

Margit Warburg, Annika Hvithamar and Morten Warmind (eds.) 2005. *Baha'i and Globalisation*. RENNER Studies on New Religions. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press. 309 pages.

In approaching this book, at least four features should be kept in mind: it appears in a series dedicated to «new religions»; the majority of the contributors are scholars who are also Baha'is; the book more or less assumes a basic familiarity with the Baha'i faith, including no more than a summary presentation of its roughly 150-year history, beliefs, practices, and organization; it is about globalization. The significance of these characteristics flows from the ambiguities to which they point.

The idea of a «new religion» often suggests relative unfamiliarity and that its legitimacy is still an issue. Thus the preponderance of inside authors combined with the lack of content overview might by itself already be interpreted as part of a declaration of legitimacy. In that light, the relation of Baha'i to Islam, a key question in terms of the «newness» of Baha'i, is almost like the elephant in the room that no one talks about. This matter receives implicit attention in Fereyduun Vahman's treatment on Iranian nationalist polemic against Baha'is and in Morten Warmind's comparison of Baha'i with the self-avowed Islamic Ahmadiyya movement. Yet it is only in the final chapter by Denis MacEoin, a declared outsider, that this relation is a central focus. MacEoin's article and the second to last chapter by Sen McGlinn are also the only ones that seriously address the possible parochialism of Baha'i, all the other contributions assuming or having as their explicit aim to show its globalism and positive resonance within the process of globalization. Here, however, we encounter one of the strengths of this volume: taken together, the various articles do address the complexity of the core questions regarding Baha'i and globalization, even though some readers may wish the «other side» of issues to be a little more central and a little less indirect. Indeed, the sceptical reader may wish to begin at the end of the book and work backwards rather than following the order of the chapters as presented.

The concern of most of the chapters then is to show that Baha'i is and has been from the beginning a globally oriented religion that resonates positively with main currents of contemporary globalization. Thus, many of the earlier contributions focus on the writings and pronouncements of the founding figures, from the Iranian Bab of the earlier nineteenth century (Stephen Lambden), to the recognized founder of Baha'i, Baha'ullah (Todd Lawson) and his two successors 'Abdu'l-Baha (Juan R. I. Cole) and Shoghi Effendi (Zaid Lundberg). These articles demonstrate rather clearly that the founders, and even the precursor to some extent, had a global vision, expanding the horizons of their message from Iran to eventually seek followers throughout the world. Yet, even though the presentations are not uncritical, they generally fail to distinguish between the claim of the Baha'i message to universal validity – it is intended for all people, irrespective of who or where they are, much like Islam, Buddhism, or Christianity – and Baha'i globalism. That issue is reasonably well addressed in Moojan Momen's chapter on the global expansion of Baha'i in the 1890–1920 period. Momen suggests several dimensions of globalization beside the normative (e.g. psychological, institutional) in his effort to show that Baha'i was more than just another movement

with a claim to universal validity. Robert Stockman's contribution, which focuses on the same period, adds a far too brief analysis of the particularity of early North American Baha'is, many of whom combined Christian, Theosophist, and other esoteric currents into their new faith.

The relation (and tension) between Baha'i particularism and universalism – a key aspect of globalization – is in fact the direct or indirect focus of several of the remaining chapters. Margit Warburg's intriguing attempt to map Roland Robertson's four-field model of globalization onto Baha'i (or perhaps vice versa) is one example, although she does not address the question of the differences among the various Baha'i national communities; that is, in what consists their particularity in relation to the Baha'i universal that is so much the focus of most of the chapters already mentioned. One might expect precisely such a discussion in Wendi Momen's treatment of the concept of subsidiarity in Baha'i, but here again the local Baha'i particularities are devoid of content. One gets a little closer to this issue in three other chapters: David Piff's analysis of Baha'i constructions on the internet focuses on attempts by Baha'i central authorities to control variation (i.e. «heresy») among Baha'is in this most fluid of communication media. Lynn Echevarria looks specifically at Canadian Baha'is, but emphasizes their conformity with the universal Baha'i message rather than possible particularities. Will van den Hoonaard shows the core Baha'i idea of «unity in diversity» is subject to a variety of sometimes contradictory interpretations, thereby pointing directly to particularism/universalism tensions. And Sen McGlinn zeros in on the by now moderately well-known contestation among elite Baha'is as to the relative role of orthodoxy and (centralized) authority, concentrating specifically and critically on the «conservatives» in this regard. One notes that representatives of the latter hardly appear as authors in this volume at all.

What is perhaps the strongest feature of this volume, and what makes it well worth reading by anyone interested in the modern construction of religions, is that the globalization-resonant universal ideal and structure of Baha'i are given clear and convincing presentation; but so are – albeit not always as directly – the ways in which the context of globalization problematizes such an ideal in very peculiar ways. If there is an aspect that is missing, it is that none of the chapters addresses a rather critical question in this regard: to what extent is the Baha'i faith a religion that contributes to and even anticipates globalization; and to what extent is it a symptom and reflection of the globalizing context? Answering this question would require explicit comparison with the global faces of other religions. With the exception of a very partial answer with respect to the Ahmadiyya movement, that is missing. It would make an intriguing focus for another volume in the future.

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