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FUNDAMENTALISM IN THE CONTEMPORARY U.S. BAHA'I COMMUNITY*

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This article considers the ways in which the Baha'i faith in the United States has become more fundamentalist in the past four decades. It looks at trends toward an increasing emphasis on doctrinal and behavioral conformity, resulting in greater exclusivism and sectarianism in what on the surface appears to be a liberal and universalistic tradition. Building on the Marty and Appleby Fundamentalism Project, it 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." It considers the impact on the community of the big wave of conversions of the 1970s and the influx of immigrant Iranian Baha'is fleeing the Khomeinist regime. It further notes that fundamentalist Baha'is have became in some key sectors of the Baha'i administration and employ their authority to exclude Baha'i liberals. In some recent instances, Baha'i liberals have simply been dropped from the membership rolls with no formal procedure.

Most researchers involved in the Fundamentalism Project concluded that fundamentalist movements as they defined them can be found in each of the contemporary Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Marty and Appleby 1991-1995). A fourth, small, Abrahamic tradition that the project did not treat is the Baha'i faith. Originating in Iran and claiming to fulfill apocalyptic expectations in Islam, the Baha'i faith has some ritual and doctrinal similarities to Islam. Its central tenets, however, are generally quite liberal. Baha'is believe that all the major religions are one. They employ a figurative approach to the interpretation of past scriptures. They believe in the need for a strong United Nations, in improving the status of women, in the unity of science and religion, and in fighting racial, ethnic and nationalist prejudices. On the surface, these principles make them sound close ideologically to the Unitarian-Universalists. But given that they also have a global hierarchy headed up by an "infallible" institution, the "Universal House of Justice," (UHJ) it is more accurate to compare the liberals among them to liberal Roman Catholics. Social scientists have published on left-of-center Baha'i communities like that of Denmark, finding a "liberal and international" outlook compatible with globalization (Warburg 1999).

I will argue here, however, that there is also a significant fundamentalist tendency in the contemporary Baha'i faith in the U.S. and at the Baha'i World Center in Haifa, Israel of which social scientists have taken less account. Scholars who have examined fundamentalisms have identified nine major motifs in such movements, including a 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 (Almond, Sivan and Appleby, 1995). Arjomand has also argued that fundamentalists see their utopia as having "negative counterparts," in the form of the scientific worldview and the centralized, secular state (Arjomand in Martin and Appleby 1995, 5:182-185). All of these motifs are present in Baha'i fundamentalism, which falls into two broad types, world-denying and world-affirming. World-denying Baha'i fundamentalists can sometimes approach an Amish-like rejection of higher education and some forms of technology. World-affirming Baha'i fundamentalists are less extreme, and some are well-educated in the sciences or engineering, but they oppose key aspects of academic scholarship as applied to the Baha'i faith, as well as many democratic values.

Baha'i fundamentalists, who do not have a separate organization but are increasingly prominent in the Baha'i administration, have interpreted the liberal-sounding principles mentioned above in such a way as to be compatible in their eyes with an emphasis on strict obedience to religious authority, a literalist approach to the interpretation of scripture, and patriarchal values. They would reject the label of fundamentalism, claiming simply to be true Baha'is, and would deny that sub-groups such as liberals and fundamentalists exist in the Baha'i faith. Scholars within the movement, such as Moojan Momen, have nevertheless admitted the tension that exists between Baha'i liberals and fundamentalists (Momen 1992). Ex-Baha'i Denis MacEoin has also pointed to fundamentalist themes in Baha'i historiography (MacEoin 1986). Fundamentalists form a plurality among U.S. National Spiritual Assembly members, who meet in Wilmette, Illinois, and among delegates to the annual National Convention. The Universal House of Justice, the nine-man collective Baha'i "papacy" in Haifa, Israel, has been increasingly dominated in the 1990s by fundamentalists, as indicated by the sentiments expressed in their public talks and in the encyclicals issued by that body. That is, I am reporting a major shift in the Baha'i faith similar to the take-over of the Southern Baptist convention by fundamentalists in the 1980s and 1990s (Ammerman 1990). Many sources are available for the study of Baha'i fundamentalism, including writings and audio tapes from prominent leaders, letters and directives from Baha'i institutions, and email and usenet discussion groups. For rank and file views I depend heavily on Soc.Religion.Bahai (SRB), a mainstream Baha'i usenet group. I have also used the more liberal list, *talisman@indiana.edu* (which has had a number of subsequent incarnations and is now *talisman9@yahoogroups.com*) and oral histories gathered from Baha'is and ex-Baha'is. The results of this study may therefore be skewed toward Baha'is who are internet users, and toward official pronouncements. These sources, despite their limitations, demonstrate the contours of a Baha'i fundamentalism. I will suggest some reasons for which this tendency, which has long been significant in the religion, has become increasingly hegemonic in the past two decades. I will also argue that in the Baha'i faith, fundamentalism as a set of motifs results in a more "sectarian" as opposed to church-like community, and that fundamentalist leaders are attempting to take

the community in an exclusivist direction typical of the sect in its strict sociological sense. Although the treatment here is academic, I should alert readers that the author has been a Baha'i since 1972, and is involved on the liberal side in the lively culture wars now taking place in the community.

The Baha'i faith came to the U.S. in the 1890s from the Middle East, where it had been founded in 1863 by an Iranian notable and prophet, Baha'u'llah (1817-1892) (Cole 1998c; Smith 1987). He taught the universalist principles mentioned above. He ordered that eventually a Universal House of Justice should be established to administer his religion. He also appointed his son, `Abdu'l-Baha (1844-1921) as the one his community should turn to for the interpretation of scripture. `Abdu'l-Baha came to the U.S. in 1912 to help spread the religion, and gave speeches that were quite liberal on social and theological issues (Stockman 1985-1995; Smith 1987: 100-114). At that time, Baha'is living in republics were allowed to be members of political parties, and Baha'i elections themselves involved nominations and canvassing. Among the 200,000 Baha'is in Iran, a few served in high government office until the mid-1920s.

`Abdu'l-Baha appointed as his successor as official interpreter his grandson, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, 1921-1957. He envisaged that the interpreter or "Guardian" would serve ex-officio on the elected Universal House of Justice, but Shoghi Effendi put off the establishment of that body. He did, however, arrange for the establishment of National Spiritual Assemblies (NSAs), indirectly elected by the believers. From the 1920s, the relatively liberal early American Baha'i community began to be transformed by the religion's leaders into a much more regimented body (Smith 1987:115-156: Armstrong-Ingram 1987). Nominations and campaigning in Baha'i elections were banned, and Baha'is were ordered to avoid membership in political parties or other churches. The vetting of all publications of Baha'is about their religion by the Baha'i assemblies at the appropriate level was organized. Baha'is were gradually forbidden to utter any public criticism of their religious bodies' decisions. In the 1950s, Shoghi Effendi appointed the Hands of the Cause, lay bishops whom he assigned the functions of "propagation" (encouraging proselytizing) and "protection" (monitoring and curbing heresy or disobedience).

Shoghi Effendi died childless and without a successor as interpreter in 1957, throwing the community into consternation over who would lead them, since most at that time felt that the integrity of the Baha'i administration depended on there always being a living guardian. The Hands responded in 1963 by having the national assemblies of the world elect the nine-man legislative body, the Universal House of Justice, with its seat in Haifa, Israel. Its first incumbents were drawn from members or former members of the NSAs of the U.S, the U.K, Uganda and India, and many of them were moderates or relative liberals. They presided over a great expansion of the religion in the third world (Smith 1987: 157-199; Smith and Momen 1988:63-91). The House of Justice, having decided that there could be no further Guardians or Hands, created the new post of "Continental Counselors," with the same duties of "propagation" and "protection." In 1972 it created the "International Teaching Center" in Haifa, with nine resident Counselors, to serve as ideological watchdog for the community, among other duties.

The U.S. community had about 13,000 members in 1968. In the 1970s, it experienced a growth spurt, having 48,000 sure members by 1979 (Cole 1998b:236). The newcomers derived from three main groups: white middle class youth (unhappy with war, political cor-

ruption and racism); white evangelicals (who embraced Baha'u'llah as the return of Christ); and African-Americans, whether middle class or poor rural folk from South Carolina (who liked both the messianism and the anti-racist message). In the 1980s and 1990s there was little or no growth through conversion in the U.S, but some 12,000-15,000 Iranian refugees from the Khomeini revolution immigrated, adding a fourth element. The American community probably now consists of about 60,000 adult believers whose mailing address is known, though the authorities claim twice that number of adherents.

SECTARIANISM AND EXCLUSIVISM

In the classical sociology of Max Weber, a "church" was a sober, broad religious organization into which one was born, whereas a "sect" consisted of individuals who had made a choice to join it and was characterized by greater fervor and personal charisma. Weber's categories consisted more of a descriptive catalogue of attributes than of a concise definition, however, which led to much subsequent confusion. Sociologist Peter L. Berger wrote his dissertation on the Baha'i faith, arguing that it demonstrated a shift from nineteenth-century Iranian sect ("the spirit is present") to mid-twentieth century American church in its increasingly "routinized" forms ("the spirit is remote") (Berger 1954, Smith 1980). Neither the presence nor absence of the spirit nor degree of organization and institutionalization (criteria Berger also rejected), however, have been seen by most subsequent theorists to be key to the distinction between sect and church. Even Berger pointed out that the centralized and elaborated Baha'i administration could be operated by officials and believers in a personalistic and "sectarian" manner, especially in Iran. More recently, greater clarity has been achieved, in large part owing to the work of Benton Johnson, Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, who have suggested that church, sect and cult can be plotted on a graph with only a few variables (Benton 1963, 1971; Stark and Bainbridge, 1985). Benton argued that the key variable is the degree of tension existing between the values of the religious group and the values of the larger society. Churches broadly have a congruence of values with the society in which they operate, whereas sects are in a high state of tension with their society. Stark and Bainbridge made a valuable contribution in recognizing the importance of Johnson's approach and employing it. They unpacked the notion of "tension" into three variables, difference, antagonism and separation. They correctly pointed out that some otherwise "church-like" groups such as the Southern Baptists, with their biblical literalism and strict moral code, are in some tension with the mean of American norms, even though they are not in so much tension as to be properly thought of as a sect (Stark and Bainbridge 1985:19-24, 135). The "high-tension" model of the sect predicts that it not only will attempt to draw firm boundaries around itself with regard to the mainstream host society, but it also will strive to exclude those adherents who are seen as too accommodating to mainstream norms. That is, high tension with the outside tends also to imply exclusivism on the inside. The old Weberian paradigm tended to see the change from sect to church as a one-way street. Such a change certainly can occur, with sectarians becoming less exclusivistic over time. Finke and Stark showed that liberals gradually came to power in nineteenth-century Methodism, taking it in a more church-like direction (Finke and Stark 1992:145-169). Another example of this phenomenon is the way in which significant numbers of Calvinist Congregationalists in

New England became liberal Unitarians in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century (Robinson 1985). It is important to note, however, that church-like organizations can also become more sectarian. Fundamentalists were able to take over the Southern Baptist convention in the past two decades, taking the group in an increasingly sectarian direction (Ammerman 1990). In both the Baptist and the Baha'i case, the growing prominence of fundamentalist beliefs has coincided with increased organizational sectarianism.

FUNDAMENTALIST MOTIFS

Reaction against the Marginalization of Religion

The first major ideological characteristic of fundamentalism, according to Almond, Sivan and Appleby, is a reaction against the marginalization of religion in secular societies (1995:405-408). Among Baha'i fundamentalists, this reaction takes the form of a belief in a future theocracy, in which they expect Baha'i ecclesiastical institutions to take over the civil state. This conviction differentiates them from Baha'i liberals and moderates. The prophet-founder of the Baha'i faith, Baha'u'llah, wrote: "Most imagine that this Servant has the intention of establishing a full-blown government (*hukumat-i kulliyyih*) on earth—even though, in all the Tablets, He has forbidden the servants to accept such a rank [of rulership] … Kings are the manifestations of divine power, and Our intent is only that they should be just. If they keep their gaze upon justice, they are reckoned as of God" (Baha'u'llah in Cole 1998c). That is, he rejected charges that his religion implied the establishment of a Baha'i government. In his *Treatise on Leadership* of the early 1890s `Abdu'l-Baha said that religious institutions, including Baha'i ones, are never to intervene in affairs of state or political matters unbidden, and that whenever in history they have done so it has resulted in a huge disaster (`Abdu'l-Baha in Cole 1998a). He envisaged the state and religious institutions as complementary, "like milk and honey" (which do not dissolve). In talks given in the West 1911-1913, `Abdu'l-Baha stressed repeatedly that "non-intervention in politics" on the part of Baha'i (and other) religious institutions was an essential principle of the faith.

The theocratic ideology developed by Western Baha'is appears to be rooted in early twentieth century premillennialist motifs among converts from Christianity and secondarily in oral traditions attributed to Shoghi Effendi (cf. Robarts 1993) and letters written on his behalf by secretaries. Shoghi Effendi does speak of a future Baha'i commonwealth in his published works, but its character remains vague and it does not seem identical to the civil world government he also envisions. Some Baha'is believed that he held that a melding of religion and state would not occur during the thousand-year dispensation of Baha'u'llah himself, but at some later time during the Baha'i "cycle," of some 500,000 years (Hofman 1953). Others reported him as thinking it more imminent. There are two problems for Baha'i fundamentalists. The first, already noted, is that Baha'u'llah's own writings, and those of `Abdu'l-Baha are frankly anti-theocratic. The second is that in Baha'i law, oral traditions are supposed to be discounted in favor of written texts. Fundamentalists thus tend to retreat into generalities when explaining their belief, since they lack scriptural support.

The status of this belief in local communities in the West has been unsettled. One old-time Baha'i from the western part of the country writes,

As I recall, growing up [in the 1950s and 1960s], the idea that Local Spiritual Assemblies would be the governments of the future was always in the air. But it was always being debated. Frankly, Shoghi Effendi's statements about this issue are contradictory and confusing, and I remember as a teenager first having doubts about the matter precisely for that reason. I remember [one person] going around in the 1980s insisting that the Baha'i institutions would take over the world by the end of the century. And I remember thinking that [this was irrational] ... Anyway, my memory is that this matter of just what role the Baha'i institutions would play in a future world was always rather fluid ... and that there was a range of opinion on the subject. (Pers. Comm. 22 May 2000).

Another liberal Baha'i, this one from the Midwest, recalled,

...in the Faith in the 70's and 80's there was not much discussion about a theocracy, there was talk of the Baha'i Commonwealth and a world superstate ... but not that the Baha'is would be in charge of the government. In fact it was quoted to me by older Baha'is that if the government was offered to the Baha'is we were to refuse to accept it—a quote from Abdu'l Baha ... I had left the Faith for three years in the '90's and came back in around '96 ...only recently, within the past eighteen months has there been a discussion about the Baha'i Theocratic State, apparently a current member of the UHJ and the US NSA are proffering this to the rank and file ...(Pers. Comm., 23 May 2000).

This belief was variously formulated, was highlighted in certain communities but not in others, and went in and out of popularity over time. In the 1970s, moderate Baha'is who acknowledged that Baha'i institutions might play an important role in future governance often expressed the conviction that non-Baha'is would be enfranchised, whereas fundamentalist Baha'is felt they would be left without the vote but would be "very well taken care of" by the Baha'i majority.

A strong belief in future theocracy is especially associated in the second half of the twentieth century in the West with David Hofman, a British publisher and U.K. Baha'i official who was elected in 1963 to the Universal House of Justice. His thoughts on the subject are not distributed in the official form of a book, but informally as audiotapes (Hofman, n.d.). His election to the House of Justice gave him a powerful platform to promulgate the belief. By the 1970s at least, Hofman's British colleague on the Universal House of Justice, former actor Ian Semple, was also strongly advocating the doctrine. A Baha'i religious publisher reported, "I recall being in Haifa in the '70s ('72 and '78) and hearing long talks about this from Ian Semple, on how the world was destined to be ruled by houses of justice and there will eventually be no distinction between church and state" (Pers. Comm, 29 Feb. 2000). How many members of the Universal House of Justice have held the strong form of this thesis is unclear (Hofman is retired, but Semple is still on that body in 2001).

The belief also occurred among rank and file Iranian Baha'is of the Pahlevi era. An Iranian-American Auxiliary Board Member told the author in 1973 that Baha'is believed that their religious institutions would one day rule the world, but "we do not speak of it to

outsiders." Some Baha'i officials, including members of the Continental Boards of Counselors, publicly advocated future governance by Baha'i religious institutions, often to the dismay of other, moderate or liberal U.S. Baha'is. A former office assistant to Counselor Florence Mayberry, wrote,

> *I became a Baha'i in 1949 and remained one through most of the 70's. When I resigned, no one asked why! . . yet I had been active, known by "major figures" in Wilmette and in Haifa ... I felt we were developing a theocracy; then someone gave a speech at a national convention and plainly said that was our goal. There was not one outcry, not one smidgen of discussion about that as far as I knew. I loved Baha'is; I loved the universal qualities of the faith, but I, in no way, wanted to help build a theocracy (Pers. Comm., 21 February 1999).*

She added concerning the identity of that speaker in the late 1970s, "I don't remember the year, but it was [Counselor] Sarah Pereira" (Pers. Comm., 23 Feb. 1999). This person, an adherent for nearly thirty years, was shocked by the open endorsement of a theocratic ideal at National Convention.

Baha'i elective institutions can have both a "democratic" and an "authoritarian" aspect. Those who stress the latter over the former often appeal to theocratic ideals. For instance, in 1988 Firuz Kazemzadeh (then professor of Russian history at Yale and a long-serving member of the U.S. NSA) told a Los Angeles gathering, "If somebody is dissatisfied with a local assembly, he is not prevented from appealing to the NSA … It is something else when whispering campaigns or petitions are sent around for signatures objecting to the activities of the institutions. That also may be something which is countenanced by American democracy but has nothing to do with the Baha'i Faith. We must always remember that our institutions are an unusual and unique combination of theocracy in the best sense of the term with democracy" (Kazemzadeh 1988).

When the Internet began in the 1990s and individual Baha'i opinions began to be broadcast beyond local communities and private conversations, theocratic views quickly surfaced. A liberal participant in the usenet group SRB worried, "One problem a Bahai majority area may have is the prohibition of Bahais taking part in politics. The minority may well have all the political offices!" A Wisconsin Baha'i replied, "But in the Baha'i Commonwealth political authority will be transferred from the current governments to Baha'i Institutions. The fact that Baha'is can't belong to the old world order political systems isn't really relevant. True, there will be a period when the two systems coexist side by side, for how long we don't know. In a majority Baha'i society all politcal [sic] authority rests with the Local Houses of Justice and their affiliated institutions" (SRB, Apr 4, 1994). A prominent Baha'i bibliographer took another tack, writing: "Remember that as time goes on and Baha'i methods of political life - e.g. electoral principles, plurality election, elimination of parties - are adopted, the stigma of participation in political affairs would lift" (SRB, Apr 4, 1994). Note that fundamentalist Baha'is often expect that in a Baha'i-ruled state political parties and campaigning for election would be outlawed. Many hoped for an organic society. There was, however, always controversy around the edges of the subject. When the academic Baha'i listserv *talisman@indiana.edu* was begun by a

Baha'i professor at Indiana University, in 1994, debates broke out for the succeeding two years among Baha'is about many issues, including theocracy. These demonstrated a wide range of opinion in the community, despite the favor with which theocratic theories were viewed in Baha'i power centers (Talisman Archives 1994-1996). One liberal Baha'i theologian based in the Netherlands has extensively argued that religious and state institutions are distinct organs in the body politic according to the Baha'i scriptures (McGlinn 1999).

Perhaps in part out of frustration that the theocratic vision was still contested, conservative members of the Universal House of Justice crafted a letter in 1995 designed to bolster it:

> *As for the statement made by Shoghi Effendi in his letter of 21 March 1932, the well-established principles of the Faith concerning the relationship of the Baha'i institutions to those of the country in which the Baha'is reside make it unthinkable that they would ever purpose to violate a country's constitution or so to meddle in its political machinery as to attempt to take over the powers of government. This is an integral element of the Baha'i principle of abstention from involvement in politics. However, this does not by any means imply that the country itself may not, by constitutional means, decide to adopt Baha'i laws and practices and modify its constitution or method of government accordingly (Universal House of Justice 1995).*

More than one informant told me that Ian Semple was the lead author of this letter. The Semple letter implies that the scriptural principle of the non-involvement of Baha'is in politics is a temporary expedient, until such time as they should succeed in converting a majority of the population in any country, when they could employ electoral politics to put their system in place of the democratic one. Baha'i fundamentalists share many ideals in common with the Khomeinist interpretation of Shi`ite Islam, their parent religion, which also seeks governmental authority for the religious institution. Because the Baha'i faith is almost everywhere so tiny in size, however, and because Baha'i fundamentalists recognize a "temporary" principle of non-involvement in politics, their dream of theocracy is projected into the future. As with Islamic fundamentalism, then, one key trend is the insistence on divine governance and rejection of its negative counterpart, the modern secular state (Arjomand in Marty and Appleby 1995, 5:184). Baha'i fundamentalism remains apolitical, unlike Islamism in the Middle East, however, by agreeing to accept the legitimacy of the secular state until a Baha'i majority is achieved that could vote in a new, theocratic constitution. (Semple's impression that such a move would be "peaceful" and "voluntary" is, however, belied by the experience of Algerian Islamists who attempted the same strategy in the early 1990s, and provoked a civil war with secularists there, even though Algeria has an overwhelmingly Muslim population).

Selectivity

The second feature of fundamentalism is selectivity. Fundamentalists select and reshape aspects of the tradition, all the while asserting that they have recaptured its pristine essence. They are also selective in their responses to modernity. They embrace some aspects of it (such as certain types of technology), while vehemently rejecting others.

Baha'i fundamentalists engage in all three types of selectivity as well. They frequently make a claim to be engaging in traditional practices that are in fact innovations, and can do so with some success because the history and texts of the Baha'i faith are relatively little studied and authorities have often actively suppressed historical sources. We have already mentioned the problem that theocratic beliefs are unscriptural. That is, the scriptural tradition in the Baha'i faith strove for a separation of religion and state as a way of making room for liberty of conscience for Baha'is in Shi`ite Iran (Cole 1998c:17-47).

Baha'i fundamentalists with theocratic leanings have used several strategies to overcome this separationist heritage in their scriptures. They have suppressed Persian texts and ensured that such anti-theocratic passages are not officially translated into English. They attempt to bound this scriptural principle as pertaining to "a particular stage" of the evolution of the faith, as in the Semple encyclical cited above. The "stage theory" of Baha'i fundamentalists allows all contradictions between scriptural principles or earlier Baha'i practice and their own vision to be resolved through relegating all contrary evidence to the status of "a past stage." The stage theory relativizes even basic Baha'i principles like the non-intervention of religion in politics, rendering them amenable to future change and even reversal, and raising the question of whether the religion permanently stands for any principle at all. Another strategy might be called an appeal to the "disease of language." Many nineteenth-century Arabic and Persian technical terms found in the nineteenth-century Baha'i scriptures have changed in their meaning profoundly under the impact of modernity, and can now be read anachronistically to support theocracy (Cole 1998c:95-96).

Baha'i fundamentalists often exalt some temporary practice to the status of eternal principle. Thus, in the early twentieth century `Abdu'l-Baha initiated the practice of official prepublication censorship ("literature review") of everything written by Baha'is about their religion for publication. This was because at that time a few seditious writers from a Baha'i background could potentially cause pogroms in Qajar Iran. Shoghi Effendi referred to this requirement as "temporary" in the 1920s. Liberal Baha'is have argued in the past decade and a half that it has stifled intellectual life or is outmoded with the rise of the Internet (Leith 1995; Dialogue Editors 1998). Yet contemporary Baha'i fundamentalists strongly resist the idea that prepublication censorship should now be abolished (SRB 23 Oct. 1996, 26 Oct. 1996; UHJ 1988).

Baha'is, including Baha'i fundamentalists, have for the most part embraced modernity. They have a vision of building a peaceful global society and have a generally positive view of technological advances. Still, the selectivity of Baha'i fundamentalists toward modernity can be witnessed in the severe misgivings that some of them have expressed about the Internet. Some Baha'i officials have attempted to control Baha'i discourse on it. The academic *talisman@indiana.edu* listserv was closed down when its owner, a Baha'i professor at Indiana University, was accused by the Counselors of "making statements contrary to the Covenant" on it. Subsequently the Universal House of Justice attempted to stigmatize liberal critiques of Baha'i fundamentalism as "a campaign of internal opposition" mounted on the Internet (UHJ 1999). One anonymous Baha'i wrote, "Still, many friends have faced trouble for voicing their opinions on the web - and a Continental Board Member gave me a real *look* when I said I write on newsgroups. The point being that many are still terrified of this bad tool like the Anti-Christ itself … and would not think of subscribing to *unmoderated* groups" (Pers. Comm., 26 Feb 1999). Many moderate and

liberal Baha'is value their self-expression on email and view it as nobody else's business, so that the commitment to control of public discourse on the part of some Counselors and Auxiliary Board members has created frictions between them and the community. By summer of 1999 the Counselors at the International Teaching Center at the Baha'i World Center in Haifa, Israel, felt constrained to write to the Continental Boards of Counselors reminding them that "The opposition campaign on the Internet, it should be noted, is being promoted by only 'a small number of Baha'is'; many friends engaged in these discussions are, in fact, devoted believers …" They urged a more forbearing approach, and warned, "as you are well aware, to develop an adversarial relationship with any of the friends will only create an atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust that will pose far greater problems for the general community than the activities of a few misguided individuals" (ITC 1999). The signs are, then, that conservative Baha'i are beginning to back off from what some adherents see as undue intervention in individual email correspondence.

Moral Dualism

Fundamentalist Baha'is put special emphasis on moral Manichaeanism. Baha'i fundamentalists see the world as comprised of a small cadre of those "firm in the Covenant." They then admit a larger number of Baha'is who are "infirm" but perhaps not dangerously so. They worry about smaller numbers of "dissident" Baha'is who attempt to "undermine" the Covenant. In response to liberal discussions on the *talisman@indiana.edu* listserv in 1996, an Iranian-American member of the NSA of Alaska wrote, "I do believe that the Covenant is being undermined and challenged continuously by a subgroup within Talisman. The self-appointed 'loyal opposition' and 'dissident group' is determined to force the Universal House of Justice to 'reform' itself and to be morally consistent with their private agendas and interpretations. I am vehemently opposed to this. Should I remain silent? You tell me." (Talisman Archives, 7 April 1996).

Then there are the "covenant-breakers" (mainly schismatic groups, all rather small), who are considered spiritually diseased and who must be shunned completely. Indeed, it is important to fundamentalist Baha'is to believe that these "covenant-breakers" are entirely insincere and know very well the falsehood of their claims (Piff and Warburg 1998; Johnson 1974). They feel it is unwise even to read something they have written, lest one become "infected." Finally, for fundamentalists, there is a vast sea of misguided and benighted non-Baha'is. It is a scriptural principle of the Baha'i faith that "all religions are one," and many Baha'is in my experience have a relatively universalist outlook. Nevertheless, fundamentalist Baha'is have developed ways of holding the principle in a triumphalist manner, so as to position members of previous religions as inferior. Speaking of Jews' refusal to recognize Christ, one Baha'i newsgroup poster wrote, "At noon on a cloudless day, one can say that the sun is clearly up in the sky. But if someone stubbornly stays indoors with all the curtains drawn, a heavy blanket over his head, and his eyes closed, he might well argue that it is not clear at all, or indeed that it is night." (SRB, May 19, 1994).

Absolutism and Inerrancy of Scripture

As with Christian and Muslim fundamentalism, Baha'i fundamentalism puts great emphasis on the absolutism and inerrancy of scripture (cf. Ammerman 1990:80-87).

According to Peter Khan (a Pakistani-Australian engineer who was elected to the Universal House of Justice in 1987), world-denying fundamentalists go to the extreme of discouraging young Baha'is from seeking a college education because "the Revelation of Baha'u'llah" contains "all knowledge." He adds that in this view

> *The physical sciences are stigmatized as being incorrect because they take no account of the spiritual dimension of creation. Psychology is condemned because most theories appear not to take account of the spiritual nature of man. Economics is dismissed as appearing not to accommodate a spiritual solution to economic problems. Evolution and the Darwinian perspective are condemned as being contrary to the belief in God. (Khan 1999:46-47).*

The presence of such views in the US during the 1960s is confirmed by an old-time Baha'i, who said his parents were "always warning me about those wacko Baha'is who thought that you only needed to read the Writings and nothing else. And there was a good deal of tension over whether one ought, as a Baha'i, to go to university-wouldn't it be better to go pioneering [move abroad to do missionizing]?" (Pers. Comm., 17 June 2000). As Khan points out, scriptural literalism is tested most fiercely with regard to issues such as evolution. `Abdu'l-Baha maintained, in Sufi and Neoplatonic fashion, that human beings have always been distinct from animals, insofar as they are endowed with a soul. He also argued that the morphological similarities between humans and apes might be merely functional (e.g, sharks and porpoises resemble one another but are not immediately related), and maintained that "the missing link" would never be found. These assertions have foundered against the DNA revolution. During a discussion of his statements on evolution, a typical poster to SRB wrote, "Dear all, On the topic of evolution: Clearly we should understand as clearly as possible what `Abdu'l-Baha says on this subject. Because we believe His statements on matters pertaining to the Revelation of Baha'u'llah and all of creation are infallible, we must be clear about what it is we believe, or are accepting" (SRB 6 July 1997). Other, moderate or liberal Baha'is on the same list were frank about noting the apparent contradiction between contemporary biology and `Abdu'l-Baha's statements, but said they had to file the problem away as irresolvable. Fundamentalist Baha'is also see scriptural inerrancy to underlie the infallibility of later authorities. One wrote, "It is my understanding that when we see people questioning the infallibility of the Guardian's interpretations or translations, or the decisions of The Universal House of Justice, we need to turn to the Baha'i writings and investigate what the Baha'i writings tell us about this subject" (SRB 6 Sept. 1995).

Since the 1940s in Iran, Baha'i fundamentalism has increasingly defined itself against those Baha'is who were seen to defect to an academic point of view and who wrote of their religion within that framework. Baha'i fundamentalists are sometimes themselves engineers or scientists and do not altogether reject a scientific world-view, but they often feel it is wrong for an adherent to speak of the scripture or history of the Baha'i faith in academic terms. World-affirming fundamentalists accept much of modern science, but they still wish to affirm the existence of ether and the chemical transmutation of elements (Khan 1999:63). These unscientific ideas, present in the Baha'i scriptures, are largely drawn from Greco-Islamic philosophy. World-affirming fundamentalists draw the line at

academic scholarship by Baha'is on the Baha'i faith that incorporates the perspectives of the liberal humanities and social sciences, the equivalent of "Higher Criticism" in biblical studies. Scriptural literalists, whether of the soft or hard variety, are often promoted within the ranks of the Baha'i administration, especially to the offices of "Auxiliary Board Member" and "Counselor," and they then use their offices for the promotion of anti-intellectualism. Arab-American Soheil Bushrui, appointed to the endowed Baha'i chair at the University of Maryland at the instance of the U.S. National Spiritual Assembly, writes, "The fact that this field has of late been largely dominated by Western scholars has placed a certain restriction and limitation on understanding, preventing a more profound appreciation of the aims and purposes of Baha'i scholarship" (Bushrui 1995:23). An Iranian-American sociologist at Carleton College expressed outrage that Bahau'llah's ability to work miracles had been questioned on the H-Bahai discussion list (Saiedi 1999). Prominent speaker John Hatcher, professor of English literature at the University of South Florida, attacks the value of the "historical-critical approach" to "the Revealed Works of Baha'u'llah" (Hatcher 1997:27-25). Ironically, his essay appears in a volume with several chapters employing the "historical-critical approach" by liberal Baha'i academics.

The Universal House of Justice, while encouraging "scholarship," has made increasingly strong pronouncements against "humanist" and "materialist" academics in the ranks of the Baha'is. A crisis was provoked by the plan in the 1980s and 1990s of some Baha'i academics to publish a *Baha'i Encyclopedia*, for which they gained the backing of the U.S. NSA, which spent some $800,000 on it. The articles commissioned, however, were academic in style and substance, and the House of Justice in response condemned the then editors and their authors as scholars who "cast the Faith into a mould which is essentially foreign to its nature, taking no account of the spiritual forces which Baha'is see as its foundation … In other words, we are presented in such articles with the spectacle of Baha'is trying to write as if they were non-Baha'is" (UHJ 1994 in Research Department 1995:37). The editors resigned, the encyclopedia was ordered rewritten in fundamentalist style, and its Harvard-educated founder was driven out of the faith. Controversies over Baha'i historians questioning the literal accuracy of some of `Abdu'l-Baha's statements about history roiled the *talisman@indiana.edu* list and were among the impetuses for the Counselors at the ITC to launch formal heresy charges against them. "Problems will arise, rather, if an attempt is made to impose on the Baha'i community's own study of the Revelation, materialistic methodologies and attitudes antithetical to its very nature" (UHJ 1997). Note that for a Baha'i simply to write about the religion using academic tools is seen as an act of aggression, an attempt to "impose" methodologies and attitudes. The insistence that the impersonal, non-theological norms of academic scholarship make it an inappropriate vehicle for Baha'i self-expression has been taken by some Baha'i authorities even to the extent of threatening to have Baha'i academics shunned over it (Birkland 1996). UHJ member Peter Khan insists, "Any form of Baha'i scholarship must necessarily be founded upon our concept of the Creative Word of our Revelation …naturally we will accord the Creative Word a central position" (Khan 1999:45). As with Muslim fundamentalism, the "negative counterpart" of Baha'i fundamentalism is the academic, scientific worldview when applied to the Baha'i faith itself by adherents (Arjomand in Marty and Appleby 1995, 5:183). What appeared to him to be the UHJ's wholesale condemnation of Baha'i scholars involved in the academic study of religion caused one auxiliary

board member for protection, then enrolled in a Religious Studies graduate program, to resign noisily from the faith in June of 1999.

Millennialism

World-denying Baha'i fundamentalists emphasize belief in an imminent catastrophe they refer to as "the Calamity" (Smith 1982). One of sociologist David Piff's informants recalled, "In 1973 … Los Angeles, there was incessant talk about the calamity. It poisoned us." Others admitted that fear of an especially severe catastrophe in the materialist United States impelled them to move abroad for missionary work. (Piff 2000:123, 498). In the 1990s as the turn of the millennium approached, the impending calamity was a subject of discussion on Bahai-Discuss, a Baha'i-only email list, where one wrote, "I would like to open a discussion on a subject which many of us are somewhat unwilling to address - namely, the impending (year 2,000) calamity which is supposed to create grave upheaval (literally) not only here in California, but also on the East Coast, and other parts of the world …" (March 14, 1994). Nor was this sort of belief confined to the rank and file. Douglas Martin, a former secretary-general of the Canadian National Assembly who was elected to the Universal House of Justice in 1993, gave an interview with the BBC in which he asserted that that the proof of the truth or falsity of the Baha'i faith would be that universal peace would arrive by the year 2000 (Pers. Comm., 18 Feb. 1997). His colleague, American physician David Ruhe, who retired from the House of Justice in 1993, said in that year, "Abdu'l Baha talked about the coming of the Lesser Peace before the end of the century, that is, before December 31, 2000. There will be surprising events in the next 7 years, many to rival the collapse of communism and the Soviet Union in the last few. I can suggest a few scenarios … My own presumption is that there will be great crises we cannot anticipate" (Ruhe 1993). Probably only a minority of Baha'is put very great emphasis on near-term apocalypticism. There is a growing tendency among world-affirming fundamentalists to reinterpret the Calamity as a long-term process of, e.g., environmental degradation (Piff 2000:117-130). One member of the House of Justice suggested that resistance to belief in the infallibility of the UHJ among Baha'i liberals was itself the long-awaited Calamity (Khan 2000).

An Elect Community and Sharp Boundaries

The question of whether conservative Baha'is consider the Baha'is an "elect" is a complicated one. On the one hand, Baha'is do not have monks or a clergy, do not have convents or communes, and in the West they do not practice spatial segregation (i.e. there are no Baha'i quarters or neighborhoods). Yet, exclusivist sentiments do exist in the community. Despite the universalist views expressed by Baha'u'llah and `Abdu'l-Baha about the validity of all the great religions, some fundamentalist Baha'is maintain that only Baha'is are spiritually "saved." One of my informants said she heard this idea of salvation only for Baha'is publicly stated by long-serving member of the U.S. National Assembly Jack McCants in 1988. One conservative Baha'i on the talisman list referred to Buddhism as a "fossil religion." In a discussion at the Baha'i Studies list at www.escribe.com, one member said he was told by a Baha'i, "I think the texts are actually saying non-members do not have salvation because they have not recognized Baha'u'llah." (March 17, 2001).

Liberal intellectuals on this list disputed this interpretation, arguing for salvation for at least some non-Baha'is or even maintaining that the issue of salvation was irrelevant to Baha'u'llah's message of social and spiritual unity.

Some fundamentalist groups develop what one liberal Baha'i referred to as "gurus," whom they treat with special reverence, and the followers of whom they see as an elect. However widespread it might be, this phenomenon is not normative. One faction of Iranian emigrants to the U.K. in the 1980s and early 1990s led by a Cambridge-trained Iranian scholar even developed a doctrine that Baha'u'llah was the Godhead who had sent the other prophets. They engaged in heated public debates with more liberal Western Baha'is who argued that all the prophets were spiritually equal. In part this was a conflict between Western converts from Christianity, who wanted to assert the equality of the religions, and Iranian Baha'i refugees in the West who were dislocated and often looked down upon, and wished to emphasize the superiority of their tradition (Pers. Comm., 1994). The "guru" (i.e. "elect") stature attributed to the leader of the Iranian group was one of the objections raised against it. Others view election to high Baha'i office as a sign of divine selection of that individual for a "high station," though some Baha'is object to such differentiation. Some fundamentalist Baha'is speak of being a Baha'i as a status that bestows special spiritual privileges. One wrote on SRB, "Donating to the Bahai Cause is a privilege that only Bahais, who have not lost their voting rights, are granted." When challenged as to why the Baha'is do not do more philanthropy than they do, they will often reply that others can carry out such charity work, whereas only Baha'is can build the foundation of the New World Order. Attending the regular Baha'i worship and community business meeting, the "nineteen-day feast," is also often called a "privilege" pertaining to being a Baha'i, from which non-Baha'is are excluded (SRB 15 Aug 1997). As for boundaries, as we have seen, in the past decade fundamentalist Baha'is have begun drawing sharper boundaries between themselves and "humanist" or "materialist" liberal Baha'is as well as between their beliefs and mainstream U.S. values.

Authoritarian Organization

Fundamentalist Baha'is have an authoritarian view of how the Baha'i "administrative order" should function. They insist on obedience, and forbid criticizing Baha'i officials or institutions. The typical logic of Baha'i fundamentalists roots obedience in the legitimacy of authority, disallowing a rational examination of the substance of a command or an inquiry into whether the body giving the command has the "constitutional" prerogative to give it. In this way, arbitrary commands by Baha'i bodies or officials are made to be an either-or proposition. If one accepts Baha'u'llah, one accepts his administrative order, and must obey whatever it orders one to do, whether one agrees in conscience or no. Rejection of the command, ipso facto, represents a rejection of Baha'u'llah (Semple 1991, McMullen 2000:66-71). Thus, fundamentalist Baha'is secretly consider liberals and some moderates "not Baha'is" at all because they do not demonstrate sufficient compliance in immersing their wills in the authority of the Baha'i administration. Kazemzadeh expressed the fundamentalist philosophy on obedience when he visited a Baha'i study class in Los Angeles in 1979 to caution its members about the tone of their discussions, which were being published in a small-circulation newsletter. A class participant suggested that tone was not the real issue, saying "Dissent seems more the issue … Every time a

Baha'i criticizes or disagrees with a policy of the NSA, is his commitment to the Covenant to be questioned and his Baha'i status threatened?" Kazemzadeh said that no one questioned the right of the Baha'is to gather for discussions, "but the word dissent implies separating oneself from the activities of the group and putting oneself outside the mainstream of the community, and that is contrary to Baha'i practice" (Kazemzadeh in Los Angeles Baha'i Study Class 1979:4). The National Assembly subsequently demanded the right to censor the newsletter, which had a circulation of about 120.

Although conservatives and persons who hold many of the fundamentalist beliefs sketched above have predominated on the NSA, occasionally liberals have been quite popular in the community. Liberal educator Daniel Jordan served on that body from 1963 until his death in 1982. Of three new NSA members elected 1998-2000, two were from the West Coast and known to be moderates. At the international and appointive level, Baha'i governance has grown more centralized and authoritarian in recent decades. The old custom in the 1960s through early 1980s of seeing secretaries-general of the U.S. and U.K. and some other key communities as the prime candidate pool for filling vacancies on the Universal House of Justice led to the election of moderates and liberals who could exercise a liberal influence on the entire religion once they became members of the House of Justice. From 1987 forward, the members of the NSAs, who constitute the electoral college that chooses members of the UHJ, for some reason began voting instead for appointees of the House of Justice itself, preferably those resident in Haifa. Chief among them are male counselors at the International Teaching Center in Haifa, who have filled the vast majority of empty slots on the House of Justice since 1987. Counselors elected to the House of Justice have tended to be more fundamentalist in their outlook than is typical of secretaries-general of national assemblies, since the latter must be acceptable to the delegates of a national community and therefore sometimes have views that are more moderate. Once on the House of Justice, conservative former counselors are also in a position to administer ideological litmus tests to the persons they in turn appoint as counselors. Since the Continental Counselors appoint regional Auxiliary Board Members, who appoint local Assistants, the influence of what Baha'is call "the Institution of the Learned" is now predominantly fundamentalist, according to dozens of messages I have received from liberal Baha'is in local U.S. communities. In some instances ABMs have summoned liberal Baha'is serving on local assemblies to weekend interrogation sessions, accusing them of being "charismatic" or seeking to "gain a following," apparently in hopes of driving them out the community (talk.religion.bahai 1999/07/28). The number of ABMs and Assistants has been much increased in the 1980s and 1990s, as has their aggressiveness in confronting liberal Baha'is.

Fundamentalist Baha'is believe that Baha'i institutions such as the local assembly or the NSA can be divinely guided, and that the Universal House of Justice is infallible. The technical terminology in Persian is ambiguous, and Baha'i texts make distinctions that this absolutist approach disregards. Contemporary Baha'i fundamentalists avoid thinking constitutionally about such issues, asserting the infallibility of the House of Justice in an undifferentiated manner. One American Baha'i mystery writer who is well known on email groups wrote, "The Guidance and infallibility of the Universal House of Justice are *assured* and *promised*. We are specifically *directed*, as an act of faith, to offer instant, exact, and complete obedience to Baha'u'llah's House of Justice." (Talisman9 Archives, 23 May

2000). In response to a former Baha'i who disagreed with a decision of the Universal House of Justice, one Baha'i on SRB replied that if he were asked by an Auxiliary Board Member whether he accepted the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice, "My reply would have been that I accept unreservedly and without qualifications the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice in the past, present and future … If I were to receive a decision that appeared to me to be contrary to my views and conscience I would automatically assume my own perceptions were incorrect" (SRB 23 December 1997). In his study of the Atlanta Baha'i community of the 1990s, McMullen found that 87 percent of his informants strongly agreed or agreed with the proposition that "As a Baha'i, I submit to the authority of the Administrative Order, even if I disagree with what it says" (McMullen 2000:66). UHJ member Peter Khan has condemned Baha'i intellectuals who point out that the Arabic word "*ma`sum*" (officially translated as "infallible") actually refers in Islamic thought to moral immaculacy or legitimacy rather than propositional inerrancy: "one of the forms of opposition at the moment that's being spread in a clandestine way, is to say: well, the word is mistranslated, it really doesn't mean "infallible", it means "immaculate" in terms of integrity, or sinlessness, or freedom from moral stain or anything like that …" (Khan 2000). Khan has also spoken of the way in which he would "convert" Baha'is at conferences dedicated to scripture study to belief in infallibility.

> *Saturday evening, we got into the covenant. And these were friends who had been brought into the Faith but hadn't been taught as much as we want to teach people these days, so a lot of it was new. And somewhere around 8.30 or 9.00 pm on a Saturday evening, I'd break to them the news that we have at the centre of our Faith a body called the Universal House of Justice, which they would accept fairly readily, it didn't particularly worry them what it was or what it was called. But then I laid on them the fact that it was, that we regard it as infallible, divinely guided and freed from error. And whenever I said this and read the passages from the Guardian's writings on this subject, one could see alarm and distress in their eyes. They'd rather not know about it, generally, and also, you could see they were saying to themselves: I have joined this very modern, this avant garde, this 21st century religion, and now having penetrated to the core of it, I find it's saddled with a medieval concept of infallibility. Where did that come from and what's it doing in the middle of my religion? So they were prone to make all kinds of extreme statements, such as: I don't believe this, this is wrong, it's not right, and things like that. And what one had to do was to stay calm, and not get hot and bothered and upset, and just deal with it as it comes ... You'd find by the next morning, they'd sorted it out in their minds. They would think: OK, I accept Baha'u'llah's the Manifestation of God, he has clearly said this about this institution of the Faith ... (Khan 2000).*

Although widespread, an absolutist approach to infallibility is not universal in the community, as Khan, who calls such reluctance "extreme," admits. Privately, some Baha'is express misgivings about the demand for strict obedience or seek to limit the scope of infallibility. Even one neo-conservative Baha'i academic historian described herself as "distressed" over Khan's denunciation of philological investigations of the Persian word

for "infallibility" (2 June 2001, the Bahai Studies list at www.escribe.com). One Baha'i informant told me that even the late David Ruhe, a member of the House of Justice, had said to him, "We're not really infallible, you know." Once the Internet developed in the 1990s, liberal Baha'is began publicly expressing less absolutist understandings of infallibility, which drew the fundamentalists' ire. In the late 90s and early 00s, Canadian fantasy writer Michael McKenny and New Zealand communications consultant Alison Marshall were summarily ordered removed from the membership rolls of their respective national Baha'i communities by the Universal House of Justice. They were apparently sanctioned in this way for repeatedly making statements on email lists that seemed to fundamentalist Baha'is to bring into question the infallibility of the House of Justice and to ask for women to be allowed to serve on that body (Documents 1999). Before 1997, believers could only get off the rolls by renouncing belief in Baha'u'llah in writing, whereas McKenny and Marshall saw themselves as believers. Also, previous to 2000, the recalcitrant were extensively "counseled" before being sanctioned, but Marshall was expelled without a single meeting with any Baha'i official about her email traffic (which had never questioned the legitimacy of the House of Justice).

Strict Behavioral Requirements

Although Baha'is do not have a distinctive dress, they do have special ritual forms of prayer, and they are required to fast in the Muslim way. They are monitored for behavior that might contravene Baha'i law. Baha'is who drink alcohol, gamble, have an affair or live together out of wedlock, engage in homosexuality or politics, or use drugs in such a way that it comes to the attention of their local community have their "administrative rights" removed and can no longer attend the Nineteen Day Feast—the main worship ceremony— nor can they vote or hold elective office. Many Baha'is who lose their administrative rights eventually leave the religion. Fundamentalist Baha'is often strive to be hyper-correct. On SRB a dispute broke out in 1997 over consuming non-alcoholic beer and wine, which the fundamentalists on the list condemned. A liberal Baha'i complained of a "witch hunt," and an unscientific attitude in his coreligionists. Some fundamentalists argued that even using cooking wine (where the alcohol boils off) is forbidden in Baha'i law (SRB Sept.-Oct. 1997). Fundamentalist Baha'is expect one another to project an image of great propriety. A discussion on SRB was provoked in February of 1995 by the question, "what do Baha'is think of R-Rated movies?" A few took a hard line, saying things like, "We don't think about them," or that they avoided them as incompatible with a prayerful life. Most responses were honest and thoughtful, with posters admitting that despite finding sex and violence distasteful they would sit through such scenes for a good film.

Fundamentalist Baha'is view "the member's time, space and activity" as "a group resource, not an individual one" (Almond et al. 408). In some communities enormous pressure is put on individuals by fundamentalists to "teach the faith" or proselytize others. Some more liberal (or just shy) Baha'is report being extremely uncomfortable with this pressure and cite it as a reason they became inactive or withdrew from membership (cf. McMullen 2000:144). Constant appeals are also made for Baha'is to donate money, to "give till it hurts," and most of these donations appear to go to monumental building projects at the Baha'i world center in Haifa or to bureaucratic purposes at the National Baha'i Center in Wilmette. In the mid- to late 1990s, typically about one third of US

Baha'i donations to the Baha'i National Center were forwarded to Haifa for the building projects of the House of Justice (National Spiritual Assembly 1998). The U.S. Baha'i administration does very little charitable or development work (measured as a percentage of its budget) unrelated to proselytizing, especially for non-Baha'is.

CAUSES OF BAHA'I FUNDAMENTALISM

In the 1960s and 1970s large numbers of relatively liberal Americans came into the Baha'i faith, some converts from Unitarianism or Quakerism, others veterans of the civil rights or anti-war movement or the youth culture. In the late 1960s the NSA had put out a slogan, "Human Rights are God-Given Rights." Relative liberals were elected to the National Spiritual Assembly and the Universal House of Justice. Of course, a strong fundamentalist tendency existed then, too. But what factors account for its increasing hegemony in the U.S. Baha'i community in the 1990s? First, the end of the guardianship in 1957, and the necessity to attempt to mount a House of Justice that lacks an official interpreter (in contradiction to what was envisaged by `Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi), was a crisis that some Baha'is dealt with by turning to fundamentalist themes. Thus, reifying the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice is one way of dealing with the bewildering end of the guardianship. Baha'i fundamentalists appear to have concentrated on gaining control of the appointive and international institutions, and to have been less successful in securing hegemony over the U.S. National Spiritual Assembly or the annual national convention, which have a stronger democratic aspect. Their successes, in marginalizing or forcing out Baha'i academics and in curbing the free expression in magazines or on email lists of liberal Baha'i views, have had little or no impact on most local U.S. Baha'i communities and so often are unknown or not a matter of concern (cf. Ammerman 1990:259).

The strict moral codes and ideological commitments of old-time Baha'is who tended to control Local Spiritual Assemblies and to provide the cadre for Auxiliary Board Members and their assistants may have been a powerful selecting mechanism. Liberals who joined may have been made uncomfortable and encouraged to leave at much higher rates than those of a conservative or fundamentalist mindset. Several of my liberal informants who left the religion told stories of having been publicly humiliated by such officials. (The Baha'i faith retains only about 50 percent of converts, compared to 80 percent among mainstream Christian denominations). Many of those who joined in the 1970s brought with them fundamentalist outlooks, as well. Opinion polls show that most African-Americans, despite their social liberalism, are inerrantists when it comes to scripture, and African-Americans constituted at least 10 percent, and perhaps more, of the community by the 1980s. White evangelicals attracted by books like William Sears' *Thief in the Night*, which explains to Christians how Baha'u'llah is the return of Christ using Millerite arguments, may have accounted for more of the converts than researchers earlier realized. Indeed, it was suggested to me by one informant that Jack McCants, a former Methodist minister from the South, owes his long-standing position on the NSA to the vote of the white evangelical converts to the faith among delegates to the National Convention. It is also possible that converts from a liberal or moderate background were gradually socialized to a more fundamentalist outlook through the 1980s and 1990s. Ammerman found

that among Baptists, income did not predict theology, but that whether one grew up in a white collar or a blue collar/farming family did correlate strongly with liberal or fundamentalist commitments (Ammerman 1990:128-129). We do not know enough about the home environments of Baha'i leaders to be sure if family background plays a role. Certainly, some prominent Baha'i fundamentalists, while professionals themselves, were raised in working-class or rural homes. The increasing influence of the Christian right in U.S. public discourse cannot be excluded as an explanatory variable, either.

Another factor is the influx of Iranian Baha'i refugees from Khomeinism. By 1987 an internal Baha'i poll found that 15 percent of the U.S. community was "Persian," and this was probably an undercount. Although it cannot be assumed that the majority of these Iranians are fundamentalists, large numbers certainly do see the Universal House of Justice's infallibility as absolute. Several Iranian Baha'i informants of a liberal turn of mind have said they were ostracized by their extended families because they do not accept the idea of infallibility. In turn, Iranian Baha'i absolutism may be a reaction to the persecution of the Baha'is by the Islamic Republic. Many immigrants saw their practice of the faith to be superior to that of local Western converts, which caused tensions (Cole 2000). They sometimes replied to the insecurities of immigrant status by turning to absolutism, as we saw in the Iranian-British incarnationist group. Further, the persecution gained the Baha'i organization great good will and sympathy on the part of governments and the press, making them reluctant to criticize Baha'is. Opportunistic sectarian-minded officials may have seen this press honeymoon as a time when they could act arbitrarily and harshly against intellectuals and liberals, using summary expulsion and threats of shunning, without fear of a backlash from mainstream society.

Baha'i fundamentalists are not separatists and do not despise their religious establishment. Rather, there is evidence that they have achieved increasing dominance on the Universal House of Justice and thence much of the corps of Counselors and Auxiliary Board Members and their assistants. There appears to be an "elective affinity" between the themes of Baha'i fundamentalism and some sorts of administrative service, since fundamentalism as an ideology gives Counselors and the UHJ far more practical power than does liberalism, which is thus seen as "undermining" that power. Given the centrality and authority of these Baha'i institutions, the ability of fundamentalists to capture them may be the most important explanation for the increasing hegemony of this tendency in the movement.

These developments in the U.S. Baha'i community have led the community to be more sectarian than was the case in the late 1960s and the 1970s, when tens of thousands of converts, many of them liberals, had joined. This conclusion challenges the old Weberian expectation, that sectarianism was more characteristic of first-generation converts whereas persons born into the religion tended to create more church-like structures. While persons with a sectarian outlook certainly came into the faith in the 1970s, so too did many religious liberals from the youth culture. The latter for a time created many local liberal communities and contributed to liberal Baha'i publishing enterprises, but most eventually left the religion, out of frustration with the conservative national and international administration. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the tendency of the movement is less open. Fundamentalists in the international center and their appointees in the "institutions of the learned" dislike the democratic system of governance, are committed to estab-

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lishing an ultimate Baha'i theocracy, and wish to prohibit academic modes of discourse about the core areas of the religion. All of these themes, if widely adopted, would bring the religion into greater tension with the surrounding U.S. society. (The U.S. is after all a democracy committed to the separation of religion and state where nearly half of citizens go on to some form of higher education). Demands that liberal members avoid discussing their personal views of the faith on public email lists, and threats or sanctions launched at those who demur from the fundamentalist orthodoxy and become "prominent," all point to an increasing exclusivism more characteristic of the sect than of the church. Whereas `Abdu'l-Baha had forbidden in the tolerant Baha'i faith the Muslim custom of issuing rulings that a believer had departed into disbelief, and whereas Shoghi Effendi had insisted that believers be extensively counseled before being punished, the current leadership has initiated a new practice of summary expulsion from the rolls. The community is becoming more ready to exclude, impelled by developments in the religion's world center, by the increasing influence of fundamentalism in American religion generally, and perhaps also by the influx of immigrants, especially some Iranians, from the Third World, as well as by the transparency and consequent open conflict introduced into community discourse by the internet. The community is small and needs its resources, and so the purges have centered on a few vocal individuals rather than being more general, apparently in hopes that the remaining liberals will take the hint and keep their silence in public. In a church, a member born into it might be punished but there would never be any question that he or she was a member. In a sectarian organization, membership is dependent on strict doctrinal and behavioral criteria. In the contemporary Baha'i community, those criteria increasingly consist of assent to, or at least avoiding public dissent from, the fundamentalist tenets discussed above.

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