenant” of Baha’u’llah is based upon these two texts (Taherzadeh 1972, xii).

Disputes regarding religious leadership erupted and caused much consternation among adherents after Effendi’s death. The majority of adherents would follow an interim government, from 1957-1963, called the ministry of custodians, which was comprised of members of the “hands of the cause,” a group of adherents directly appointed by one of the religious figures. This ministry would follow the last guidelines provided by Effendi in order to inaugurate the UHJ. The majority of adherents, who followed the ministry of custodians and, eventually, the UHJ, are what we are referring to as mainstreamers.

Although there seem to be different branches among orthodox Baha’ism, we will discuss one specific religious community based in Las Vegas, Arizona, who makes its case by emphasizing the importance of the guardianship in its website, namely, the Tarbiyat community. They do not believe that the UHJ should function without a guardianship and they expect a lineal descendant of Baha’u’llah to arise in the future and reestablish the guardianship. A few quotes from the first guardian, Shoghi Effendi, is displayed in order to show the importance of this institution which was meant to go hand in hand with the UHJ. According to an orthodox reading of Effendi, the guardianship “preserves the identity of [Baha’ism], and guards the integrity of [Baha’u’llah’s] law” (Effendi 1982, 23; my brackets). The UHJ “enables it, even as a living organism, to expand and adapt itself to the needs and requirements of an ever-changing society.” This website also quotes a text written by Effendi in which he warns that if the guardianship were to be separated, the world order envisioned by Baha’u’llah would be “mutilated”

and without the institution of the guardianship Baha'ism's institutional integrity "would be imperiled" and "gravely endangered" (Effendi 1982, 148). There are a few points that need to be made about these quotes.

First of all, if we were to fully read Effendi's text out of which the Tarbiyat community makes its case, it would seem more likely that Effendi is not referring to the guardianship but Baha'u'llah's scripture as the subject that preserves the identity of its religion. Be it as it may, the orthodox thesis regarding the importance of a guardianship cannot be ignored since, during Effendi's guardianship, this very hereditary religious institution had been presented as one of the unique features of Baha'ism. In this manner, the Tarbiyat community expects a guardian that will arise in the future, thus contributing with its discourse as a competing possible in Bourdieu's field of opinion.

During Effendi's leadership, the guardianship was indeed a religious institution that was repeatedly highlighted by Effendi himself. Due to the fact that there are numerous instances in which Effendi envisioned a hereditary line of guardians, we will limit ourselves with only a few examples. In a letter written by a secretary on Effendi's behalf, Effendi's view on the guardianship is clear. In that letter Effendi encourages an unnamed adherent to think deeply about the fundamentals of divine revelation. In doing this, she will come to a deeper understanding of what the guardianship means. Thus, once she assumes "the fact that God guides men through a Mouthpiece [the prophet-founder]" that is infallible and unerring, she would also understand the station of 'Abdu'l-Baha and the guardianship. The guardianship is a sign of mankind's maturity "in the sense that at long last men have progressed to the point of having one world, and

of needing one world management for human affairs” (Hornby 1994, 310; my brackets). In another work, Effendi writes how ‘Abdu’l-Baha envisioned a hereditary office called the guardianship and drafts the fundamental functions of that office (Effendi 1974, 327). In yet another instance Effendi writes that “[o]nly future generations can comprehend the value and the significance attached to this Divine Masterpiece, which the hand of the Master-builder of the world has designed for the unification and the triumph of the world-wide Faith of Baha’u’llah. Only those who come after us will be in a position to realize the value of the surprisingly strong emphasis that has been placed on the institution of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship” (Effendi 1982, 7). This said, we will discuss the roots from which Orthodox Baha’is in Las Vegas trace their religious tradition.

After the death of Effendi in November 1957, a few years later, in 1960, an American hand of the cause and one of the most prominent adherents, Mason Remey (1874-1974), declared himself to be the next guardian. In a video shown on Youtube, orthodox adherents explain their views regarding the shift of leadership to Remey. According to one of the interviewees she became an adherent in 1955. During her first years as an adherent, she was told that one of the unique distinctions of Baha’ism was the guardianship. According to her, they did not fail to ask about Effendi’s children and they were told that his children were either hiding for protection or in some school in Switzerland. However, when Effendi died and it appeared that there was no offspring, and Remey declared the guardianship, there was no doubt in their mind that the right religious leader to follow was Remey. After Remey’s self-declaration as a guardian, he was shunned by the other hands of the cause. Among other reasons, perhaps the most weighty one, was the fact that ‘Abdu’l-Baha, in his will and testament, envisioned a

guardianship that was strictly hereditary. Remy, not being related to Effendi, was therefore a difficult candidate for a guardianship for most adherents. Whereas this might be position of the overall orthodox Baha'is, a "position paper" posted by the Tarbiyat community in Las Vegas, does not view Remy as a guardian—nor his successors Joel B. Marengella and Donald A. Harvey. This community follows Reginald "Rex" King, who viewed Remy, Marengella and Harvey not as guardians but as "regents." These regents are to procure the rise of a second guardian in the future. After King's death in 1977, a "Council of Regents" was formed and it continues to be the governing body of the Tarbiyat community.

Mainstream Baha'ism would indeed have much to say against the orthodox positions. First of all, so far as the mainstream is concerned, the central administrative structure comprised of the guardianship and the UHJ remains intact. Effendi, although at first envisioned a line of hereditary guardians, has, through his voluminous legacy, continued to be absolutely influential in the decisions the UHJ makes. The guardian is indeed "alive" and he was such a proliferate writer that the central structure remains as Effendi wished. In a study-circle in which I participated, one adherent once asked how it was possible that the guardian had died intestate. The adherent was not, however, questioning the shift of leadership. He viewed this rupture as a mystery which god had undoubtedly intended. The capable facilitator of the study-circle answered very convincingly to the adherent: "Perhaps he exhausted everything that needed to be said by future guardians and thus the lineage had no reason to continue." Thus, mainstream Baha'ism views orthodox claims as preposterous and dangerous to the unity of its institutions. The sheer thought of another guardian, or a regency that awaits a future

guardian, is not only heretical but, such regency is nowhere to be found in scripture. On the other hand, this would also be the claim from the orthodox position: a ministry of custodians that governed during the interim years until the UHJ was elected in 1963, is also not to be found in scripture. This said, we will continue with other discourses that also form part of the competing possibles: gay Baha'is.

A disease, metaphorically used among mainstream Baha'is (and probably among orthodox Baha'ism too), does not only refer to heretics: "homosexuality" is also understood as another "spiritual disease." Thus, Baha'ism continues its condemnation of homosexuality like the rest of the Abrahamic religions. Heretics are to be shunned institutionally and adherents must not to have contact with them. On the other hand, homosexuality (and transsexuality) is a spiritual disease that must be cured. Effendi's words on the subject are clear. In a widely used compilation, *Lights of Guidance*, we can find, under the section titled "Homosexuality," the following selective quotes from Effendi in a letter dated May 1954: "Amongst the many other evils afflicting society in this spiritual low water mark in history, is the question of immorality, and overemphasis on sex. Homosexuality, according to the Writings of Baha'u'llah, is spiritually condemned. This does not mean that people so afflicted must not be helped and advised and sympathized with. It does mean that we do not believe that it is a permissible way of life; which, also, is all too often the accepted attitude nowadays" (Hornby 1994, 364). In another letter dated January 1973, the UHJ writes: "A number of sexual problems, such as homosexuality and trans-sexuality can well have medical aspects, and in such cases recourse should certainly be had to the best medical assistance. But it is clear from the teaching of Baha'u'llah that homosexuality is not a condition to which a person should be

reconciled, but is a distortion of his or her nature which should be controlled and overcome” (Hornby 1994, 364). Furthermore, in another letter written by Effendi and dated in March 1950, he writes: “No matter how devoted and fine the love may be between people of the same sex to let it find expression in sexual acts is wrong. To say that it is ideal is no excuse. Immorality of every sort is really forbidden by Baha’u’llah, and homosexual relationships he looks upon as such, besides being against nature” (Hornby 1994, 365). Unsurprisingly, gay Baha’is have spoken out against this view on homosexuality in different ways.

The Gay Baha’i website, which celebrates nine years since its inauguration, emphasizes the idea of diversity that is easily found in scripture. From the *Tablet of the Divine Plan*, this website quotes ‘Abdu’l-Baha in which he uses the metaphor of a colorful garden with many kinds of flowers to highlight the importance of diversity.⁴⁹ The Gay Baha’i website encourages gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender adherents to make themselves known and be comfortable with their sexuality. In its introduction, the creator writes about the mission of his website. He is not a Baha’i but his boyfriend is. They searched the internet but could not find any gay organizations within Baha’ism. Thus, the main reason for this website is to bring the community of gay Baha’is together although at the time he created the website his boyfriend did not know about it. As he concludes, this website attempts to create a virtual gay Baha’i community to let people know that gay Baha’is “do exist and that they are proud of who they are.”

⁴⁹ ORL, search "tablet divine plan."

As we can see from this introduction, the author's companion, running the danger of being expelled from mainstream Baha'ism, is not the webmaster. There is a very good reason for this. Although he is well aware that he could be viewed as a person with a "sexual problem" and therefore as someone who is "spiritually ill," he is not engaging in an activity that would oppose the mainstream: he will not be shunned or limited in engaging in Baha'i social life. Thus, it is not surprising that some of gay Baha'is would be part of the gay community as long as it is in anonymity.

In another website that attempts to bring the gay and lesbian community together, the Gay/Lesbian Baha'i Story Project, the emphasis is not on the idea of diversity but the idea of justice as independent thought. It quotes the second Arabic hidden word written by Baha'u'llah: "O Son of Spirit! The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbour. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes." In this website we can find one of the stories being shared.

According to one adherent he has a 23 year-old son who did well in his studies and graduated at the top of his class at UC Berkeley. His son's girlfriend is also brilliant student and the mother of a 4 year-old child. Although the narrator of this story and his son are close, he says that "[i]nterestingly enough, [his son and his son's girlfriend] are disgusted by the Baha'is." They had known Baha'is but they describe them as "weird,

arrogant, insular, overwhelmingly Persian, conservative... and out of touch.” When the narrator received a letter by the American Baha’i national institution, letting him know that he was no longer a Baha’i in good standing, his son and his son’s girlfriend visited him. Although he feels very close to Baha’ism, and neither his son nor his son’s girlfriend are Baha’is, they visited him to show their support. The narrator, a man from California, is no longer a Baha’i in good-standing because he married another man. His son’s girlfriend filmed and edited the wedding video and his son was the best man. As the narrator of this story says: “he’s perfectly OK with being around gay folks, and doesn’t find it a problem. He knows what he is and enjoys diversity.” His son’s mother, on the other hand, is disgusted by Baha’is for different reasons but, most of all, she is disgusted because of their homophobia. Ironically, however, she did not join the narrator’s wedding (her ex-husband) because she found them “nutty and weird.” As the narrator concludes, “she remains a Methodist.”

The letter to which the narrator of the story is referring is the one he received from the Baha’i national religious institution, the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States (NSA), in which he is removed from membership rights—this removal is not the same as being shunned as a heretic but those removed are not allowed to vote during elections or attend mass (nineteen-day feasts, in Baha’i terminology), among other things. The NSA’s letter provides a good example of how gay marriage is not accepted and how the full membership of an adherent is removed. This letter, dated May 2009, and addressed to the author of the story quoted above, states that the Baha’i national organism learned “with deep sadness” that the adherent has “openly married his male companion in a same sex marriage ceremony.” As the adherent is aware, “homosexual

relationships are not permissible within the Baha'i Faith no matter how devoted and fine the love may be between the parties." This adherent is reminded that when he asked his reinstatement years earlier, in 2001, he was asked if he "had resolved [his] personal feelings about the Baha'i position on homosexuality and if [he was] now able to accept the teaching of the Faith on this subject." The adherent responded at that time that he accepted Baha'ism's doctrines on the subject of homosexuality. However, since the adherent married his male companion and showed "support of homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle" his membership is now limited. As the letter states: "Such flagrant actions in violation of Baha'i law leave the National Spiritual Assembly with no choice but to remove your Baha'i membership rights." Thus, the adherent is no longer a full member of his religious community and, therefore, he is no longer a member in good standing.

As we can see from these websites, gay Baha'is continue their struggle to be accepted in their religious communities. Some of them choose to be open about their sexuality and struggle against the centers of power in mainstream Baha'ism and are therefore shunned; others choose not to be open and not attract attention; while others choose gender neutrality in order to continue being full members of the Baha'i community. Although mainstream Baha'i adherents do not openly acknowledge, or give much importance to, these communities (heretics, or gays), we may prognosticate an unavoidable outcome through which these competing possibilities will become all the more intense and highlighted. As secular laws increasingly allow same-sex marriages, mainstream Baha'ism will need to address specific paradoxes. For instance, Baha'ism emphasizes the importance of family values. Would this indicate then that future gay

Baha'i families will not be able to adhere? Moreover, another important element of Baha'i believe is centered around the "harmony between science and religion." If mainstream Baha'ism takes this element seriously, would not the contributions made by Gender Studies upset the principle of the unity of science and religion? Although the mainstream views heretics as spiritually corrupt and a movement that is doomed to fail, there seems to be a deep misunderstanding as to how religious schisms begin. As we have discussed in the first chapter, the beginning of Shi'ism in Islam was not a schismatic movement that steadily continued through time. Shi'ism experienced many transformations and not until a few centuries later the party of 'Ali became known as Shi'ism. Religious movements, contrary to Baha'u'llah's wishes, continue to be comprised of schisms and different interpretations that on and off gain importance. The Baha'i religious figures, who were well aware of the dangers and challenges that shifts in leadership represent, probably due to their knowledge of traditional Islamic history, had attempted to avoid such schisms through the writing of wills. Nevertheless, as religious movements develop, differences of interpretations proliferate. These conflicts and competing possibilities do not, however, debilitate religious phenomena. To the contrary, they become theological spaces through which religious traditions are sporadically innovated in order to provide a belief system that reinterprets the world around them. But we must also explain why mainstream Baha'ism would either shun or limit the religious rights of some adherents, and this has to do with Baha'ism's religious mission and how its religious figures interpreted the world around them.

Comparatively, Baha'ism's sense of history shares many similarities with the Dutch Calvinists discussed by Webb Keane (2007). As Keane points out, "radical

conversion can foster a heightened sense of history” (Keane 2007, 113). Keane also quotes T.O. Beidelman’s observation which also fits the purposes of this chapter, ““Missionary views about the process of conversion ultimately amount to a theory of social change.”” “More forcefully,” Keane quotes Errington and Gewertz, “in many cases missionaries and converts alike have been endowed with ‘a sense of the portentous, a heroic sense of making history—of precipitating events.’” (Keane 2007, 113; emphasis in the original). This “sense of history” refers to “perceived transitions between past, present and future” and it “involves questions about the kinds of agent that produce or hinder transition, about the continuities or ruptures that result from their actions, and about the projected future” (Keane 2007, 114). Indeed, this is also the case in Baha’ism, although there is no need for conversion to be radical. What is then Baha’ism’s understanding of the world around it? How does it understand the present in order to give its adherents the sense of making history and lead them to precipitate events? In other words, how does Baha’ism construct the sacred and profane worlds.

To begin answering these questions we must take a quick look at Effendi’s “The Unfoldment of World Civilization,” written in 1936. In this letter, Effendi explicates the relationship between secular (non-Baha’i) and religious (Baha’i) historical processes. On the one hand, there is the secular society which is disintegrating; on the other, Baha’ism’s mission is—through its missionizing efforts—to unite or integrate the disintegrating secular society through the establishment of its religious institutions. It is this struggle between a disintegrating society and Baha’ism’s missionization that even in Baha’i terminology is usually called the “Age of Transition” (Effendi 1982, 170). According to Effendi, there is a “twofold process [...] each tending, in its own way and with an

accelerated momentum, to bring to a climax the forces that are transforming the face of our planet. The first is essentially an integrating process, while the second is fundamentally disruptive.” The former, he goes on, continues to evolve and is unfolding a “System which may well serve as a pattern for that world polity towards which a strangely-disordered world is continually advancing.” It is this “constructive process” that refers to Baha’ism and its new world order. The latter is an increasingly disintegrating process that “tends to tear down, with increasing violence, the antiquated barriers that seek to block humanity’s progress towards its destined goal.” This disintegrating process is described as a destructive force that “should be identified with a civilization that has refused to answer to the expectation of a new age, and is consequently falling into chaos and decline” (Effendi 1982, 169). Effendi’s view of historical processes confirms the findings of those authors who have researched religious phenomena. Mircea Eliade (1987) had already pointed out the different spaces and times in which religious adherents live. Indeed, religious adherents move across sacred and profane spaces and temporalities and Effendi is effectively creating them through his depiction of the profane, society’s downfall, and the sacred, Baha’ism’s religious mission.

There is an anecdote that I think would be helpful in understanding this twofold process discussed by Effendi. I attended a Baha’i High School in the Czech Republic and I liked to draw and paint. One of my High School teachers asked me to draw a sketch in which the world was supported by crumbling pillars (the disintegrating secular society) while other pillars were being freshly built by Baha’is (the Baha’i integrating efforts) to support the world before the old pillars finally crumbled. This idea, I think, does not only depict

the age of transition but also a certain millenarianism that lingers within Baha'ism (as we discussed in previous chapters). In times of social crisis, Baha'ism's millenarian element is accentuated and it relies upon a temporality of crisis which has been, nevertheless, always latent within Baha'ism's historical sense (Faubion 2001, 104). It is this temporality of crisis that impels adherents to intensify their proselytizing efforts and, consequently, precipitate the foreordained events: a worldwide and divine civilization. The relationship between the profane world as chaos and the sacred as cosmos are therefore closely related (Eliade 1987, 29-32). As we are about to see, Effendi depicts society's downfall at three fronts: the religious, the moral, and the politico-economic.

This age of transition, however, did not come on its own. According to Effendi, it was God and Baha'u'llah's divine agency that indirectly caused the fall of those who opposed his religious mission—i.e. the Qajar dynasty and the Turkish Sultanate. Whereas those who opposed Baha'u'llah are thought to have fallen, Effendi uses a different example to liken the future globalization of the Baha'i church, namely, the United States of America. Let us not forget that Effendi's audience is primarily American: "Such a unique and momentous crisis in the life of organized mankind may, moreover, be likened to the culminating stage in the political evolution of the great American Republic [...] The stirring of a new national consciousness, and the birth of a new type of civilization, infinitely richer and nobler than any which its component parts could have severally hoped to achieve, may be said to have proclaimed the coming of age of the American people. Within the territorial limits of this nation, this consummation may be viewed as the culmination of the process of human government. The diversified and loosely related elements of a divided community were brought together, unified and incorporated into

one coherent system” (Effendi 1982, 165; my brackets). With the American example, Effendi illustrates a similar process through which humanity, not only Americans, is united under one religion and the final consummation of Baha’ism is achieved by its global and divine civilization.

As we have mentioned, Effendi explains society’s downfall and arranges his letter to discuss three areas (i.e. religious, moral and politico-economic) that will enable the adherent to discern the signs of such downfall. The religious downfall, Effendi indicates is not merely limited to the Sultanate or the Qajar dynasty, but the “collapse of Islam” and the “deterioration of Christian institutions” (Effendi 1982, 172-189). The so-called collapse of Islam, Effendi affirms, is due to the inevitable “wave of secularization” (Effendi 1982, 172) that sprang from those who oppressed the Babi-Baha’i religious community. Christian institutions have deteriorated because they are unable to cope with such a “wave of secularization” since they have “strayed far from the spirit and teachings of Jesus Christ” (Effendi 1982, 184). Baha’ism’s mission is, to use Eliade’s terms (1987, 20-65), to make the world sacred through its proselytizing efforts.

Regarding the signs of moral downfall, Effendi effectively highlights the social tensions of his time. He points out the intensity of “religious intolerance,” racism, nationalism—which according to Effendi Hegelian philosophy is to blame—and arrogance; “the increasing evidences of selfishness, of suspicion, of fear and of fraud; the spread of terrorism, of lawlessness, of drunkenness and of crime; the unquenchable thirst for, and the feverish pursuit after, earthly vanities, riches and pleasures; the weakening of family solidarity; the laxity in parental control; the lapse into luxurious indulgence; the

irresponsible attitude towards marriage and the consequent rising tide of divorce; the degeneracy of art and music, the infection of literature, and the corruption of the press; the extension of the influence and activities of those ‘prophets of decadence’ who advocate companionate marriage, who preach the philosophy of nudism, who call modesty an intellectual fiction, who refuse to regard the procreation of children as the sacred and primary purpose of marriage, who denounce religion as an opiate of the people, who would, if given free rein, lead back the human race to barbarism, chaos, and ultimate extinction—these appear as the outstanding characteristics of a decadent society, a society that must either be reborn or perish” (Effendi 1982, 186). These signs of moral downfall are interrelated to political currents and economic events that were present when he wrote this letter—the spread of communism, the aftermath of World War I, the Great Depression and the beginning of World War II, are good examples through which the Euro-American adherent may identify the signs of religious intolerance, nationalistic arrogance, racism, “material” ambitions, and the “opiate of the people,” among other things. But even today, these signs are available to the adherent through current events such as the recent financial crisis which would represent selfishness and “material ambitions;” George W. Bush’s administration as nationalistic and arrogant; same-sex marriage as the decline of family values and marriage; 9/11 as the spread of terrorism; and perhaps even deconstruction as the more recent product of the “prophets of decadence.” Some adherents would see the signs of the downfall of communism, with the fall of the Berlin Wall as its best representation, the works of the divine agency enabling further missionization to Eastern Europe. Or, furthermore, the arrogance of the

Bush administration as a tool of the divine agency through which Iraq is liberated and further missionization and recuperation of sacred sites may be gained.

This said, the secular or profane world is chaotic. This chaos must be turned into cosmos in order to make the world sacred. Baha'u'llah clearly describes the state of the profane as chaotic when he rhetorically asks his adherents: "How long will humanity persist in its waywardness? How long will injustice continue? How long is chaos and confusion to reign amongst men?" (Baha'u'llah 1983, 216). But, for Baha'ism, the leading ideological orientation is not chaos as such: it is its synonym, "disunity," that describes the profane, and unity its religious mission. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Baha'ism's advertisement on the radio—"uniting the world one heart at a time"—is not coincidental. 'Abdu'l-Baha is known to use the concept of disunity as death, and unity as life: "Look about thee at the world: here unity, mutual attraction, gathering together, engender life, but disunity and inharmony spell death" (Abdu'l-Baha 1982a, 31). More importantly, however, is the notion of "unity" that is often used among adherents. Let us discuss this notion for a moment.

Although this notion is found repeatedly in scripture, we will only discuss the most common ones among adherents. For example, Baha'u'llah writes: "The Divine Messengers have been sent down, and their Books were revealed, for the purpose of promoting the knowledge of God, and of furthering unity and fellowship amongst men" (Baha'u'llah 1998, 361). In another instance he writes: "It is incumbent upon all the peoples of the world to reconcile their differences, and, with perfect unity and peace, abide beneath the shadow of the Tree of His care and loving-kindness" (Baha'u'llah

1998, 457). As it was mentioned earlier, religious intolerance is viewed with dismay and, in fact, it blames such intolerances and tensions, wherever they may be, because adherents of previous religions have “strayed far” from their original contexts. These tensions are thought to be solved by bringing other adherents into one religion or, put differently, bringing disunity into unity. However, religious intolerance or the unity of mankind aside, there is another kind of unity that orients its religious institutions. Baha’ism, through its democratic organisms and its adherents, must show its unity in contrast to the disunity of the profane world. Regarding the workings of its religious organisms, Effendi highlights the following: “One of the fundamentals involved in our Administrative Order, which we must remember will become the pattern for our World Order, is that even if an Assembly makes an ill-advised decision it must be upheld in order to preserve the unity of the community” (Hornby 1994, 80). When a decision is made among religious organisms, although it may be appealed, the decision should be assumed once there has been a majority vote. This enables Baha’ism to be resolute when confronted with difficult decisions or when it needs to take action. But when doctrinal differences of opinion arise, such as the cases of orthodox and gay communities, it employs exclusionary mechanisms in order to maintain its “unity”—a unity that some scholars have described as an “obsession for unity” that is closer to “homogeneity” (Amanat 2005). Indeed, several Baha’i scholars have experienced these frustrations and have exposed them in academic reviews. This is Juan Cole’s case in his article “Fundamentalism in the Contemporary U.S. Baha’i Community” (2002) in which he clearly outlines the processes of review and censorship through which an adherent must submit her or his work before it is published.

Much like other Abrahamic religions, there are tensions between adherents due to the differences of opinions. Mainstream Baha'ism, through its representation of chaos and cosmos, attempts to control "criticisms" that affect directly the image of their religion—the world must be made sacred and not the other way around. Moreover, its emphasis in unity, in an increasingly fragmented society, tend to show such tensions more visibly (i.e. orthodox, gay or academic adherents). This also backfires within the hegemonic mainstream and exclusionary mechanisms take place in order to preserve its own understanding of "unity." The hegemonic mainstream views the orthodox position as heretical since the majority of adherents resolved that there were no longer any future guardians. As we have seen earlier, Baha'i "consultation" among the integrative and elected members of religious organisms, must submit to the majority vote and this is all the more forceful, for mainstreamers, since that decision was made by its "infallible" organism, the UHJ. Put differently, we may also say that mainstream Baha'ism's theory of social change is, to an extent, radically democratic. The adherent must submit to the majority decision and public criticism is frowned upon. However, there is also an undemocratic element to it as well. Whereas democracy is usually a violent struggle for power among political parties and interest groups, Baha'ism attempts to avoid this form of violence by exclusionary mechanisms it understands to be fundamental for its concept of unity in a disunited profane world. Finally, we must also pay attention to Faubion's millenarian temporality as a temporality of crisis which, as I pointed out, is always latent within Baha'ism. Not until the Baha'i divine civilization has occurred, Baha'ism will continue to struggle and find different interpretations to understand the profane as a chaotic world. In this sense, although Baha'ism may not be fully millenarian, since it

does not expect the end of time, or a messianic return, even as a millennialist movement, its temporality is closer to a millenarian temporality.

History Rhymes: A Conclusion

Driving back home, during my first years as a graduate student at Rice, I would come across Baha'i advertisements on the radio that usually aired at around five o'clock in the afternoon. I believe it was NPR, or KUHT, where one could listen to their message: "The Baha'i Faith, uniting the world one heart at a time." It was pretty exciting since, being a Baha'i who grew up in Spain, lived in the Czech Republic during High School in the 1990s, traveled to different European countries, and visited his friends in Germany, such advertisements on the radio were virtually unknown to these countries. The US, popularly known for its many adherents and their intense (and successful) religious activity, made me feel as if I were in the middle of the most vibrant and active religious community. Houston was among the few places one could say you were a Baha'i and people would not look at you as if you were part of an obscure cult. They knew something about it and it was one denomination among many others. Years have passed and, through research and hard work, from wanting to become a Baha'i scholar to an anthropologist, from being an adherent to becoming an unbelieving Baha'i, things have changed since then.

When I first began my research, I was interested in how a religious movement like Baha'ism could be possible. Under the Baha'i rubric, there were adherents from many different backgrounds and dispositions. Why, and how, would they convert to a different religion? What social conditions influenced such change of identity? After all, they believed in things apparently different from those prescribed by Baha'ism and, all of a sudden, they believed in God, in a global religious movement, in the Bab as the precursor

of Baha'u'llah, in Baha'u'llah as the latest prophet, in 'Abdu'l-Baha as a perfect exemplar, in Shoghi Effendi as the guardian, and in the Universal House of Justice as the religious administrative center of a global religious movement which was, generally speaking, infallible. As I continued my research, I began to realize that this apparent change was not so much a change than continuity within change—to use Marshall Sahlins' term. I began to realize that these conversions were not so much conversions but transfigurations as a mode of subjectivation—to use Michel Foucault's term. The significance of this dissertation hopes to bring to light and contribute to the literature that explores continuity within change on the one hand, and transfigurations, on the other hand, by researching the Baha'i movement.

The first chapter of this dissertation discussed the origins of the Baha'i movement. It began by exploring the development of Islam and, as I had mentioned, it is an arrangement of academic literature through a set of particular concepts: millenarianism (or chiliasm) and millennialism; heresy and revisionism; and utopianism and conservatism. These concepts should not be treated as structural binary concepts but concepts that affect each other and enable us to view the history of a religious movement as a more dynamic phenomenon. By millenarianism, following Faubion (2001), we meant a system of belief in which the adherent presumes that the eschatological period is the period of her or his own generation that she or he is part of the faithful elect that will see the final days through to their end. Millennialism, in contrast, denotes any system of belief in the finitude and sacred redemption of the historical process regardless of whether the believer presumes that the end of that process is at hand and that she or he is among the agencies of its redemption. Whereas millenarianism disregards

institutionalization and is less effective in establishing its own tradition, millennialism is compatible with the institutionalization and establishment of a religious tradition with a “civilizing” mission. In addition to Faubion’s concepts of millenarianism and millennialism, we took into consideration Arjomand’s definitions of apocalypticism, messianism and millennialism. Apocalypticism “denotes the imminent expectation of the total transformation of the world” (Arjomand 2002, 106); messianism referred to “the expectation of the appearance of a divine savior;” and millennialism is understood “in the literal sense of the expectation of a radical break with the present at the end of a 1,000-year age and, by extension, of the calculation of the time of the end and related numerological speculations.” To be clear, Arjomand’s millennialism is close to Faubion’s millenarianism. The reason I thought of bringing into this dissertation Arjomand’s definitions is because, as we are about to see again, his definitions regarding apocalypticism and messianism enable us to further describe religious movements in their different fragmentations and religious emphases. Generally speaking, however, we will use millenarianism and millennialism in Faubion’s sense and we will substitute “chiliasm” for Arjomand’s term “millennialism” to make things more clear. The first chapter thus attempted to explain how those concepts were configured differently depending on the religious movement and the particular historical context.

We began by discussing the routinization of charisma in Islam following the death of the prophet Muhammad in 632 CE. This process of routinization began with the problem of authority. Most of the Muslim community (ummah), under Abu-Bakr’s leadership, took a millennial stance because it was thought that a state had to be established based on Muhammad’s religious message. A minority of the community—which also took a

millennial stance—believed that the rightful leader was to be Ali ibn Abi Talib and opposed Abu-Bakr’s leadership. Others, moreover, viewed Islam as a personal relation of men and women to God. Since the beginning of Islam, however, the expectation and possibility of other future prophets was vivid and the millenarian expectations among Ali’s minority took, naturally, an important role. Those who revolved around Ali viewed their sacred history as taking the wrong turn and, consequently, the expectation of a savior that would make things right was longed for. It is out of this minority, which was at the margins of power, that millenarianism took precedence.

After Ali’s death the shift to an appointed leader or Imam created further factions among the minority. This kind of crisis occurred repeatedly after the death of an Imam. For example, although most Alid loyalists believed Hasan was to be the second Imam, others, like the Kaysaniya, believed Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya to be the true heir and successor. Thus, since the beginning of Islam, many Shi’ite groups believed in the imminence of the Mahdi (the rightly guided one). In this manner, Alid loyalists, as Arjomand pointed out, were apocalyptic, messianic and chiliastic—or, to use Faubion’s term, which comprises in this case Arjomand’s definitions into one, Alid loyalists were millenarian. As the minority movement developed, Alid loyalists were eventually transformed from a millenarian into a millennial movement through the leadership of Muhammad al-Baqir and Ja’far al-Sadiq, the fifth and sixth Imams respectively. This transformation was an “impressive feat of unifying sundry pro-Alid groups into the Imami sect” (Arjomand 1996, 491). A transformation that was not only reached by its characteristic “peaceableness” (Hodgson 1955, 9n51) or political aloofness, it was also reached by the messianic and apocalyptic postponement. In other words, the millenarian

Alid loyalists, or Shi'ite, were transformed into the millennial Imami Shi'ism. Moreover, Imami Shi'ism would also split into different groups as the succession of the Imams went along. Ismailis, for example, believed the imamate ended when Ja'far al-Sadiq designated his son Ismail as the next Imam. Those who believed that the sacred line continued with Musa, and five other imams, would be known as Ithna 'Ashariya or Twelver Shi'ites, a designation that, according to Kholberg (1976, 521n2), would not make its first appearance until circa 1000 CE. After the death of the twelfth imam, Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Askari, Imami Shi'tes were led by four deputies or Babs. Al-Askari was thought to go into a lesser occultation (873-874) and he would communicate with his four deputies. Once the leadership of the four deputies came to an end, the twelfth imam, or the Hidden Imam, went into greater occultation (940-941), and the return of the Hidden Imam, as he was known, was indefinitely postponed. Twelver Shi'ism became further transformed into a millennial movement because its apocalypticism, messianism and chiliasm in Arjomand's sense were postponed.

Finally, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century we discussed the revival of millenarianism through the school Shaykhism, which opposed the religious monopoly of the Usuli school. It was out of the Shaykhi theological school that the Babi movement emerged. Sayyid Ali Muhammad Shirazi (1819-1850), claimed to be the Bab, a term that was used to designate the deputies during the lesser occultation of the twelfth imam. He was the gate or bab, "the special spokesman of the Hidden Imam" (Hodgson 1977, 3:305). Ali Muhammad, or the Bab, claimed to be the mediator in Twelver Shi'ism between the Hidden Imam and his followers. His religious mission developed gradually and his prophetic revelation moved from a millenarian revisionary movement that called

for a return to “pure religion” to a millenarian and heretical position. To illustrate this development from a revisionary stance into heresy we borrowed terms from literary criticism. For example, we discussed Harold Bloom’s conceptualization of revisionism and heresy: “[t]he ancestor of revisionism is heresy, but heresy tended to change received doctrine by an alteration of balances, rather than by what could be called creative correction, the more particular mark of modern revisionism. Heresy resulted, generally, from a change in emphasis, while revisionism follows received doctrine along to a certain point, and then deviates, insisting that a wrong direction was taken at just that point, and no other” (Bloom 1997, 29). In contrast to Bloom’s theory of poetic influence, we see the opposite movement: the ancestor of heresy is revisionism. The Bab’s religious mission first called for “pure religion,” which was revisionary, and later developed into heretical stance that changed and abrogated the previous Islamic tradition. We also borrowed Kenneth Burke’s conceptual tools to further illustrate this point. According to Burke (1969), there are utopian and conservative ideologies: the first denote a progressive and futuristic outlook; the second attempt to either preserve a status quo, or re-establish a previous social order. The Bab’s early claims were conservative as it called for the return of “pure religion”; then, his message became utopian in the sense that it expected the future rise of a charismatic authority that would deliver a new religious mission more forcefully.

Mirza Husayn Ali Nuri (1817-1892), who was later known by the title of Baha’u’llah, would transform the Babi millenarian movement into a millennial movement known as Baha’ism. Indeed, while mainstream Baha’ism is millennial, it does contain an element of millenarianism. It does not expect a divine savior for at least another one thousand

years and therefore, it is not messianic in Arjomand's sense. It does not expect a sudden break from the present because that already occurred with the coming of Baha'u'llah and, therefore, it is not chiliastic in Arjomand's sense either. But it is apocalyptic because it expects a sudden transformation of the world through which the majority of the world will become Baha'i. Following Baha'u'llah's death an imamate was established in the sense that a specific individual to which adherents should turn to was appointed: 'Abdu'l-Baha. After 'Abdu'l-Baha's death in 1921, Shoghi Effendi was appointed as the guardian: *walid*, or guardian, is also one of the titles attributed to the imams, who guarded against those who wrongfully claimed to be the leaders of the community. As we already discussed, although it was thought that a sacred line of guardians would work hand in hand with the Universal House of Justice (UHJ), there were no apparent inheritors to this position according to mainstream Baha'ism. Consequently, the UHJ decided that Shoghi Effendi was Baha'ism's first and last guardian.

In addition, there are more comparisons that can be made between the history of Islam and that of Baha'ism, aside from the different configurations of imamate and guardianship. As we mentioned, every time an imam would perish, Alid loyalists experienced a crisis which led to splits within this minority. After the death of the Bab, Baha'u'llah challenged the leadership of his half-brother, Mirza Yahya, and when 'Abdu'l-Baha was appointed, his family also opposed him and his appointed grandson, Shoghi Effendi. With the institutionalization of the UHJ in 1963, a minority of Baha'is, which we discussed in chapter four, did not believe that the UHJ should run without a guardian. These adherents, who call themselves Orthodox Baha'is, either expect the coming of a future guardian, as the case of the Tarbiyat Baha'i community, or believe

that other guardians followed Shoghi Effendi, like those who followed the guardianship of Mason Remey. In this sense, orthodox Baha'is are to Baha'ism what Alid loyalists were to the majority of the Muslim community. Moreover, these orthodox communities also experienced further splits. Like the Kaysaniya and the Ismailis, some orthodox Baha'is believe that the second guardian was Mason Remey, while the Tarbiyat Baha'i community reformulated these claims and expect the coming of a second guardian while it is led by an interim government called a "regency." While the Tarbiyat Baha'i community may be millenarian, apocalyptic, and messianic, it is not chiliastic in Arjomand's sense. It is also a revisionary movement and not heretical (in Bloom's sense) since, like mainstream Baha'is, it believes in Baha'u'llah's revelation and not in another revelation that surpasses Baha'u'llah. Finally, it is also utopian, in Burke's sense, as it hopes for a futuristic society that will be led by a living guardian which will work with the UHJ. Other orthodox Baha'is, who believe in a living guardian, are surely millennial, but they are, like mainstream Baha'is, also apocalyptic and not messianic nor chiliastic in Arjomand's sense of the term. Thus, orthodox Baha'i groups form, to use Bourdieu's term, the *heterodoxy of Baha'i doxa*, which was discussed in chapter three, in the same way Alid loyalists were heterodox to the majority of the Muslim community.

In the second chapter of this dissertation I attempted to explain the process of conversion. As I had mentioned at the beginning of the present chapter, I was interested in how a religious movement like Baha'ism could be possible. How it could expand from a religious movement that originated in the Middle East and reached the West. After all, Baha'is adherents were from many different backgrounds and dispositions. Why and how did these adherents convert to a different religion? What social conditions

influenced such change of identity? The second chapter attempted to broadly explain these questions.

Religious conversion, as Faubion explained, is usually understood in terms of its derivation from the Latin verb *converto*, “to turn back or around, to change, to translate, to turn in a particular direction, to direct, to devote” (Faubion 2001, 21). Moreover, according to Webb Keane, it is understood in missionization contexts as “a more or less dramatic transformation of the person” (Keane 2002, 65). My fieldwork in Madrid and other cities in Spain, during the years 2005-2007, hoped to gather narratives on such conversions. During my ethnography, I began to realize that I needed to differentiate two terms: “conversion” and “adherence.” Whereas the former suggests a radical and canonical transformation, like Saul on the road to Damascus (Faubion 2001, 21), the latter is less a transformation than a finding one’s place in the world. I tentatively defined adherence as a displacement of elective affinities. I also pointed out that it would not be surprising if, within missionization contexts, we would find many similarities between Baha’is and Keane’s Sumbanese Calvinists (2002).

In my inquiry on Spanish Baha’i adherences during in the mid and early 1970s, transfiguration as a mode of subjectivation gained an import role. Spain was ruled by General Francisco Franco’s regime, a regime that had strong ties with the Catholic Church and had been legitimated by it. It was therefore expected that those adherents I interviewed were either among those at the margins of power or those on the “losing” side in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War—among them socialists or communists, but not always necessarily so. Potential adherents who were inclined toward the political

“left” became an important part of my fieldwork. They were usually politically active in their twenties and longed for “Democracy,” “Equality,” “Freedom” or “Justice.” They resisted the central political power and the Church’s hierarchy, but were also somewhat disenchanted with their leftist political affiliations for a variety of reasons. Some viewed their affiliations as either guided by the personal interests of a political hierarchy that led their activism (and political parties), or because they viewed the political program as lacking any substantial source of morality and ethics. When potential adherents became exposed to Baha’ism, they were increasingly interested in the utopian space that Baha’u’llah had created. That space was not at all the creation of something foreign to the ideas already present in the subjects’ imagination. As one of my informants told me, “I did not only identify with a utopian idea that was worth living for. Instead, I identified [Baha’ism] with what I had always believed in, but better expressed. [...] I did not accept a religion, I accepted a way of life.” Baha’ism envisions a global and “spiritual civilization” without a professional clergy that is organized around democratic ideas, dialogue (consultation, in Baha’i terminology), and a decentralized spiritual government formed by nine members who are elected by adult adherents of the religious community. Moreover, ideas such as equality, freedom and justice are not only longed for in terms of an ideal society alone. Such a spiritual civilization cannot be reached without the ethical work or askēsis—prescribed by various religious figures and religious institutions—of the individual adherent: it is achieved through daily prayers, scriptural readings or reflections on daily activities. Thus, ethical subjects found their transfiguration by adhering to a new project, their new-found religion, which enabled them to seize the present and change it.

Fernando's background was socialist or Republican. In contrast to what I expected, he was not interested so much in doctrines Baha'ism offered regarding the soul or the afterlife, he was more interested in the religious institutions or the Baha'i "administrative order" which was centered around democratic principles. He also opposed the Iberian Church and its hierocracy but, through his mother, he also inherited a certain religious sensibility that gave more importance to Christian religious figures than the institution of the Church. The Church, for him, was a power and not a religion. He believed that all humans, men or women, regardless of their religion or race, were equal, but he did not believe in the Church's clergy and their celibacy. He did not believe in confession. Nevertheless, this religious sensibility continued to be part of him. David Kertzer's study (1990) of the Italian Communist Party and the Catholic Church was very helpful here because it made me realize that the thesis of "the two Spains"—one liberal and secular, the other conservative and Catholic—was ultimately erroneous. Looking back at my interviews, I realized that there was not a clear-cut difference between the so-called two Spains and the fragmentation of my informants was much more complex than I thought at first. They might have been liberals and seculars but there was a religious sensibility that could not be ignored. At the end of our conversations, three general aspects seem to have gained an important role in his adherence: the Baha'i administration, the religious community and religious literature. The Baha'i church is democratic, integrative, lacks a professional clergy and, at the local and national levels, these institutions may be formed by men and women alike. There is also no confession. He liked the religious community, too. They came across as peaceful and easy-going: "they transmitted good vibes." Regarding religious literature, it was not Baha'u'llah's

scripture that initially attracted him most. One of them was a comprehensive introduction to Baha'ism, *Baha'u'llah and the New Era* (Esslemont 1980). The other two centered round the religious figure of 'Abdu'l-Baha, the Christ-like figure—*Portals of Freedom* (Ives 1937), and *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Abdu'l-Baha 1982b)—not Baha'u'llah.

María's background was communist. Her father is an atheist but her mother gave her a certain religious sensibility. Her family, who was known for its communist activities, had to leave Spain during Franco's regime and did not come back until the 1970s. She grew up in France and Spain. She was part of the communist youths but she became "disenchanted" with the communist party in France. While they criticized Christian proselytization, communists in France proselytized just like Christians did. She tried to find a different political alternative or affiliation but she would find that they were also centered on personal leadership and hierarchy. The democratic, decentralized, flexible, and integrative Baha'i church caught her attention as she was going through political disenchantment and personal crisis. Although she found the workings of the Baha'i church interesting, she also found a religious community that was amicable, relaxed and hospitable. The deepenings she attended were also integrative and democratic: the small religious community would decide the next subject to be discussed and put it to a vote. One of the adherents would prepare a fifteen-minute presentation and the audience would assume different positions: communists, atheists, Catholics and even pasotas (people who are indifferent to the issue at hand). She remembered that those deepenings helped her open her mind to another possibility. For example, praying was difficult for her and absurd. It was gibberish and she did not believe in God

previously. However, through her contact with the religious community, praying seemed natural. The peaceful atmosphere and the feeling of being at peace led her to pray more at ease. The Baha'i church and the religious community also took an important role in becoming an adherent. She was also informed by the same set of books that Fernando had mentioned. An introductory book on Baha'ism and books that centered around the figure of 'Abdu'l-Baha. Also, like Fernando, she became an adherent during her twenties.

Loles, like the other two informants, is also an Andalusian. Unlike the other two, her background was neither communist nor socialist. She came from an upper-middle class family that had local ties to the Catholic Church and the police. As a child, however, she suffered from an illness and she had to grow up in a rural area near Málaga. She grew up as a peasant until the age of seven and she became close to her nursemaid. When she returned to live with her parents in Málaga, she could not stand the hierarchy and prejudices that characterized her social class. She could not play with the housekeepers' children and her relationship with her parents became more difficult during her adolescence. She rejected her parents' values and, as she grew older, she joined the hippie movement on the coast of Málaga. There, she began to socialize with the English, Dutch and Germans that had also joined the movement. She began to have problems with her parents and she moved to Pamplona to live with her grandmother. There she sympathized with ETA, like María did, as a way to oppose Franco's regime. She then moved to Madrid to begin her university studies. In Madrid she met her future husband, Nacho, who was a Baha'i. During our interview, she did not stress so much the importance of the Baha'i church as she viewed Baha'ism as the return of Christ. She was

interested in the prophecies and Parousia that are mentioned in the Bible and that Baha'ism claims to be referring to Baha'i figures. Although she became communist, and then a disenchanted communist, she found Baha'ism to be, as she said, "communism but with meaning." Fernando and María's narratives were more politically inclined. In contrast, Loles and Nacho's narratives were more religiously inclined. Baha'ism's ideology, which has a strong democratic and integrative component on the one hand, and a creative interpretation of the Bible regarding prophecies and Parousia on the other, enables the accommodation of these two dispositions.

What then had the informants I interviewed had in common with my research on Babism and Baha'ism in the Middle East and North America? Babism was a local religious upheaval that originated in 1844, in Iran, and which had as its background a long history of Twelver Shi'ite millenarian expectations. Twelver Shi'ism, on the other hand, was not since the beginning a clear cut movement that was always present in Islam. It was a movement with its continuities and discontinuities, changes and reformulations that were more solidly formed after some centuries into what we now call Shi'ism. The last Imam, the twelfth Imam according to Twelver Shi'ism, who disappeared and promised to return, highlighted such expectations. Babism was indeed a revolutionary religious movement that mainly concerned and aroused the local imagination of Twelver Shi'ites. As the movement developed and began to lose its initial force, Baha'u'llah, a Babi himself, was able, during his exile in present-day Iraq, Turkey and Israel, to reignite other millennial expectations by proclaiming Christ's return and founding another religion that would be later known as Baha'ism. 'Abdu'l-Baha, his son, the perfect exemplar, and the Christ-like figure, had indeed attracted the imagination of Euro-American Christians. His

charismatic attributes were very appealing to them, and he even made a remarkable impression during his visits to Europe and North America. Shoghi Effendi, the guardian, a title borrowed from Twelver Shi'ism, was educated in Oxford and his leadership for both Middle East and Euro-American adherents was also important. He wrote extensively to both religious communities. It was he who had brought about a set of integrative and democratic religious organisms, from the local to the national and international levels: the UHJ. Except for a few cases, these religious figures had, generally speaking, appealed to the imagination of those at the margins of power. Those who were, for one reason or another, at the margins of power—those who were disenchanted or dissatisfied with their present state of political or religious affairs—had found within Baha'ism an integrative democratic system that enabled them to work towards a new civilization that has been, since its inception, the driving force of the Baha'i imagination: a utopian, global and religious movement that would eventually reunite mankind.

Spanish adherents have very little to do with Babi adherents, Iranian Baha'is, or American Baha'is. Baha'ism treats Babism as a precursor of Baha'ism. The Babi movement is viewed for the overwhelming majority of Baha'is as a preliminary movement whose main and definite purpose was to prepare the way for the rise of Baha'ism. However, as I began my research, Babi adherents, which were considered to be the spiritual ascendants of the American Baha'i adherents, had very little to do with the Euro-American Baha'i adherents. Babism was definitely a local movement that was mostly comprised of Iraqi and Iranian Twelver Shi'ite adherents with millenarian expectations. It was out of millenarian expectations within the Twelver Shi'ite tradition

that this movement was created—a movement that hoped to change what it viewed as a corruption of its traditional clergy and the weakening of its nation. Through Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha, and Shoghi Effendi's exiled leadership their religious message reached, moreover, the sympathies of Jewish, Zoroastrian and, more importantly, for the purposes of this dissertation, Christian communities outside the Middle East. It is not surprising then that some nineteenth-century Christian American millenarians, at a time when Millerites thrived, too, embraced the Baha'i message. It was Baha'u'llah who represented the return of Christ, but it was 'Abdu'l-Baha's Christ-like charisma who brought the message to them. For example, Juliet Thompson (1873-1956), an Irish American, describes, among many others, 'Abdu'l-Baha's Christ-like charisma: "Into this room of conventional elegance, packed with conventional people, imagine the Master ['Abdu'l-Baha] striding with His free step: walking first to one of the many windows and, while He looked out into the light, talking with His matchless ease to the people. Turning from the window, striding back and forth with a step so vibrant it shook you. Piercing our souls with those strange eyes, uplifting them, glory streaming upon them. Talking, talking, moving to and fro incessantly. Pushing back His turban, revealing that Christ-like forehead; pushing it forward again almost down to His eyebrows, which gave Him a peculiar majesty" (Thompson 1983, 273; my brackets). Indeed, once again, Iranian and American adherents had very little in common with the Spanish adherents I interviewed. Whereas the American adherents in the early twentieth century emphasized the religious message of Christ's second-coming, Spanish adherents in the 1970s envisioned a religious movement that enabled them to achieve their ideas of democracy,

equality, freedom and justice. Thus, adherence, which I described as a displacement of elective affinities, seemed the best way to discuss Foucault's transfiguration.

The third chapter dealt with Baha'i doxa through a couple of essays written by mainstream Baha'is. The fourth chapter, dealt with the other side of the field of opinion, the Baha'i competing possibles. Mainstreamers and orthodox opinions are both part of Baha'i doxa (the universe of the undisputed) in that both believe in Baha'u'llah's revelation and religious mission. Formulations on revelation are written by contemporary American Baha'i scholars and I basically tried to show some coordinates of Baha'i ideology. Baha'ism views God as an entity impossible to comprehend and Baha'u'llah as a superhuman figure that is above humanity. As we discussed those two essays, I attempted to show how for every affirmation Baha'i scholars formulated, there was a scriptural precedent that expressed the same idea differently. Moreover, important concepts such as "revelation" or "independent investigation of truth," differed widely and were purposefully inconclusive. The inconclusiveness of these formulations is then postponed to a future since Baha'u'llah's scriptures are viewed as being always unfulfilled or never fully understood by humanity.

An orthodox Baha'i opinion would have little to say against such formulations. They would, however, have much to say on the succession of Baha'i institutions. Orthodox Baha'is believe that the UHJ should not run without a guardianship and, therefore, stress the importance of the guardian as an office that must run hand in hand with the UHJ. Gay Baha'is, moreover, emphasize the importance of diversity and independent thought. Mainstreamers, on the other hand, emphasize the unity or homogeneity of their religion.

The competing possibles of the orthodox and gay communities have not posed much of a threat so far and their opposing opinions or narratives are usually ignored. They are ignored because mainstreamers believe that one of the unique characteristics of their religion is that there will not be any schisms. Their supreme institution is divinely guided by Baha'u'llah and therefore infallible for the overwhelming majority of adherents. Consequently, if mainstreamers were to acknowledge such schisms they would feel that Baha'u'llah's promise to keep his religion united would fail.

Surely, many things have changed since I began researching Baha'ism. I have grown over the years professionally and personally. Researching the history of Islam, Babism and Baha'ism, and comparing their developments have been very helpful in understanding the Baha'i movement. Moreover, analyzing the conversion narratives of my informants, and comparing them historically, has enabled me to understand conversion as adherence, as the displacement of elective affinities. I moved from a canonical notion of conversion to an anthropological understanding of such a process. Many fears were also overcome, too. Reading and thinking through other Baha'i narratives, those who form what Bourdieu termed as competing possibles, led me to realize my previous dispositions and prejudices. They were not narratives of the spiritually diseased but merely other narratives that changed their emphases. As a whole, if I were to conclude my findings in this dissertation, I would have to quote Mark Twain when he said: "History does not repeat itself, but it does rhyme."

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