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Subject: A Common Language for Postmodern Political Theologies
Date sent: Thu, 13 Apr 2006 12:57:25 +0200

> I finished quite unsure of what you meant by 'post-modern.'

I speak of post-modern society, not of postmodernism. This is the society produced by structural differentiation, individualisation and feminism, global integration, pluralism and relativism. It is global, and it is different in kind to modern national societies, which in turn were different in kind to medieval societies defined by local characteristics and concerns. Postmodern philosophies are produced for people living in this kind of society, and postmodern theologies likewise; just as medieval philosophies and theologies were produced for medieval people. There is as much variation within postmodern thought as within medieval thought or classical thought.

> 'individualization' and 'differentiation'with postmodernity b/c
> these two concepts have, on my reading, been generally seen as two
> of the hallmarks of *modernity*.

I think differentiation began with the specialisation of labour, which must have begun long before Ur. Gender roles and caste stratification are a kind of structural differentiation, but they act to limit individualisation: they force people into collectivities and society relates to them as members of collectivities. Individualisation was one of the hallmarks of modernity, but so was anti-individualisation, in the forms of communism, nationalism, fascism and racism. Global integration was a hallmark of modernity, so was anti-globalisation. Intercultural contacts and relativism were going on in modernity, and so was the rage against them. In this sense we are still living with modernity, and probably will be for the next century. Vice versa, the epistemological individualism of Descartes was a step in individualisation. It did not immediately lead to an attack on the society of estates, and it did not recognise at all the pluralism of person within, but it was a beginning.

- > Post-modernity says that the notion of rationality and individual
- > autonomy is a myth, that we are a narrative fiction that takes place
- > at the intersection of our different roles and identities.

My postmodernity doesn't say this !! The child is created in a social matrix, but the mature individual knows with her own knowledge, and not with the knowledge of her neighbour, parents, religious community, cultural group etc.

"I have perfected in every one of you My creation, so that the excellence of My handiwork may be fully revealed unto men. It follows, therefore, that every man hath been, and will continue to be, able of himself to appreciate the Beauty of God, ... For the faith of no man can be conditioned by any one except himself." (Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, p. 143)

As adults we create and recreate ourselves at the intersection of different roles and identities -- we have not one self but several, both in society and within ourselves. The playing self, the thinking self, the creating self, the political self -- they exist both without and within. "The Kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20), and the universe is folded within you (Imam Ali, not that I think Jesus and Ali were postmodern prophets !). In the Lawh-e Maqsud, Baha'u'llah says "No two men can be found who may be said to be outwardly and inwardly united." Our two men will not be outwardly united until they are inwardly united: persons who have conflicts within cannot sustain harmonious relationships with others. The task for postmodern theology is to explain the selves to the person, and to explain postmodern society, explaining the religious significance of society and the significance of religion for society, so that inwardly harmonious people have the wisdom to know what should be changed, and can work together to change it. Just as the institutions of world government cannot be effective until colonialism is finished, the harmony of the selves is dependent on ending the colonisation of all life experience by the rational self. In this sense the cartesian individual is only a first approximation, because it privileges one social self and one internal self, and I support postmodernists' attacks on the cartesian model of self to this point.

However, in comparison, all the collectivities are absolutely myths, they are merely imagined identities (but not necessarily harmful if we do not reify them). That is, all collective identities are imagined except the human identity, which is based on the fact that human

beings share the faculties of the spirit which define the meaningfulness of being human and, so far as we know, distinguish humans from animals, plants and minerals. Modernity was characterised as much by the reification of collective identities as by individualisation. And modernity's individualism has produced a surge of progress and innovation, while its collectivism caused untold pain and threatened a return to barbarism: "On the continent of Europe inveterate hatreds and increasing rivalries are once more aligning its ill-fated peoples and nations into combinations destined to precipitate the most awful and implacable tribulations" (Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 188). The Guardian's worst fears came true, didn't they ?

- > I especially think the idea of progress from premodernity to
- > modernity to postmodernity mirrors in many ways the metaphor in the
- > Baha'i Writings of humanity moving from childhood to adolescence to
- > adulthood (which can also be roughly thought of as dependence to
- > independence to interdependence).

I like this. I think it is important to acknowledge that we leave childhood behind, but we take the things of childhood with us. Much of the past comes with us into postmodernity, but transformed or placed in a wider context. National and cultural identities for example. And Christianity: "The indwelling Spirit of God ... will, no doubt, be reborn and revived as the inevitable consequence of this redefinition of its fundamental verities, and the clarification of its original purpose. (Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 185).

This opens the possibility for an explanation of progressive revelation that is not supercessionist. There are revelations throughout history, and their communities and positive effects continue for some thousands of years (but not indefinitely). Humanity passes through climactic changes, such as the end of the classical age, and all of the religious communities have to reinvent themselves in a new world, which is painful and difficult. The religions born at the time of such a change also have to transform, but they have an easier task, less baggage and (in successful cases) more relevant guidance, and their example of transformation can show the way. In the same way, social innovations often occur and spread from the periphery to the centre, and economic and ecological adaptations may arise in a niche and spread from there. This reading preserves the special role of the new revelation in shaping the new age, but does not treat all previous revelations and the wisdom in their traditions as simply

superseded.

- > differentiation is a notion very much tied to *modernity* and the
- > Industrial Revolution (and something almost all early sociology was
- > obsessed with).

Yes, but early sociology noticed the phenomenon and worried; it postulated that a common "glue" was necessary and discovered that religion had once provided it, and it then proposed to create a new religion for industrial man, or to replace religion with an ideology. The difference in postmodernity is that we see this same phenomenon of differentiation, but we say, don't worry, be happy. That's the way it's meant to be. Multiplicity good, singularity bad. Now who said postmodernism was complicated ?