

---

Leyla MELIKOVA

---

*Ph.D. (Philos.), Senior Research Fellow, History of Religion and Social Thought Department, Academician Buniyatov Institute of Oriental Studies, National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan (Baku, Azerbaijan).*

## HOW BAHÁ'ISM TRAVELLED FROM THE EAST TO THE WEST (IDEOLOGICAL EVOLUTION OF THE NEO-UNIVERSALIST RELIGIOUS DOCTRINE)

---

### Abstract

---

**T**he author places the ideological evolution of the Baha'i faith as a religious doctrine in the context of the social and cultural trends of Western neoliberal ideology and globalism. She classifies this religious teaching, born in Iran in the mid-19th century (1844) out of the Shi'a-Imamite messianic doctrine and fully developed by

1863, as a neo-universalist religious concept, the moral and ethical values of which did not offer sensational revelations, but followed the religious provisions of other faiths. Her analysis of the phenomenological aspects and quintessence of Baha'ism

in the context of historical conditions and the factors that made it possible, the Baha'is religious identity, their relations with the environment, society, and the state reveals the contradictory and utopian nature of this faith.

**KEYWORDS:** *Baha'ism, the Bab, Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, globalism, neo-universalist religions, universalism, cosmopolitanism.*

## Introduction

By the turn of the 20th century, the institution of the church had gradually lost its followers amid the cultural and spiritual crisis in the West, which kindled a wide interest in all sorts of religious cults and theosophical, mainly Oriental, trends. Later, the new religiosity born of the culture of modernity rebounded as a fairly specific postmodernist, sociocultural phenomenon. An attentive listener, however, can discern a consistent call in the postmodernist cacophony to universalism and unification of mankind for the sake of a new world order coming from the religious movements and associations that fall into the category of “neo-universalist religions.”<sup>1</sup> Their ideological content, that is, their neo-spiritualist<sup>2</sup> aspect, is very different and, at the same time, very similar: all of them are geared toward the idea of uniform world governance. Baha'ism, a socio-cultural and socio-religious phenomenon, is one of the new religions in which the neo-universalist aspect is an obvious and inseparable part of the doctrine. Its universalism is practically identical to the globalist concept of an omni-human universe. The statements coming from the Baha'i ideologists of the Universal House of Justice (UHJ), the supreme governing institution of the Baha'i faith in Haifa (Israel), add more sense to everything taking place in the world. They say that mankind should strive for a New World Order, a new world religion according to the followers of the Baha'i faith.<sup>3</sup> The teaching of Bahá'u'lláh<sup>4</sup> proceeds from the idea of continuity of the Divine Revelation; this means that the founders of all religions were merely prophets drawing their knowledge from a single Divine source. The idea that the Prophet Muhammad was the last prophet for a certain historical period, rather than for the entire stretch of human history, was cen-

<sup>1</sup> The Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon, the Church of Osho and, conventionally, the New Age movements (there is no religion and no clearly organized structure of this name).

<sup>2</sup> Neo-spiritualism, a neologism coined by René Guénon, describes various forms of “new religiosity,” an eclectic combination of fragments of mystical knowledge, subjective ideas, and elements of contemporary scientific-technical ideas about the world that lead humanity to decline.

<sup>3</sup> They believe that to unite mankind into a new social entity called the New World Order, it should be accepted that the world religions have a common source of revelations and are, therefore, united, that all believers should seek the truth individually, that mankind should abandon all its prejudices while religion, the human mind, and scientific knowledge should achieve harmony, that education for all is needed, that extreme forms of poverty and wealth should be eliminated, that men and women should be equal, that a common language for international communication should be created and put into circulation, and that a federative form of universal governance with a single administrative center should be set up to supervise the economy, international security, and the judicial system. The Baha'i International Community has a consultative status with ECOSOS and UNICEF (see [<http://www.bahai.org/>]).

<sup>4</sup> Bahá'u'lláh (*Arab.*: بهاء الله [“Glory of God”]), born Mírzá Ḥusayn-`Alí Núrí (*Persian*: میرزا حسین علی نوری), 1817-1892, founder of the Baha'i Faith.

tral in the teaching of the Bab.<sup>5</sup> The new period would be opened by two prophets, the Bab being one of them; the name of the second remained concealed. Bahá'u'lláh capitalized on the idea of developing his own religious-philosophical concept. The Baha'is are convinced that Bahá'u'lláh is the second and last (for the current cycle) of the two promised prophets predicted by the Bab and that his advent opened an epoch in which all messianic prophecies present in all religions have been fulfilled.

To identify the present status of the Baha'i faith, I will trace the evolution of its ideology from the very first day of its existence.

## Genetic Links between Baha'ism and Shi'a Islam

To establish the fact of genetic affinity between Baha'ism and Shi'a Islam we should look for the sources of the Baha'i faith in Babism and, therefore, in Shi'a Islam as a whole. In 1848-1852, Babism, a religious-political movement used the extremely unfavorable social and political situation in Iran<sup>6</sup> to raise a high wave of riots which swept the country and threatened the ruling Qajar dynasty.

Babism as a religious teaching is rooted in the Shi'a messianic doctrine, according to which the promised imam, the last of twelve imams, would come to Earth to bring justice. In Shi'a, the role of a Messiah, an ultimate savior of humankind, belongs to Al-Mahdi (the Guided One) and Al-Qa'im (the Rising One). According to this concept, the twelfth imam was concealed by Allah and for 69 years guided his followers through messengers, all of them titled the Bab (Gate). There were four of them; the death of the last in 940 was the starting point of the Shi'a Imamite religious-political doctrine, which reached its highest point under the Safavids. Since the concealed imam and his last deputy (Gate) refused to name the successor, the Shi'a-Imamites are still waiting for the concealed imam Mahdi or Qa'im who will restore justice on Earth. What is important is the fact that in this context Al-Qa'im is expected to come not only as the savior of mankind, but also as the founder of a new religion.<sup>7</sup>

The Babi-Baha'i religious philosophic concept grew out of the Shi'a-Imamite doctrine. The Bab, founder of Babism, originated from the Shaykhi environment. The Shaykhi (*Arab.*: As-Shaykhiya) School in Shi'a Islam (like many others in Iran) grew out of the traditionally messianic sentiments and existed in Kerman in the 19th century; it has survived until our day as a distinctive part of Shi'a Islam. The Shaykhiya School was founded by Sheikh Ahmad al-Ahsá'i, an Arab from Bahrain (1753-1826); he and his followers interpreted the Koran allegorically to predict the forthcoming second advent of Imam Mahdi. The Sheikh was born in Al-Ahsa (the eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula). Back in the 10th century, the Qarmatians set up a small utopian state there, which Nasir-i-Khusrau visited and described. It seems that this and many other factors influenced the ideas and spiritual rules of Sheikh Ahmad.<sup>8</sup> According to the available information, at no time did he try to set up a school of his own; he never tried to oppose the Shi'a traditions and always regarded himself as a true follower of the teaching of the Imams of Imami Shīa Islam.<sup>9</sup> As could be expected, the ideas and highly spe-

<sup>5</sup> The Bab (*Arab.*: الباب ["Gate"]), Siyyid 'Alí Muhammad Shirázi (*Persian*: سید علی محمد شیرازی), 1819-1850, a merchant from Shiraz commonly known as the Bab is the founder of Babism and the ideological predecessor and spiritual teacher of Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Baha'i faith.

<sup>6</sup> "Cities and towns were shaken by riots of the hungry, the majority of them unrelated to the Bab movement" (see: Mirza Kazem Bek, *Bab i babidy. Religiozno-politicheskie smuty v Persii v 1844-1852 godakh*, Selected Works, Elm, Baku, 1985, p. 219; M.S. Ivanov, *Antifeodalnye vosstaniia v Irane v seredine XIX veka*, Moscow, 1982, 247 pp.).

<sup>7</sup> See: "Islam," in: *Entsiklopedichesky slovar*, Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 1991, p. 127.

<sup>8</sup> In view of the fact that Babism developed from the Shaykhiya School, it is interesting to point out that Vasily Bartold at one time quoted Ignac Goldziher, who wrote that Babism was a "development of the Mahdi idea in the Ismailite sense" (V.V. Bartold, *Sochinenia*, in 6 vols., Moscow, 1966, p. 391).

<sup>9</sup> زارعی جلال. جهان شناسی احمد احسانی (بررسی تطبیقی). نشریه: "علوم انسانی"، مقالات و بررسیها بهار و تابستان 1383 - شماره 75 (دفتر دوم) (علمی-پژوهشی)، صفحه - از 147 تا 160. C.147

cific approaches of Sheikh Ahmad al-Ahsá'í were consistently rejected by the mujtahids.<sup>10</sup> Siyyid Kázim Rashtí (1793-1843), one of Sheikh Ahmad's pupils, an Iranian born in Rasht (on the south-western Caspian coast) who died in Baghdad, became his spiritual successor. A profound metaphysic and mystic, he left a vast written heritage, part of which disappeared together with Sheikh Ahmad's manuscripts during two inroads that devastated Kerbela but did not cut short the history of the Shaykhiya School; under Sheikh Ahmad's second successor, the school moved to Kerman (south-eastern Iran) where its members set up a madrasah, a school, and a print shop. The tradition survived and developed under later successors; the school produced over one thousand titles to become one of the most popular and respected philosophical discourses in Iran today. The limited scope of my article forces me to go back to the time when the Shaykhiya School gave birth to a new religious movement known in scholarly writings as Babism. We should bear in mind that, by the early 19th century, traditional Shi'a in Iran had lived through cardinal changes caused by shifting ideological accents. The Usulis regained their prevalence over the Akhbaris, which gave the mujtahids a chance to interfere in secular life. The Shaykhiya School retained its own position and was, therefore, isolated: unlike the Shi'a traditionalists, its followers believed that after the deaths of the Prophet Muhammad, Ali, Fatima, and Imams, their holy souls could be reincarnated in chosen people. They also prophesied that a new Messiah, Imam Mahdi, would soon reveal himself and that the world would learn about this from a messenger, the perfect Shi'a. The followers of the Shaykhiya School not only prepared the public and religious consciousness for the appearance of a messenger (Gate) and a group of people who embodied the spiritual essence of the holiest figures in Shi'a and were, therefore, an indisputable authority for the people in all spheres of life. In this way, the Shaykhiya School, deliberately or not, tilled the religious soil for Babism.

Shortly before his death, Siyyid Kázim Rashtí instructed his pupils to spread out in search of the Qa'im as the messenger and the Gate to the future. One of them, Mullah Hossein Boshru'i ended up in Shiraz where he met young Siyyid Alí Muhammad who, on 23 May, 1844, declared himself the Bab, The Gate of God. Mullah Hossein was the first to accept him as the Bab; later followers of Siyyid Alí Muhammad joined him.

By that time, the Shaykhiya community had lost its ideological unity very much obvious under late Sheikh Ahmad. After the death of Siyyid Kázim Rashtí, some of his followers, seeking more political consequence, realized that they needed a less formal and more socially oriented religious teaching and an ideological base or an idea attractive enough to lure new members. The Bab, a 23-year-old young man who has shown an interest in all sorts of religious trends in the tareqat, attended Siyyid Kázim Rashtí's classes, and gained respect in the Shaykhiya community while in Kerbela, looked like the best candidate for the role of the messenger.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The 17th century gave rise to different approaches to the problem of tradition in Shi'a thought. On the one hand, there were the Usulis (critical theologians) and the Akhbaris (fundamentalist theologians). When dealing with the collection of Shi'a legends (khabar), the former were guided by the criteria of external authenticity, while the latter insisted on preservation of the collection's entity. The disagreements were mainly related to the sphere of canonical law (al fiqh), yet the Akhbaris also influenced the approach to traditional Shi'a metaphysics. When it comes to the problems of authenticity of the hadiths (as belonging or not belonging to the Imams), the Akhbaris were guided by their content rather than the authority of the mujtahids (theologians), who had the right to pass judgment, or the authority of those who transferred the tradition. This dialectical intertwining apart, the Shaykhiya School occupied an intermediate position between the two extremes, being closer to the Akhbaris (see: H. Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, Gallimard, 1986). The followers of the Shaykhiya School, however, disagreed with the Shi'a Akhbari theologians on several conceptual problems; they objected, in particular, to the great number of legends and absence of their criticism. They also favored a unified approach to the interpretations of the Koran and the Shari'a. The Shi'a theologians, in turn, condemned their refusal to embrace the idea of man's physical resurrection—for more details about the religious and philosophic ideas of Sheikh Ahmad al-Ahsá'í and his biography, see: زارعی جلال. جهان شناسی احمد احسانی (بررسی تطبیقی). نشریه: "علوم انسانی"، مقالات و بررسیها بهار و تابستان 1383 - شماره 75 (دفتر دوم) (علمی-پژوهشی)، صفحه - از 147 تا 160. چهاردهی مرتضی مدرسی. احوال بزرگان: شیخ احمد احسانی (1166-1241). نشریه: زبان و ادبیات "یادگار"، آذر 1323 - شماره 4، صفحه - از 30 تا 48.

<sup>11</sup> See: Mirza Kazem bek, op. cit., p. 73.

He started his new mission by performing hajj to Mecca and Medina. On 20 December, 1844, standing at Kaaba, the most sacred of the Islamic sites, he announced that he was the Bab (the Gate of God) through which the future Imam would reveal himself. This calls for a more detailed discussion.

The Bab and the Shaykhiya followers looked at Shi'a (the Religion of Truth) as resting on four supports: "Briefly, Shi'ism had heretofore recognized five pillars of belief: tawhid (unity of God), nubúwa (prophethood), the resurrection, the imamate and justice. The Shaykhiya joined divine unity with justice and prophethood with the resurrection and added the principle of the Perfect She'd or Shi'í. Thus for the Báb, Shi'ism or true religion was based upon four supports, not five. His quaternary discourse no doubt reflects a doctrinal position, particularly as the fourth level, the Fourth Support (al-rukn al-rábi')..."<sup>12</sup> Al-rukn al-rábi', a very important term for the Babi, was interpreted by the Shaykhiya School as following the injunctions of the Imams of the Shi'a tradition—to remain in unity with the "friends of God" (*Arab.: al-Auliya*). Within the Imamite esoteric tradition, this meant strict observation of the mythical hierarchy of cycles, according to which the present period is the period of Occultation (*Arab.: Ghaybah*). Henry Corbin wrote in his history of Islamic philosophy that Occultation of Imam means occultation of his Threshold (Gate) (*Arab.: Al-bab*) and the entire hierarchy. This hierarchy is a group of concealed people, their occultation being an indispensable condition. In his last letter, the imam (who alone knew these concealed people) warned that those who would speak in his name were false. The occultation (Ghaybah) should be preserved until his arrival. The author further wrote: "This thesis was consistently repeated by the Shaykhiya teachers, which means that any religious teaching which moves away from Ghaybah also moves away from Shi'a and Shaykhiya."<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere in his fundamental work, he probed deeper into the quintessence of the Shi'a Imamite eschatology: "The last message of Imam warns against deceit and fraud of all sorts and against all attempts to cut short the period of eschatological expectation of his inevitable arrival. This was what constitutes the drama of Babism and Baha'i."<sup>14</sup>

Igor Bazilenko from St. Petersburg has written: "While accepting a certain degree of conventionality of the concept of heresy as applied to Shi'a, it is possible, however, to identify two main features that speak of the heretical nature of a Shi'a trend or a Shi'a community. In all cases, heresy, first, denies consistently and deliberately or avoids fulfilling the main dogmata—the pillars of faith (one or all of them)—and second, sets up a new organizational structure which is detached from the Muslim community to become independent and practically always antagonistic to this community."<sup>15</sup> This means that the Bab, having violated Ghaybah, moved outside the Shaykhiya: he set up a new teaching with distinct elements of bourgeois social reformism. In 1847, the Bab wrote his main work *Bayan* in Persian, in which he summarized his teaching and prophesied the appearance of "He Whom God shall make manifest." It was in the same year that, while in Máh-Kú prison (on the border with Northern Azerbaijan), he declared himself Imam Mahdi. This is the main contradiction of his status—a messenger of the new "revelation" that prophesied the advent of the Promised One in his main work (*Bayan*) and Mahdi, a title which, according to logic, belonged to the still concealed prophet. It is no wonder that the Muslim clergy of Iran was very concerned: indeed, anyone who declared himself a messiah in a traditional Shi'a country where it was believed that the lives of nations and rulers were at the disposal of a concealed imam who would appear and declare Doomsday was guilty of challenging the Shah and the clergy. The Babi slogans reflected the interests of the Iranian trade bourgeoisie and were related to social and public issues and man's everyday existence. Many of the important or even fundamental provisions of the Koran were rejected in the just kingdom of the Bab, such as all the Koranic limitations on usury and interest (a sin in Islam); while "complete freedom of trade was

<sup>12</sup> T. Lawson, "Dangers of Reading, the Inlibration Communion and Transference in the Qur'an Commentary of the Bab," in: *Scripture and Revelation*, Gorge Ronald, London, 1997, pp. 185-186.

<sup>13</sup> H. Corbin, op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>15</sup> I.V. Bazilenko, "Osobennosty evoliutsii religiozno-filosofskoy doktriny shiizma v istoriko-kulturnom prostranstve musulmansko Vostoka," *Khristianskoe chenie* (St. Petersburg Spiritual Academy), No. 1 (32), 2010, p. 169.

declared, which was limited, however, to the autochthonous population while foreigners and people of other faiths should be evicted to free the Iranian merchants from foreign competitors.”<sup>16</sup> The Babis demanded that certain Islamic customs and rules related to the family and everyday life and the status of women should be changed; they wanted simpler religious practices and suggested that prayer meetings, five daily prayers, should be abolished. They also insisted on total elimination of duties and taxes, they wanted men and women to be equal, their property to be common and their shares equal; they also spoke about abolishing hijabs.

The Babi slogans contained certain revolutionary bourgeois-democratic elements; the Babis, however, were doomed to military defeat because of their utopian ideas about social changes and absence of adequate material resources. The above explains why Mirza Taghi Khan, chief minister of Nasser al-Din Shah, asked for permission to execute the Bab. The execution took place on 9 July, 1850; the movement was cruelly suppressed. Tuned to the social-bourgeois changes unfolding in Iran, which brought the country close to one of the turning points in its history, the movement lost the battle: the ripe social and political prerequisites, however, were not enough to stir up an armed struggle of adequate scope and character. “The soul of Iran ... is constantly being torn apart by religious doubts and quest. An Iranian ... is inclined to speculative thinking; nowhere were there as many heresies and religious protests as in Iran.”<sup>17</sup>

## Transformation of Babism—Bahá'u'lláh, A New Religious Leader

The history of the Babi-Baha'i movement can be divided into several periods:

- (a) the life and activity of the Bab, the founder of Babism;
- (b) post-Bab transformation into Baha'ism, a religious teaching of Bahá'u'lláh, a new leader;
- (c) the life and activities of Bahá'u'lláh's descendants;
- (d) the rest of the movement's history up to and including the present time associated with the Universal House of Justice founded in 1963.

For obvious reasons, the period connected with Bahá'u'lláh as a new spiritual leader of the Babi community is the key one.

The Bab and key figures of Babism had been executed; in 1852, a certain Mirza Husayn ali Nuri was detained on suspicion of plotting against Nasser al-Din Shah. Later, as famous Bahá'u'lláh, he added a new and wider scope to Babism.

He spent four months in Siyah-Chal (Black Pit) prison together with other Babis arrested on the same suspicion. Many of them were executed, however Bahá'u'lláh, after being repeatedly interrogated, was set free due to absence of evidence. Under an edict of the shah, he had to leave the country together with his family and a group of followers. Russian Envoy Prince Dolgorukov never let Bahá'u'lláh out of sight; in 1852, he did a lot to help get him out of prison.<sup>18</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh could choose between Russia and Turkey as places of exile. He preferred Baghdad (at that time in the territory of the Ottoman Empire), where he moved with his family in 1853, set up a small Babi community, which he managed himself, and wrote: one of his important theological works *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (from Persian: The Book of Certitude, circa 1863), the book *Hidden Words*, and

<sup>16</sup> I.A. Kryvelev, *Istoria religiy*, Vol. 2, Moscow, 1976, p. 257.

<sup>17</sup> N.A. Kuznetsova, *Iran v pervoy polovine XIX veka*, Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 1983, p. 224 (footnote 60).

<sup>18</sup> For more details, see: I.V. Bazilenko, *Kratkiy ocherk istorii i ideologii bakhaizma (XIX-XX vv.)*, St. Petersburg University Press, St. Petersburg, 1998, available at [<http://www.abc-globe.com/bahaizm.htm>], 2 July, 2008. Appendix I. “Ob uchastii rossiiskogo poslannika kn. D.I. Dolgorukova v sudbe Bakha-Allakha v 1852-1853 gg.”



a mythical treatise called *Haft Vádí* (from Persian: Seven Valleys). The shah of Iran repeatedly demanded that the Babis should be deported from the Ottoman Empire; the Turks responded by moving them to Constantinople. On the eve of the move, Bahá'u'lláh gathered his most loyal followers in a garden of Nejb Pasha (Baha'i sources call it the garden of Ridván), where he stayed for twelve days from 21 April to 2 May, 1863. It was in this garden that Bahá'u'lláh revealed to his followers that he was the messianic figure of He whom God shall make manifest, whose coming had been foretold by the Bab. These events are celebrated annually for twelve days during the Festival of Ridván.

On 26 July, 1868, Sultan Abdülaziz published a firman under which Bahá'u'lláh, his family, and followers were exiled to Akka in Palestine (now Haifa in Israel). At that time, it was nothing more than a huge prison for condemned criminals from all corners of the vast Ottoman Empire. To be sure that the enemy was put safely out of the way, the Iranians dispatched special supervisors to watch the move. In 1872-1873, when in Akka, Bahá'u'lláh wrote his main book called *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), which expounded the laws of worship, societal relations, and administrative organization, or governance, of religion. He continued sending his special letters (tablets) (al lauhul) to rulers, scholars, politicians, and state and public figures on the widest range of questions. In 1877, he moved from Akka to a country house called Mazra'ih; two years later he left it for a sumptuous mansion Bahjí (Delight) with a garden planted for him and called Ridván. He lived there until his last day with his loving family and his followers, who regarded him as god reincarnated. He continued writing; it was in Bahjí that he authored his famous "Epistle to the Son of the Wolf" addressed to Shaykh Muhammad Taqi-i-Najafi in Isfahán, son of powerful cleric Shaykh Muhammad-Báqir, who had sentenced two Babis to death. He tried to convince the "son of the wolf" to recognize his wrongdoing and to beg God's pardon and mercy. This tablet confirmed the main principles of Baha'ism: that all religions "have proceeded from one Source, and are rays of one Light. That they differ one from another is to be attributed to the varying requirements of the ages in which they were promulgated."<sup>19</sup> In May 1892, Bahá'u'lláh caught fever and died at the age of 75. He was buried in the garden of Bahjí, now a sacred place for the Baha'is of the world, the Qibla of Baha'ism. His last tablets contained his *Kitáb-i-'Ahdí, Will and Testament* (later published by A.G. Tumansky in Russian as *Gramota moego Zaveta*); the sealed document was opened by his elder son Abdu'l-Baha (1841-1921), his successor and head of the Bahai community. The process of recognition of Bahá'u'lláh by the Babis was not smooth; it abounded in ups and downs, the details of which are better left aside. The fact remains: Bahá'u'lláh was the only one among the Babis, including the Letters of the Living (*Hurúfu'l-hayy*), i.e. the survivors among the first eighteen followers of the Bab, who reunited the dispirited followers, rekindled their moral and spiritual fervor, raised the general mood to a higher level, indicated new goals, and set the far from simple mechanism of management into motion.

An analysis of his life and activity reveals that it was in Akka that his reformist ideas were fully formed and translated into real deeds. While his *Kitáb-i-Íqán* was a sort of ideological preparation for the later recognition of Bahá'u'lláh by the Babis predicted by the prophet in *Bayan*, the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* speaks with a great degree of certainty of the future spiritual power of Bahá'u'lláh, whom mankind will recognize sooner or later. *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* serves as the source of the social aspects of contemporary Baha'ism. Shoghi Effendi<sup>20</sup> described it as the "Charter of the future world civilization" where the "Author—at once the Judge, the Lawgiver, the Unifier and Redeemer of mankind—announces to the kings of the Earth the promulgation of the 'Most Great Law'."<sup>21</sup> In this book, Bahá'u'lláh laid the foundation for the New World Order as seen by the Baha'is; he coined the term the Universal

<sup>19</sup> "Epistle to the Son of the Wolf by Bahá'u'lláh." (C) 1953 NSA of the USA, available at [[http://bahairesearch.com/russian/Бахаи/Бахаи\\_Авторитетные\\_тексты/Бахаулла/Послание\\_к\\_Сыну\\_Волка.aspx](http://bahairesearch.com/russian/Бахаи/Бахаи_Авторитетные_тексты/Бахаулла/Послание_к_Сыну_Волка.aspx)], 29 October, 2013 (see Para 18).

<sup>20</sup> Shoghi Effendi Rabbani (*Arab.*: شوقي أفندي رباني) (1897-1957), great grandson of Bahá'u'lláh, grandson of his elder son Abdu'l-Baha, appointed Guardian of the Baha'i Faith in his Will and Testament (*Arab.-Persian*: ولي أمر الله), and remained head of the Baha'i community from 1921 until his death in 1957.

<sup>21</sup> *Kitáb-i-Aqdas by Bahá'u'lláh*, Bahá'í World Center, Haifa, 1992, original written in Arabic, available at [<http://bahai-library.com/writings/bahauallah/aqdas/description.html>], 29 October, 2013.

House of Justice (*Arab.*: Bayt-ul-Adl) leaving the question of the level or levels of the system and structure of this body to his descendants, who completed the task.<sup>22</sup> In the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* the author spoke about an important instrument called Hukuk Allah (the right of God) very much needed to maintain the financial wellbeing of the Bahai community and its power in the form of property tax of 19 percent paid by all members of the community. During his lifetime, Bahá'u'lláh controlled all finances; after his death this function was transferred to Abdu'l-Baha. In his Will and Testament he wrote that Hukuk should be concentrated in the hands of the Guardian of the Baha'i faith, that is, Shoghi Effendi. Today, in the absence of the Guardian, the money is concentrated in the UHJ to be used for the needs of the Baha'i organization and for charity.

This means that at the critical moment Bahá'u'lláh created new tactics and a strategy of behavior well adjusted to the new conditions. Later, he spoke from a new position on social-political, religious, dogmatic, moral, and ethical subjects. After revising the teaching of the Bab, Bahá'u'lláh enriched it with new elements (pacifism, religious tolerance, and cosmopolitanism). The antinomy of the situation created by the emergence of the Baha'i faith is rooted in its foundation, i.e., the ideological principles of Babism, which widened the gap between them both and Islam. In 1925, Baha'ism officially and completely detached itself from Islam to become a new teaching in its own right.<sup>23</sup>

## The Ideological Descendants of Bahá'u'lláh

The ideas of Baha'ism, which reached Western Europe and North America early in the 20th century, perfectly fitted the ideology of the financial and economic interests of the West. Western globalists on the lookout for an "accession code" to the social, cultural, and mental fields of the Islamic East have tried, and found wanting, all the available routes, keywords, and symbols only to discover that no matter how hard they tried they could not arrive at a genuinely global ideology. They deliberately left out the specifics of the cultural development and history of the Eastern civilizations out of the picture. From the very beginning, the Muslim world remained practically out of reach of post-modernist Western religious and cultural consciousness: the doctrinaire specifics of Islam make it resistant to secularization. The ideologists and theoreticians of globalism refused to be defeated: from the very beginning, "theologization" presupposed "an identity of their own interests and the moral and ethical rules of the universum," while "the slogan *Novus ordo Seclorum*, which appears on the reverse of the Great Seal of the United States, that is, the New Order of the Ages, is no longer a mythical task, but a political reality."<sup>24</sup>

Arnold J. Toynbee, in turn, said more or less the same: "This concentric attack of the modern West upon the Islamic world has inaugurated the present encounter between the two civilizations... It is also distinctive in being an incident in an attempt by Western man to 'Westernize' the world."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* by Bahá'u'lláh, footnote 42.

<sup>23</sup> In 1927, Baha'ism gained official recognition as an independent religious community "thanks to the fact that in 1925 the Muslim Court of Appeals in Beba (Egypt) declared that the Baha'is were not Muslims" (I.V. Bazilenko, *Kratkiy ocherk istorii i ideologii bakhaizma* [XIX-XX vv.]). Baha'ism, which from the very beginning was antagonistic toward Shi'a Islam, always stirred up opposition from the Arab-Muslim world (see: . محسن عبد الحميد. حقيقة البابية و البهائية. بغداد. 1977. ص 312). Today, anti-Bahai Internet resources condemn the Baha'i ideology as being close to the document known as "The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion," considered genuine by many of the Arab and Muslim governments and political leaders (see: . بروتوكولات حكماء صهيون تقضح الماسونية البهائية. available at [http://www.anti-bahai.com/site/modules.php?name=News&new\_topic=28], 30 October, 2013). René Guénon, in turn, wrote: "It should be further noted that, according to the fabrications of the Protocols themselves, the organization responsible for inventing and spreading modern ideas in order to achieve world domination is perfectly aware of the falsity of these ideas" (R. Guénon, "Review of the Italian Publication of 'The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion,'" in: R. Guénon, *Theosophy: History of a Pseudo-Religion*, Sophia Perennis, 2004, p. 314).

<sup>24</sup> G.P. Khorina, "Globalizm kak ideologia," *Globalizatsia i gumanitarnoe znanie*, No. 1, 2005, p. 71.

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.alislam.org/egazette/articles/Islam-the-West-and-the-Future-200911.pdf]. A chapter of a book by Arnold J. Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial*, published by Oxford University Press, 1948.



When seeking a definition of Baha'ism, be it from academic or other positions, we should bear in mind the political, financial, and economic realities in which it emerged: "The teaching of Bahá'u'lláh appeared and acquired organizational forms in the latter half of the 19th century when the course of history was pushing the East into the economic and technological progress of the West, which, in its turn, was looking to the East for spiritual and organizational forms adequate to its, often pretty vague, requirements."<sup>26</sup> Baha'ism as a phenomenon owes its appearance to economic and ideological factors closely connected with its roots in Shi'a Islam, a teaching permeated with the spirit of defiance. The Qajars, who tried to modernize the mechanism of power and bring technological novelties into the country, were not very popular with their subjects. Baha'ism can be described as a response of the Iranian Muslim clerics to the bourgeois changes inside the country and the inflow of foreign capital. The Bab, in turn, pointed out, according to *Bayan*, that he and his followers regarded national trade as one of the important goals. Bahá'u'lláh went even further: he modernized the ideas of his predecessor to adjust them to the new historical context; in fact, he acted from the position of comprador bourgeoisie. Analyzed in its historical context, Baha'ism looks absolutely adequate to the principles and rules of the Eastern comprador bourgeoisie closely connected with the political and economic interests of the West. This fact, accepted by all students of Baha'ism, throws the etymology of its basic ideological principles into bolder relief. The universal nature of the teaching of Bahá'u'lláh offered an absolutely new religious-ethical and social-economic approach to the way financial ambitions could be realized. Psychologically, cosmopolitanism destroyed the obstacles that separated the Western and Eastern types of thinking to facilitate the process of Western financial infiltration.

The ideological pillars of Baha'ism were logically developed later, in the early 20th century, by Abdu'l-Baha,<sup>27</sup> who travelled in Western Europe and North America to make his cherished dream, a Universal Baha'i Community, a reality. In 1894-1901, the first pilgrims started flocking to Haifa.<sup>28</sup> Abdu'l-Baha, destined to develop Baha'ism, the teaching of his father, in the Christian West had no choice but to "fit Baha'ism into a cosmopolitan shell of the values common to all people."<sup>29</sup> In 1911, he set out on the road; during the next twenty-four months he visited the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Switzerland, and Austria-Hungary, where he delivered lectures about Baha'ism and met members of all sorts of social organizations and structures.<sup>30</sup> In 1911-1913, newspapers heralded the appearance in Europe and America of a "great fighter for the dawn of a new age of peace," "Teacher," "Apostle," and "Messenger of Peace."<sup>31</sup> These trips were summarized in tablets addressed to the Baha'is of America, Canada, and Greenland under the common title of *Tablets of the Divine Plan* (1916-1917), in which he imposed on them the "supreme mission" of spreading Baha'ism at home and even among the Eskimos. It was much later, in 1937, that his grandson, Shoghi Effendi, began to realize these plans in earnest.

Educated in Oxford, Shoghi Effendi translated many of the holy Baha'i texts into English. Determined to implement all the plans of his ancestors, he authored a multitude of tablets in which he explained to the world the meaning and purpose of the system as a model and basis of the New World Order. His letter of 28 November, 1931 addressed to the Baha'is of the West is entitled "The Goal of a New World Order."<sup>32</sup> In February 1934, he explained in detail the goals and structure of the Administrative System of Baha'i and stressed the theocratic nature of its governance.<sup>33</sup> On 4 November,

<sup>26</sup> For more details, see: I.V. Bazilenko, *Kratkiy ocherk istorii i ideologii bakhaisma (XIX-XX vv.)*.

<sup>27</sup> Abdu'l-Baha—عبد البهاء (from *Arab.*: "Servant of Baha") born 'Abbás Effendi (1841-1921), son of Bahá'u'lláh and his ideological successor who did a lot to promote the teaching in the West.

<sup>28</sup> See: *Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion*, Compiled by E.G. Browne, Cambridge, 1918, p. 258.

<sup>29</sup> For more details, see: I.V. Bazilenko, *Kratkiy ocherk istorii i ideologii bakhaisma (XIX-XX vv.)*.

<sup>30</sup> See: A. Baha, *Mysl mira (Rechi i nastavlenia Abdul Bakha o novoy kulture mira)*, Transl. from the German, Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 1992, p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> See: *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> See: Shoghi Effendi, "The Goal of a New World Order," available at [[http://bahai-library.com/pdf/t/troxel\\_world\\_order.pdf](http://bahai-library.com/pdf/t/troxel_world_order.pdf)].

<sup>33</sup> See: *Ibidem*.

1957, his widescale activity and determination to promote the ideas of Baha'ism were suddenly cut short. According to official information, he caught Hong Kong flu in London and died intestate of a heart attack at 60.

In 1963, the newly established Universal House of Justice opened a new page in the history of Baha'ism. As a supreme structure, it issues laws (to complete what was done by Bahá'u'lláh) to keep in step with the times.<sup>34</sup> This important mechanism of self-regulation supplies Baha'ism with the very much needed freedom of maneuver in all historical and geographic conditions. On the other hand, however, it deprives Baha'ism of its specifics and has made it more formalized. Since Shoghi Effendi's time, the structure of the presumed New World Order has somewhat changed; today it is seen as a result of the concerted efforts of all governments to integrate with the universal Baha'i community.

## The Phenomenological Aspects of Baha'ism

Any attentive reader of the written heritage of Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l-Baha, and Shoghi Effendi and, especially, of the writings of the UHJ will not miss the fact that Baha'ism not only offers mankind its own picture of the future world, but fills it with well-substantiated political content. These texts brim with terms far removed from religion and sacral matters and, instead, concentrate on problems that bring to mind sociopolitical teachings.

Non-interference in politics and pacifism as two linchpins of the doctrine stem from what Bahá'u'lláh said in *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* about obedience to the government of the country of residence. Contrary to common sense, yet in tune with the teaching of their religion, his followers say that in case of war,<sup>35</sup> they will have to go to the front, but they will never fight. The question is: Does the state or religion (represented by its founding father) doom their loyal subjects/loyal followers to certain death? Correct from a humanistic position, this is a rhetorical question.

This brings to mind the more or less recent political scandal in the U.K. "Iraq weapons expert Dr David Kelly was found dead shortly after being exposed as the source of a BBC claim that Tony Blair's Government had 'sexed up' the case for war in Iraq." He was described as a "recent convert to the Baha'i faith which expressly forbids suicide,"<sup>36</sup> it was said elsewhere that "this was undoubtedly the greatest crisis of his (Tony Blair's.—*L.M.*) premiership to date."<sup>37</sup> This tragedy brings to light the internal contradiction in Baha'ism created by the ban on political involvement. Dr Kelly, a convinced Baha'i, could not remain outside politics, which cost him his life.

Baha'ism as we know it today is pursuing the strategic task of setting up a federatively arranged world. We hail its reluctance to use force to realize its principles and impose its ideas (something of which totalitarian systems are guilty), but we cannot exclude the possibility that under different social conditions its humanitarian principles will be pushed aside by considerations of self-preservation. This was amply confirmed by Paul Tillich, a recognized authority in the philosophy of religion. He used the term "quasi-religion" to describe all ideological phenomena or even "humanitarian quasi-religions" to point to certain phenomenological specifics. "Religions of the Spirit, in the encounter with centralized and legally organized religions, are as fragile as the liberal-humanist quasi-religions; and there is a deep interrelation, in many cases interdependence, between the two... The real danger is not that they are overwhelmed by other less fragile forms of religion or quasi-religion, but that in defending themselves they are led to violate their very nature and shape themselves into the image of

<sup>34</sup> See: Shoghi Effendi, op. cit.

<sup>35</sup> It should be said here that for many decades Azerbaijan has remained in a state of war with its neighbor that occupied part of its territory. It takes no wisdom to guess how the local Baha'is would have behaved in case of general mobilization.

<sup>36</sup> [[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/politics/3076869.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/3076869.stm)].

<sup>37</sup> [<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-488667/Why-I-know-weapons-expert-Dr-David-Kelly-murdered-MP-spent-year-investigating-death.html>].

those who attack them. In such a critical moment we are living today ... a self-defying radicalization would take place and the loss of that very liberal humanism which is to be defended would be almost unavoidable.”<sup>38</sup>

It is no wonder that some academics who have recently moved away from Baha’ism point to much stronger “literalism, patriarchy, theocracy, and censorship,” which they describe as “radical reorientation ... which resonates with the positions of ‘fundamentalist’ movements elsewhere.”<sup>39</sup> In the last four decades of the 20th century, Baha’ism in the United States, for example, and in Haifa “shows a trend in the community toward a strong reaction against the marginalization of religion, selectivity about the tradition and about modernity, moral dualism, absolutism and inerrancy, millennialism, an elect membership, sharp boundaries, authoritarian organization, and strict behavioral requirements. It also demonstrates that Baha’i fundamentalists see the civil state and academic scholarship on religion as their negative counterparts.”<sup>40</sup>

Agafangel Krymsky, in turn, quite rightly noted that “Baha’ism interprets the teaching about social equality of all people not in the republican or liberal meaning. They say, on the contrary, that a single flock should have one shepherd while political freedom is undesirable from the point of view of higher human interests.”<sup>41</sup> In an effort to remain neutral, Baha’ism cannot move to active opposition to murders and violence; its followers are unable to respond on their own to any outstanding social or political event before being instructed by the UHJ. This cannot but discredit, depreciate, narrow down, and devalue the universalism of the Baha’i faith, which is deplorable. Universalism is impossible without the community’s involvement in the world historical process, wars, violence, and expansion being part of the process. So far, the Baha’is are limited in their response by commands from above.

Paul Tillich, in turn, pointed to the same thing: “But in such extremes something becomes manifest that, in a moderate way, characterizes all ideologically conscious movements and social groups. It is the consecration of communal self-affirmation, whether this consecration happens in religious or secular symbols.” This “quasi-religious element” can inspire any ideology and, at the same time, “radicalize” it. “The same dialectics is true of Socialism. In it, the expectation of a ‘new state of things’ is the driving religious element whether expressed in the Christian symbols of the end of history or in secular-utopian symbols like ‘classless society’ as the aim of history.” Paul Tillich further specified: “In secular quasi-religions the ultimate concern is directed towards objects like nation, science, a particular form or stage of society, or a highest ideal of humanity, which are then considered divine.”

In her review of Juan Cole’s<sup>42</sup> work quoted above, Barbara Metcalf has written about the utopian nature of the tasks and goals formulated by the leaders of Baha’ism. Juan Cole has made an important contribution to the analysis of the genesis of the Baha’i faith in the 19th century in the Middle East: “To explore an interpretation of movements like the Baha’i as utopian, rather than reactionary and antimodern, is in itself an important contribution of this study.”<sup>43</sup> This is another eloquent comment about what is going on in Baha’ism today.

<sup>38</sup> *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* by Paul Tillich, Chapter 1, “A View of the Present Situation: Religions, Quasi-Religions and Their Encounters,” available at [<http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=1557&C=1389>].

<sup>39</sup> B.D. Metcalf, “Review on Research Work by Juan R.I. Cole, *Modernity and Millennium: The Genesis of the Bahá’i Faith in the Nineteenth-Century Middle East*,” Columbia University Press, New York, 1997, *Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 30, Issue 3, 2000, pp. 567-568.

<sup>40</sup> [<http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jrcole/bahai/2002/fundbhfn.htm>].

<sup>41</sup> A.E. Krymsky, *Istoria musulmanstva (Ocherki religioznoy zhizni)*, Part 3, *Babism i Bahaitstvo*, Krestny kalendar print shop, Moscow, 1912, p. 18.

<sup>42</sup> John “Juan” Ricardo I. Cole, American scholar and historian of contemporary Middle East and South Asia, professor at the University of Michigan. Converted to Baha’ism early in his academic career, he devoted some of his academic writings to the history of that tradition. In 1996, he officially resigned from the religion and wrote several critical articles about Baha’ism.

<sup>43</sup> B.D. Metcalf, op. cit.

So far this trend can and should be described as “possible” for the simple reason that it has not yet shown us its revolutionary-radical form in motion, similar to what happened to socialism in the course of its transformation into communism. It should be said that Baha’ism transformed the militant trends typical of Babism into their opposites.

The experience of Baha’ism, as a touchstone of the sociocultural trends of “globalism” (a product of the neo-liberal West), could have been interesting in the context of the relations between the Western and Eastern types of social-religious mentality. So far, we can observe only one version of the intercivilizational dialog, which plays a very distinctive role in shaping the worldview of the Modern Time and the prospects for its development.

It seems that Baha’ism is, in fact, a failed attempt by the West to “Westernize” Oriental ideas in the hope of coming back to the East using its “Islamic origin” as a password. Islam and Baha’ism have been mutually incompatible from the very beginning; therefore, their final divorce could not be avoided. “Having extracted national ideas from ancient sources and having borrowed foreign ideas freely and widely, the Bab grafted ecstatic Indian concepts, mystic tenderness of Christianity and theories or hypotheses of modern Europe on Iranian Islam.”<sup>44</sup> The question is: Did Islam need this? When talking about the “failed relationships” between Baha’ism and Islam, we should bear in mind that the latter is a self-sufficient and genuinely universal religion. This explains why it could not accept the “alien structure” of the Baha’i philosophy and faith. Islam rejected its eclectic nature and syncretism rather than its other features. The Baha’is are never embarrassed by the conceptually different or even contradictory foundations of the religions they tried to bring together in their own teaching. Buddhism, for example, has no single god, Hinduism is a pantheist religion, while Christianity, Islam, and Judaism are monotheist. The result is easily predictable and inevitable: an eclectic combination of incompatible elements. Bahaiism strives to be a religion for all that is impossible; it strives to replace all religions. This explains the ease with which it builds up its own doctrine and finds its way in all holy texts and pronouncements of the founders of all sorts of religions and faiths. This syncretism looks artificial: “Baha’is will quickly draw upon the scriptures of any religion of their sacred nine to defend the teachings of Baha’u’llah and ’Abdu’l-Baha. In this they have a distinct advantage because not a few of them are well informed concerning the scriptures of the religions of the world, particularly the Old and New Testaments and the Koran. Thus, it is possible for a well trained Baha’i cultist literally to run the gamut of the theological quotations in an eclectic mosaic design to establish his basic thesis, i.e., that all men are part of a great brotherhood revealed in this new era by the manifestation of Baha’u’llah.”<sup>45</sup> Only the Baha’is are in absolute agreement when it comes to a definition of Baha’ism as a religious movement; the academic community remains divided over it. It was believed for a long time that, having emerged as a reformist teaching in Islam, Baha’ism, which promoted a revision of Islam, helped it to survive and function in social contexts very different from the Arab world. In many respects, it anticipated modernization and reformation in Islam.<sup>46</sup> Baha’ism was described as a refined and modernized Islam.<sup>47</sup> Bernard Lewis, a prominent Anglo-American Orientalist, has written that though Islam “reacted with something of the hostility” to “post-Islamic faiths” “a similar situation, as it turned out, was much less dangerous from their point of view.”<sup>48</sup> For some time, Baha’ism was described in academic writings as an Islamic sect, this definition being very much alive today. Heydar Jemal, founder and chairman of the Islamic Committee of Russia, sees “the only difference between it and Aum Shinrikyo in the fact that the Baha’is spoke about matters that have become U.N. platitudes and which sounded strange in the 19th century

<sup>44</sup> V. Berard, *Persia i persidskava smuta*, St. Petersburg, 1912, p. 274 (V. Bérard, *Révolutions de la Perse*, Paris, 1910).

<sup>45</sup> W. Martin, “The Kingdom of the Cults,” available at [<http://www.full-proof.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/Martin-Walter-Kingdom-of-the-Cults.pdf>].

<sup>46</sup> See: L.S. Vasiliev, *Istoria religiy Vostoka*, Vysshaya shkola, Moscow, 1983, pp. 164-165.

<sup>47</sup> See: S.A. Tokarev, *Religii v istorii narodov mira*, Izdatelstvo politicheskoy literatury, Moscow, 1976, pp. 532-533.

<sup>48</sup> B. Lewis, *Islam and the West*, Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 176.

in Iran.<sup>49</sup> This itself sounds strange: in 1925, Islam officially registered its complete detachment from Baha'ism; coming from an Islamic public figure this sounds even stranger.

Many of the critics of Baha'ism refused to count it as a religion because social and political aspects in it prevailed over religious aspects proper. These people argued: "The God of Baha'u'llah does not warm the heart; it is primarily a doctrine and an ideology that can hardly penetrate deep into human souls and awaken in them repentance and the hope for forgiveness through confession. The cosmopolitan ideas of the founding fathers of Baha'ism can hardly dampen the thirst for spiritual quest: they are much better suited to serve the interests of political and economic circles of all sorts."<sup>50</sup> "We must build up our Baha'i system and leave the faulty systems of the world to go their way. We cannot change them through becoming involved in them; on the contrary, they will destroy us."<sup>51</sup> "The Baha'i conception of social life is essentially based on the subordination of the individual will to that of society. It neither suppresses the individual nor does it exalt him to the point of making him an anti-social creature, a menace to society... The only way that society can function is for the minority to follow the will of the majority."<sup>52</sup> This stirs up painful recollections of life under "communism": in some places, the Baha'i leaders sound very much like the Bolsheviks. There is nothing new in this: "Atheistic communism, which took shape in Europe, and religious Baha'ism born at the same time in Asia have much in common: both borrowed heavily from traditional religions."<sup>53</sup> Baha'ism rejects these parallels, however the phenomenological parallels are too many to be ignored: "The followers of Baha'ism ... believe that their teaching not only meets the needs of the descendants of the cultures of the West, but also of other peoples who have found their place in the community of nations. The same fully applies to the communist (socialist) teaching. Communist philosophy has synthesized everything that predated it at the global scale. Communism is a global teaching ... and we should treat it not only as a revolutionary theory, but also as a 'non-religious religion,' a moral-ethical teaching worthy of respect to the same extent as religions."<sup>54</sup> This confirms that the Baha'i doctrine is not free from ideological underpinnings.

## Relations with the Historical Homeland

We should always bear in mind that, from the very beginning, Baha'ism attracted great powers which discerned its huge political potential. Igor Bazilenko, for example, writes of it as a "cosmopolitan structure of the Masonic type,"<sup>55</sup> and further: "The attitude of the Russian and British repre-

---

<sup>49</sup> Z. Ostrovskaia, "Orientatsiia—Islam, ili Nazad v budushchee (Interview s Heydarom Jemalem)," *Chelovek*, No. 3, 1999, available at [<http://www.molites.narod.ru/kausar/orentasiya.htm>], 30 October, 2013.

<sup>50</sup> I.V. Bazilenko, *Kratkiy ocherk istorii i ideologii bahaizma (XIX-XX vv.)*.

<sup>51</sup> *Wellspring of Guidance: Messages of the Universal House of Justice 1963-68 by Universal House of Justice*, Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1969, p. 135 (quoted from: *Bahá'í News*, No. 215, January 1949, p. 1), available at [[http://bahai-library.com/uhj\\_wellspring\\_guidance#n10](http://bahai-library.com/uhj_wellspring_guidance#n10)].

<sup>52</sup> Letter by the Guardian's secretary on his (Shoghi Effendi.—L.M.) behalf, dated 21 November, 1935, and quoted in Universal House of Justice letter of 9 February, 1967, available at [[http://bahai-library.com/nsa\\_war\\_governance\\_conscience#s11](http://bahai-library.com/nsa_war_governance_conscience#s11)].

<sup>53</sup> V.K. Mamutov, "Kommunisticheskaia vera v torzhestvo sotsialnoy spravedlivosti (essay)," *Alternativy*, No. 3, 2000, p. 164, available at [[http://libelli.ru/magazine/hm/00\\_3/esse.htm](http://libelli.ru/magazine/hm/00_3/esse.htm)], 30 October, 2013.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>55</sup> The Spiritual Assembly (*Arab.*: المحفل الروحاني) is a multilayer elected structure of nine members with UNJ as its center in Haifa (Israel). Bazilenko has rightly written that "translated from the Arabic, mehfil means, first, 'place of a meeting,' second, 'a (Masonic) lodge,' and third, 'a meeting.' In the context of activities and structure of the Baha'i community, the second version looks much more adequate and, therefore, preferable" (I.V. Bazilenko, "Bakhaizm v sovremennoy Rossii," *Khristianskoe chenie*, No. 23, 2004, pp. 127-182).



sentatives in Iran to the attempts to capitalize on the political potential of neo-Babism-Baha'ism wrongly seen as an intermediate stage on the road from Islam to Christianity illustrates the evolution of the assessments of the ideology and organizational structure of the Iranian heretics among the Russians and the British. The latter were faster on the uptake: they fully appreciated the potentials of this movement as an instrument of political games in the Middle East and Russia."<sup>56</sup>

In 2011, Iranian Ambassador to Russia Reza Sajjadi explained why Baha'ism was banned in his country: "It is banned because it is not a religion but a colonial political party set up by Great Britain. In an effort to dominate in the Middle East, the strategic importance of which cannot be overestimated, the West sows discord among its peoples, new religions of all sorts being one of the weapons. During the Pahlavi times, the Baha'is were, and still remain, an instrument of the U.K. This is why Iran refuses to recognize Baha'ism and keeps it away from its territory."<sup>57</sup>

Under the Pahlavi shahs (1925-1979), Baha'is were widely represented among the top bureaucrats and intellectuals. "The financial might of the Iranian Baha'is forced the government in 1972 to introduce a special property tax for them," which indirectly made the Baha'i community an official structure. "Baha'is belonged to the closest circle of Shah Muhammad Reza (1941-1979), the last Iranian monarch, as his bodyguards and drivers."<sup>58</sup>

On many occasions, the Iranians violently responded to appointments of Baha'is to top government posts. This happened, for example, in 1948, when Prime Minister Ebrahim Hakimi was replaced with Abdolhossein Hajir, pro-American finance minister in the Cabinet of Qavām os-Saltaneh. Two months earlier, Ayatollah Kashani warned about the planned shift and issued a leaflet in which the future prime minister was described as an Anglophile and Baha'i; he called on the people to close their shops and protest against the appointment. This proved enough to raise a wave of protests against the Baha'is in Shiraz, Mahabad, Shahrood, Rezaya, and other cities. The government had to use force to stop the riots. On 17 May, 1955, Minister of the Interior informed the Majilis that Baha'ism would be banned, prayer houses closed, etc. The Shi'a clergy went even further: they dismissed Baha'is from all official posts. On 23 May, 1955, the last day of the month of Ramadan, fanatics led by Mullah Taqi Falsafi destroyed the Baha'i prayer house in Tehran, which had been standing at this site for a quarter of a century. In Shiraz, the bloody clashes between the Shi'a, who wanted to destroy the Baha'i prayer house, and the Baha'is, who defended it, ended in the state of martial law.<sup>59</sup> Ayatollah Boroujerdi, one of the Shah's favorites, issued thinly concealed calls to confiscate the money of the Baha'is to restore mosques and madrasahs but specifically warned against violence and bloodshed.<sup>60</sup> In his letter of 9 May, 1955, he complained: "The Bahā'īs ... had developed good organization and expended vast amounts of money which unknown sources had contributed to them. For the hundred years of their existence, he lamented, the Bahā'īs had tirelessly propagandized against Islam, 'which, of course, is a cause of the unity of [our] nationalism.' And now, he charged, they were 'secretly working against the monarchy and the state'."<sup>61</sup> Iranian Baha'is complained to the U.N.; the International Baha'i Community asked the U.N. to interfere and protect the Iranian Baha'is (information can be found in Baha'i sources). This was when Baha'is transferred their money (\$1.5 billion in all) from the National Bank to other banks, etc. Aware of a mounting international scandal, the Iranian government promptly revised its treatment of the Baha'is and adepts of other religions.<sup>62</sup> In 1978-1979, "after the Islamic revolution,

<sup>56</sup> I.V. Bazilenko, "Pravoslavnaia Rossia i shiitsky Iran: po stranitsam istorii otnocheniy (XVI-nach. XX vv.)," *Khristianskoe chtenie*, No. 2 (37), 2011, p. 172.

<sup>57</sup> "Religia i religioznye menshinstva v Irane," available at [<http://www.portalostranah.ru/view.php?id=226&page=2>], 30 October, 2013.

<sup>58</sup> I.V. Bazilenko, *Kratkiy ocherk istorii i ideologii bahaisma (XIX-XX vv.)*.

<sup>59</sup> See: E.A. Doroshenko, *Shiitskoe dukhovenstvo v sovremennom Irane*, Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 1985, p. 99.

<sup>60</sup> See: *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>61</sup> Sh. Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran: Clergy-State Relations in the Pehlevi Period*, New York, 1980, pp. 77-78.

<sup>62</sup> See: E.A. Doroshenko, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

the Baha'is lost at least some of their positions; the poorest of them were badly hit. Well-to-do followers of the Baha'i faith emigrated and transferred their money to foreign banks."<sup>63</sup>

The Islamic revolution of 1979, which brought together the government and Islam, marginalized Baha'is in Iran not only because they did not belong to Ahl az-Zimma<sup>64</sup> and remained ideological antagonists of Islam. This explanation is too primitive to be accepted at face value. The Baha'i faith was defeated in its historical homeland because of its phenomenological specifics at the level of self-identity. Alexandra Leavy, an American student of Baha'ism, has found the statement "that the Baha'is did not hold an unshakable attachment to their homeland" very convincing and that "the Baha'is prioritized the preservation of a strong religious community over nationalist commitments to their homeland. This speaks to the way in which the Baha'is conceive of their own identity—Baha'is first, Iranians second ... throughout the twentieth century, Muslim Iranians defined themselves first as being a part of a religious community. They did recognize the unique Persian heritage of the Iranian nation-state, but they always placed Islamic values before nationalist ones and often viewed them as one and the same. It was impossible, then, for Baha'is to adopt a complete Iranian identity because there was—and remains—a contradiction inherent in the concept of a distinctly national Iranian heritage."<sup>65</sup>

## Conclusion

Today, consolidation of people according to the Baha'i principles may become or, rather, has become a fairly successful enterprise in many countries and regions, Azerbaijan being no exception.<sup>66</sup> These results of the Baha'i social practice make it hard to imagine what aims and tasks those members of society who remained loyal to Baha'ism can be used for or serve.

As a rule, religious traditions, even those that claimed universality, developed in cultural isolation, Baha'ism being no exception. Despite its efforts to consolidate mankind under the banner of cosmopolitanism, this faith could not satisfy, to an equal extent, the spiritual needs of its followers from different confessional environments: it was too eclectic to synthesize the elements of alien religious traditions.

An attentive student of Baha'ism can follow the process of adjustment and readjustment of its doctrine by its adepts who outwardly managed to remain loyal to the spirit and letter of the laws of Baha'u'llah, the founding father. I have in mind the tool that allowed Baha'u'llah to widely use allegories both in life and in building the edifice of his religion. The Bab's allegories and esoteric quest helped Baha'u'llah substantiate and develop his teaching based on texts brimming with Sufi esoteric symbols, the meaning of which remains beyond the comprehension of even the most knowledgeable readers. Anyone seeking a generalized definition of the doctrinal foundation of Baha'ism might come

<sup>63</sup> I.V. Bazilenko, *Kratkiy ocherk istorii i ideologii bahaizma (XIX-XX vv.)*.

<sup>64</sup> Ahl az-Zimma (*Arab.*: أهل الذمة ["People of the Pact"])—non-Muslim population of Muslim countries who accepted Muslim power and paid jizya (*Arab.*: جزية ["per capita tax"]) in exchange for protection against external enemies, personal safety, and safety of property on a par with the Muslims; Ahl al-Kitab (*Arab.*: أهل الكتاب ["People of the Book or People of Scripture"]) belonged to the same category. The IRI recognized three religions (Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Judaism) besides Islam.

<sup>65</sup> A. Leavy, "Searching for Baha'i Identity (Baha'i Identity in Islamic Iran)," *Journal of Cultural Studies of the Middle East and North Africa (JCSMENA)*, 22 August, 2009, available at [<http://journal.jcsmena.org/2009/08/22/searching-for-bahai-identity/>], 30 October, 2013.

<sup>66</sup> In Azerbaijan, the Baha'i community first appeared in the 1860s; however, the echo of the stormy events associated with the emergence of Babism reached Azerbaijan much earlier, in 1844. In 1863, there were Baha'i communities in Baku, Ganja, Barda, Salyan, and Geokchai. Until the 1930s, they flourished in the relatively favorable conditions. Today, after a long and involuntary interval, Baha'ism is regaining its position in Azerbaijan (for more details, see: L. Melikova, "Bahaism in Azerbaijan," *The Caucasus & Globalization*, Vol. 1 (5), 2007, pp. 93-100, available at [[http://www.ca-c.org/c-g/2007/journal\\_eng/c-g-4/09.shtml](http://www.ca-c.org/c-g/2007/journal_eng/c-g-4/09.shtml)]).

face to face with ethical problems. We have to admit that the Baha'i Sacred Texts have been commented on by Shoghi Effendi and the UHJ and that any further attempts are nothing but optional interpretations of the teaching. This does not prevent fairly unexpected or even paradoxical definitions of Baha'ism coming from its opponents. Several years ago, a Muslim theologian, speaking on one of the Turkish TV channels, described Baha'ism as one of the "enneagram"<sup>67</sup> theosophical trends, a definition adding mystical depth and meaning to Baha'ism. The roots of this and similar treatment of Baha'ism, mainly by Muslims, are found, strange as it may seem, in the paradoxical processes going on in Baha'ism. After the death of Baha'u'llah, his teaching followed roads different from the expected: to survive amid the threats created by the changing environment and emerging inside it, Baha'ism had to radically shift the accents. It moved away from the flowery and enigmatic style of the earlier period to absolutely clear and precise definitions or even catchwords; from Baha'u'llah's vague exaltation to clear statements of Abdu'l-Baha addressed to all mankind. As could be expected, the conceptual elements of Baha'ism—religious and sacred found to different degrees in the works of the Bab and Baha'u'llah—were discarded by their descendants as ill-adjusted to the cause of flourishing. This is the main paradox: having deliberately rejected the trend that, if developed, would have become the teaching's main advantage, the Baha'i leaders chose a much easier road. This deprived Baha'ism of its attraction, indispensable to any true religion, and made it one of the numerous religious movements with a hardly distinguishable set of program statements. Unwilling, or afraid, to look for the secret meanings that Baha'ism probably contained, its leaders took it to the other extreme: banalities so loved by the masses that made Baha'ism an instrument of spiritual-religious globalization for translating the aims and tasks of Western globalism into the terms of mass religious consciousness.

---

<sup>67</sup> Enneagram (from Greek: *ennea*—nine), a symbol in the form of a nine-pointed figure usually inscribed within a circle. This nine-pointed star was borrowed by many theosophical schools and teachings as an emblem. In Baha'ism, it serves as the main symbol of its teaching. In Europe and in the West, it is widely known in "narrow circles" thanks to George Gurdjieff, founder of his own esoteric school, in which he revealed "fragments of an unknown teaching" (the title of the book by P.D. Ouspensky, his friend and comrade-in-arms). The origins of the enneagram, one of the oldest Oriental symbols, are very interesting. Vladimir Eremeev, prominent Orientalist and Sinologist, wrote: "The enneagram in its initial form appeared in ancient China in the Western Zhou period (1122-771 B.C.). By the end of the epoch, the enneagram had been known to Iranian priests and led to the emergence of Zoroastrianism and Zurvanism. In the West, the enneagram borrowed from the Iranians was secretly spread far and wide as part of the Cabala, alchemy, and related teachings. Finally, it became part of the source familiar to Gurdjieff" (V.E. Eremeev, "Ideynye istoki uchenia G.I. Gurdjieva," in: *Sakralnoe, irratsionalnoe i mifologicheskoe. Sbornik materialov konferentsii*, Moscow, 2005, p. 62). The humanities regard Gurdjieff as a vehicle of the traditions of the Sufi Naqshbandi order (see: *Novaia filofsfskaia entsiklopedia*, in four volumes, Vol. 4, Moscow, 2001, p. 149). It is interesting to note in the context of the universal nature of the Baha'i doctrines that, within the Gurdjieff teaching, the enneagram was "a universal symbol" and a "fundamental hieroglyph of a universal language." From time immemorial, it has been used by the "initiated" to register sacral knowledge. In principle, "the enneagram can contain all knowledge and can be used to interpret it" (V.E. Eremeev, op. cit., pp. 61-62). Baha'ism treats the symbol in a superficial manner. For Baha'ism "number nine is very mysterious, and more than any other number, full of special qualities and potencies"; it is a "special number which is the numerical manifestation of the Greatest Name: Bahá" (A.-Q. Faizi, "Explanation of the Symbol of the Greatest Name," available at [[http://bahai-library.com/faizi\\_symbol\\_greatest\\_name](http://bahai-library.com/faizi_symbol_greatest_name)]). The presence of this symbol in Baha'ism is not fortuitous; it shows that, at the earlier stages of its development, Baha'ism contained certain esoteric trends, which points to its proximity to the ancient secret traditions and teachings related, at one and the same time, to the system of traditional ancient Iranian ideas and cults. In the Gurdjieff teaching, only the enneagram relates it to the old secret Sufi traditions; in all other respects, his teaching is, likewise, syncretic, albeit in its own way.

---