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### The Bahai Faith- A Theological Analysis of a World Religion

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THE BAHAI FAITH

A Theological Analysis  
of a World Religion

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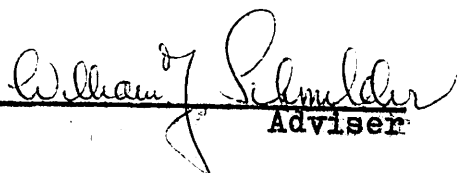
A Research Paper Presented to the Faculty  
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in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for elective  
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by

Mark Allen Mueller

May 1976

  
Adviser

4-4-16  
Research paper



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I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the Gospel of Christ. But even if we OR AN ANGEL FROM HEAVEN should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!. As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

Galatians 1:6-9 (NIV)

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## I. INTRODUCTION

My first contact with a member of the Bahai World Faith came at the age of seventeen in 1967. That same year a study of the Bahai faith became my required option for a unit on comparative religions during junior religion at Milwaukee Lutheran High School. Unfortunately, it was quite brief and incomplete since it was difficult to obtain many published materials on the subject. Even the central library in Milwaukee had only a few volumes on this faith in its vast collection. This was due to the relatively small number of works published and the extremely limited circulation of those works. Fortunately, a man and his wife who had made a pilgrimage to that part of modern day Iran which had been Persia became available for an interview. They were ardent believers and had a desire to share their faith with whoever would listen. Listening to their story, as well as to the history behind their faith, was fascinating. On one occasion an evening was spent in their home viewing slides which they had taken while on a pilgrimage to the shrines and holy places of the Bahai faith throughout the Mideast. It was an unforgettable experience.

Through the years my interest in this unique religion never waned. From time to time during my schooling, some newly published works or some old, obscure volumes would surface and be brought to my attention. After my arrival in St. Louis, someone pointed out to me that there was a very active Bahai community in the metropolitan area. When the time came to choose a topic for a research paper, it seemed appropriate to utilize this opportunity for an extensive study of the religion. Easy access to such a large number of primary and secondary resources may never again present itself.

Something must be said at this point about terminology. Where does the faith get its name? What is the meaning of the word Baha'i? This word is derived from the title by which the founder of this faith is known. His name was Baha'u'llah, which literally means glory of god.<sup>1</sup> This word is used both as a noun and an adjective. When used as a noun, it indicates an individual who subscribes to the faith, like the terms Christian, Muslim, and Buddhist are used to identify the followers of Christ, Muhammad, and Buddha, respectively. When it is used as an adjective, it describes something related to the faith, such as the Baha'i religion, a Baha'i temple, or a Baha'i meeting. The word Baha'i itself is a Persian word which literally means of glory. It is derived



from the Persian bahā meaning glory. When the word was anglicized by the Baha'is, they included all of the various diacritical markings which the word possessed in the Persian language. This was later shortened to Baha'i. Webster has entered the word into his dictionary as Bahai. Since this has become an acceptable spelling, it will be used throughout this paper. It seems that even the Bahais themselves have never bothered to standardize the transliteration of Persian words into English.

What, then, is a Bahai? "A Bahai is a person who accepts Baha'u'llah as his Lord, knows his teachings and obeys his precepts; the Bahai religion is the religion of Baha."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The first a in Baha'u'llah has the sound of a in bat, and the second a has the sound of a in barn. The i in Bahai, which is a three syllable word (Ba/ha/i), is pronounced like ee in see, and the stress is on the last syllable.

<sup>2</sup>Bahai World Faith: Selected Writings of Baha'u'llah and Abdu'l-Baha (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahai Publishing Trust, 1956), p. i.

## II. HISTORY

The birthplace of this mysterious faith was in the ancient country of Persia, in a part which is now encompassed within the borders of modern Iran. The Bahai faith began on May 23, 1844, in Shiraz, Persia.. A young man by the name of Ali ~~Muhammad~~, who became known to his followers as the Bab (literally, the Gate), announced that he had come to fulfill a prophecy and that he was going to prepare the way for the appearance of a great world-wide teacher. This teacher would usher in an age of lasting peace for all mankind by creating a universal faith.

The Bahais claim that the coming of the Bab fulfills "the prophecies of several major religions.. Approximately at the same time that the Bab announced himself, groups in America such as the Millerites and scattered fragments of the Seventh Day Adventists were awaiting Christ's second coming. The Bahais claim that these Americans had correctly calculated the right time but were waiting in the wrong place. Furthermore, they claim that the prophecy which Christ made concerning his Second Coming did not apply to himself, but rather to another "messenger" of God. They believe that the promised messenger was the Bab.

In order to understand the Bahai faith it is important for one to understand Islam. A knowledge of Islam is as indispensable to the Bahai faith as the Old Testament is indispensable to the New Testament. The Bahai faith is an outgrowth of Islam. Islam, the last of the world religions (in opposition to the universal religions of the Bab and Baha'u'llah), contains a number of prophecies which the Bahais consider as proof that the Bab was expected.

After the death of Muhammad there soon developed within Islam a schism. Two different parties each held to different theories of leadership, that is, who was the rightful successor (Caliph) and ruler over the church-state of Islam. Thus the Muslim world was from the earliest times divided into the Shi'ites and the Sunnites, a division which remains to this present day. But the divisions did not stop here, for within each of these two major branches are many other sects. The majority of the Shi'ites acknowledges twelve Imams (a successor of Muhammad). The twelfth Imam disappeared in the year A.D. 873 and the Shi'ites awaited his return. This prophet, called the Qa'im<sup>1</sup> by the Muslims, would not come into the world unannounced. They await his second coming as earnestly as Christians await the Second Coming of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Later on another heretical sect appeared in Persia, that of the Shaikhis,<sup>3</sup> the followers of

Shaikh Ahmad-i-Ahsai (d. 1826). He and other Shaikhii teachers began preparing their disciples for the expected appearance of the Qa'im, the Twelfth Imam, sometime in the near future. Some of the Muslim traditions said that he would return after a thousand years and, according to the Muslim calendar,<sup>4</sup> the time was close at hand. All of the various sects within the Shi'ite branch of Islam were impatiently awaiting his return.<sup>5</sup>

Fifty-one years before the appearance of the Bab, ~~Shaikh~~ Ahmad-i-Ahsai began preparing his followers spiritually. He did not find one person among all of his pupils in Baghdad who realized the importance of what he was saying. Not until twenty years later did he find a man whom he recognized as spiritually pure. This was Siyyid Kazim, whom he worked with during the last twenty years of his life. Before he died, Ahmad told Siyyid to go out and search for a messenger of God. He also put particular emphasis on the geographic locality of Shiraz, and said that a double epiphany of God was impending. This meant that two messengers would appear in the near future, one heralding the coming of the next.

Siyyid Kazim and his followers spread out to look for the coming prophet in the 1840's. This search went on for many years. Siyyid Kazim died in 1843. For a while his disciples did not know where to turn

for guidance.<sup>6</sup>

One night about five months after the death of Siyyid Kazim, Mullah Husayn (a follower of Kazim) was entering the city of Shiraz after sunset. There he was approached at the city gate by a man who welcomed him into the city. This man, Sayyid Ali Muhammad, was a merchant. At exactly two hours and eleven minutes after sunset on May 23, 1844, Sayyid Ali Muhammad announced to Mullah Husayn that he was the proclaimed messenger of God, the Bab. He took Mullah Husayn with him to an upper room of a house in Shiraz.

To his great surprise, Sayyid Ali Muhammad quietly informed him of his mission, and by reading to him portions of his writings, and answering questions about difficult points of theology, convinced his guest that he was the possessor of supernatural knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

He was the living fulfillment of a number of prophecies. This was the beginning of what was to become known as the Babi religion. This religion sprang up in the middle of an Islamic nation. It reached its zenith in nine short years. The Bahais mark this meeting between Mullah Husayn and Sayyid Ali Muhammad as the beginning of their faith.

But not even all of the Shaikhis accepted Sayyid Ali Muhammad. Thus "the old Shaikhi school was divided into the 'New Shaikhis' and the 'Babis'."<sup>8</sup> This is not surprising, for there are three contradictory theories regarding the initial claims of the

Bab.<sup>9</sup> At any rate, the majority of the old Shaikhi school accepted him as "The Herald."

This new religion caught on very quickly after the Bab's initial proclamation. It soon spread like fire. Orthodox religious and governmental leaders condemned it from its inception. They tried to get rid of this religion by treating its adherents with contempt and by utilizing various forms of social ostracism. Such moves only fanned the flames of the movement. The new religion found its greatest reception in the arms of the lower class, but it gradually spread among the orthodox religious leaders, the merchant classes, and ultimately among the higher circles of this feudal society.<sup>10</sup> In time, many eminent scholars of the period were won over.

Finally, some orthodox religious and governmental authorities concluded that the only way that this "heretical" religion could be stamped out was to capture the Bab. (They saw him as a threat to their authority.) He was soon imprisoned and the authorities "instigated systematic massacres of his followers."<sup>11</sup> After the first of these persecutions, the Babis were compelled to take up arms to defend themselves. A full-scale war immediately erupted between this sect and the Shah. The Babis had to resort to building fortresses for themselves because the persecutions became so vicious and deadly. The abominations and

atrocities which the authorities perpetrated are almost unbelievable! "His followers were also martyred, in the most abominable ways imaginable--beheaded, hanged, blown from the mouths of cannon, burned, or chopped to pieces."<sup>12</sup> The events of this era are summarized in this statement: "The massacres of the Babis find their parallel in the bloody holidays of ancient Rome."<sup>13</sup>

By joint order of some of the religious leaders and state officials, the Bab was denounced as a heretic and instigator of rebellion. On July 9, 1850, he was shot by a firing squad of 750 soldiers, under the orders of the Grand Vizier, before a crowd of ten-thousand people. It is amazing to learn that "of the storm of bullets which had been aimed at him, not one had touched him; nay, instead of death they had brought him deliverance by cutting the ropes which bound him, so that he fell to the ground unhurt."<sup>14</sup> Despite this strange twist of fate, a second firing squad was assembled and it finished the execution forthwith.

The martyrdom of the Bab helped to spread his religion throughout the country. It grew in increasingly larger numbers. Finally, many of the Babis escaped to foreign soil in order to escape the persecutions in Persia.

About two years later, on August 15, 1852, two crazed young Babis attempted to assassinate the Shah

because they believed that he was ultimately responsible for the death of the Bab. A wave of horror swept the country. When the ecclesiastics and the state officials learned that the pair were Babis, they used that fact to discredit the entire Babi religion. They stirred up public opinion and began a new wave of persecutions which were even more horrible than the last.

The reign of terror which ensued was revolting beyond description. The spirit of revenge that animated those who had unleashed its horrors seemed insatiable. Its repercussions echoed as far as the press of Europe, branding with infamy its bloodthirsty participants.<sup>15</sup>

In 1853 a Babi by the name of Husayn Ali was awaiting execution in prison on suspicion of being a part of the attempt on the Shah's life, which was tantamount to treason. He remained in prison even after he had been proven innocent, simply because he was a Babi. The he and 150 other Babis were shifted into an old subterranean reservoir, where it was hoped that they would all die. Here he remained for four months in stocks and chains. He later described that place as chilly, damp, filthy, fever-stricken, infested with vermin, and filled with an overwhelming stench. "We were consigned for four months to a place foul beyond comparison . . ."<sup>16</sup> It was while he was in this prison that he experienced a vision of a divine revelation. In this revelation he was told that he was the High Prophet whose coming was foretold



by the Bab. He did not publicly reveal this revelation until 1863, when he formally took the title of Baha'u'llah.

After this stay in prison Baha'u'llah and his family were removed from Tehran, where the prison was located, and, along with a company of the followers of the Bab, were exiled and banished from the country forever. This began a period of exile and imprisonment which was to last for forty years. The entire group was sent to Baghdad. The authorities hoped that by physically removing him from Persia they would further weaken the remnant of Babi believers who had looked to him for leadership since the time of the Bab's death. They believed that the lack of his presence would so weaken the movement that the Babi religion would soon die out.

It was near the end of his stay in Baghdad that Husayn Ali declared his mission to the company of believers and revealed himself as the High Prophet—Baha'u'llah. This occurred on May 3, 1863. When he later announced his mission to the public, they went wild with joy. Most of Babis believed him and became Bahais, a name which they have claimed ever since.<sup>17</sup>

At this point, however, another division occurred, for a group of the Babis followed one of the Bab's disciples who was known as Subb-i-Ezal (Dawn of Eternity), who established his headquarters in Fumagista, Cyprus, and who proposed to carry on the work of the Bab in the form given to it by his master.<sup>18</sup>

After this public announcement Baha'u'llah was continually persecuted by the Islamic hierarchy and both the Persian and Turkish governments. He was soon exiled to Constantinople following his ten year imprisonment in Baghdad, but he remained there for a brief period of only four months.. Then he was moved to Adrianople where he and his family and followers remained for five years. In 1868 the Turkish regime moved Baha'u'llah and his followers to the disease-ridden prison in the fortress at Akka, Syria (now Acre, Israel). There he remained until his death.

Despite the fact that the government never withdrew the prison sentence, Baha'u'llah lived the last years of his life under conditions very different from what his enemies had hoped. Once again, a stream of visitors, people of every class and description, came from the surrounding countries to hear his teachings. And his ever-increasing followers, now known as Bahais, took the life-giving message from the Holy Land to the world outside.<sup>19</sup>

Baha'u'llah died on May 29, 1892, eight hours after sunset, at the age of 75. During his more than thirty years in exile and forty years in prison, he wrote over one hundred volumes. His family, relatives, and close followers who had accompanied him into exile were not released until 1908, sixteen years after his death.

Before his death Baha'u'llah was concerned with choosing a person to succeed him as the divine authority, one who would provide guidance for the members

of the faith. He feared that his followers would split into sects unless he personally named a leader who was to succeed him. In his will he left his eldest son, Abdu'l-Baha (which means servant of glory), as the leader of the faith. He would interpret the faith, but no more. "For at least another thousand years the Bahais believe there can be no one to bring a new Revelation."<sup>20</sup>

During Baha'u'llah's lifetime, Abdu'l-Baha was his closest companion. When his father died he became the leader of all of the Bahais, even though he was still imprisoned in the prison at Akka. He had spent almost his whole life in prison with his father. Now he directed the affairs of Bahais everywhere through his voluminous correspondence. It seems that most of the Bahais were willing to follow this new leader, no matter what he claimed for himself. But there were some who did not agree with him. Soon Mirza Muhammad Ali became the leader of the opposing faction. Almost all of the members of the family sided with Mirza and Abdu'l-Baha was left alone. He responded to their disobedience by excommunicating all who opposed him and depriving them of their living allowances. There is even conclusive evidence that on at least one occasion Abdu'l-Baha resorted to assassinating a dangerous personal enemy.<sup>21</sup> A certain Mirza Yahya died after having his throat cut.

But the Bahais have covered this up, or at least have not talked about it. Even today they still speak very highly of him as if nothing ever happened:

From the beginning of the world until today there has not been recorded any other such person as Abdu'l-Baha. Infallible because Baha'u'llah, the manifestation of God, had decreed that he be so, he was still human, although always divinely inspired and divinely motivated.<sup>22</sup>

It is also ironic that Abdu'l-Baha chose a title for himself: the Exemplar.

After Abdu'l-Baha was freed in 1908, he made extensive journeys throughout Europe and America. He delivered many lectures and speeches during this time.<sup>23</sup> He also tried to promote peace in Palestine throughout the First World War. He died in Haifa early on the morning of November 28, 1921. He in turn left a will, like his father before him, which appointed his grandson, Shoghi Effendi, as the Guardian of the Faith.

Shoghi Effendi accepted the task of heading the Bahai administration, although unwillingly at first. Throughout his administration he worked tirelessly at establishing the Bahai faith in many countries throughout the world. Perhaps one of his most important accomplishments was the volumes of translations which he made from the writings of the Bab, Baha'u'llah, and Abdu'l-Baha. He also wrote many books of his own in order to promote the Bahai faith. By the time of his death on November 4, 1957, he had

firmly established the Bahai faith on an international level. Unfortunately for the Bahais, he left neither a will nor a successor when he died.

For a time the Bahais were plunged into a panic which eventually lead to schism. Nobody knew what to do for a leader. About three weeks after his death this succession was superceded by an internationally elected assembly of nine members called the Hands of the Cause. One of the problems which they had to grapple with immediately was the claim of Charles Mason Remey, an American, as the successor to the Infallible Guardianship.<sup>24</sup> This problem was not solved until Mr. Remey was ostracized from the faith, first by the Hands of the Cause and eventually by the vast majority of the Bahais. Today the Bahai International Administration remains under the Hands.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Qa'im is an Arabic word meaning the straight, correct, authentic, or true (in respect to religion).

<sup>2</sup>William M. Miller, The Bahai Faith: Its History and Teachings (South Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1974) pp. 6 & 7.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>4</sup>The Muslims have their own calendar which is based upon the lunar year rather than the solar year. This usually accounts for any time deviations.

<sup>5</sup>Miller, Bahai Faith, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>8</sup>Dwight Donaldson, The Shi'ite Religion (London: Luzac & Company, 1933), p. 364.

<sup>9</sup>Miller, Bahai Faith, pp. 14-16.

<sup>10</sup>Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahai Publishing Company, 1950), p. 11.

<sup>11</sup>Shoghi Effendi, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahai Publishing Trust, 1952), p. ii.

<sup>12</sup>Jessyca R. Gaver, The Bahai Faith; Dawn of a New Day (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1967), p. 53.

<sup>13</sup>Effendi, Gleanings, p. iii.

<sup>14</sup>Miller, Bahai Faith, p. 42; Gaver, Bahai Faith, pp. 55-56.

<sup>15</sup>Effendi, God Passes By, p. 63.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>17</sup>Gloria Faizi, The Bahai Faith (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahai Publishing Trust, 1972), pp. 10-11.

<sup>18</sup>Donaldson, Shi'ite Religion, pp. 365-366.

<sup>19</sup>Faizi, Bahai Faith, pp. 14-15.

<sup>20</sup>Gaver, Bahai Faith, p. 76.

<sup>21</sup>Miller, Bahai Faith, pp. 183-184.

<sup>22</sup>Gaver, Bahai Faith, p. 85.

<sup>23</sup>Some of these addresses have been compiled and published under the title of Foundations of World Unity. See the Bibliography for publication data.

<sup>24</sup>Miller, Bahai Faith, pp. 319-320.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 323.

### III. ORGANIZATION

With the death of Abdu'l-Baha on November 28, 1921, the period which the Bahais call The Dispensation ended. This was the creative age of the faith, in which its foundations were laid. Upon the event of Shoghi Effendi's accession to leadership as the Guardian of the Faith, the Bahais entered into a formative period which they call the New World Order. They believe that this order is "destined to embrace in the fullness of time the whole of humanity."<sup>1</sup> This will be attained by means of the Administrative Order, which Baha'u'llah himself revealed before his death. He "revealed its principles, established its institution, appointed the person to interpret His Word, and conferred the necessary authority on the body designed to supplement and apply His legislative ordinances."<sup>2</sup> The purpose of the Order was to guarantee against disintegration and schism. However, the Bahais are by no means free of internal disputes today.

How is the faith organized today? Its formal structure is rather simple. The Bahai faith has no clergy. The functions of worship, teaching, welfare, and administration are carried out by the members

themselves, none of whom have any distinction. They are elected to administrative posts or arise voluntarily, serving according to ability and preparation.

The Bahais do not conduct formal, liturgical church services, but they do assemble on the local level every nineteen days. This event is known as the Nineteen Day Feast, and it is observed on the first day of every Bahai month. It must be noted that the Bahais have their own calendar. It consists of nineteen months, each with nineteen days (a total of 361 days), and four Intercalary Days (five in a Leap Year). The months were named after the attributes of God by the Bab himself.<sup>3</sup> These assemblies include no ritual, sermon, collection, or devotion. They consist of saying prayers and reading passages from any of the Holy Books written by the the nine messengers. Daily prayer is a must; many prayers have been written for this purpose. Even daily work, when performed in the spirit of service, is regarded as an act of worship.

The local unit (which is roughly equivalent to our own congregation) is called the Local Spiritual Assembly. These local assemblies are the basis of the Administrative Order. Abdu'l-Baha set these up as the primary unit of the Administrative Order, which is based upon the writings of Baha'u'llah. Each Local Spiritual Assembly has an administrative body of nine



persons. It can exist as long as there are nine or more adult Bahais living in a specific area. These persons are elected annually by the members of each local Bahai community. It is responsible for all the believers in the area. These local Assemblies are social institutions, not ecclesiastical. They are to promote unity and justice throughout the community. When a disagreement occurs between Bahais, it is brought before the local Assembly. Bahais are forbidden to take their disagreements into civil courts. The nature of these local assemblies was described by Shoghi Effendi as follows:

They must endeavor to promote amity and concord amongst the friends, efface every lingering trace of distrust, coolness and estrangement from every heart, and secure in its stead an active and whole-hearted co-operation for the service of the cause.

They must undertake the arrangement of the regular meetings of the friends,<sup>4</sup> the feasts, and the anniversaries, . . . .

The Bahai religion is controlled on the national level by the National Spiritual Assembly. They "are possessed of the necessary authority to enable them to insure the harmonious and efficient development of Bahai activity within their respective spheres."<sup>5</sup> The Bahais are actively organized in over 260 countries today.<sup>6</sup> Most of these countries have their own National Assembly. Each of these consists of nine people who are elected annually by delegates who represent the local Bahai communities. There is

"no nomination or propaganda of any kind, and anyone who has reached the age of twenty-one can be elected."<sup>7</sup> Voting is done by secret ballot. Each delegate votes for the person who "can best combine the necessary qualities of unquestioned loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well-trained mind, of recognized ability and mature experience."<sup>8</sup> This election is held at the national Bahai convention which is an annual affair. The National Assembly usually busies itself with matters of national importance and encourages its Local Assemblies to carry out its own affairs through the means of its own elected body. However, the authority of the National Assembly is above that of the Local Assemblies. Local assemblies are encouraged to support the decisions of the National Assembly. Intercommunication between the local and national levels of administration is constant. Local Assemblies may request guidance or help from the National Assembly whenever they have need of it. National Assemblies send out regular newsletters and correspondence concerning matters of importance to the individual Local Assemblies for the Nineteen Day Feasts. Bahais who live in an area which does not have its own Local Spiritual Assembly (a minimum of nine adult Bahais is necessary) communicate directly with their National Assembly. The National Assembly responds through correspondence and by sending them the regular newsletter.

In this way the National Assembly guides and regulates the activities of these individuals until it is possible to organize their own Local Spiritual Assembly. Regarding the leaders of the National Spiritual Assembly, Shoghi Effendi writes:

Let it be made clear to every inquiring reader that among the most outstanding and sacred duties incumbent upon those who have been called upon . . . . are those that require . . . the confidence and affection of those whom it is their privilege to serve. . . . Theirs is the duty, while retaining the sacred and exclusive right of final decision in their hands, to invite discussion, provide information, ventilate grievances, welcome advice from even the most humble and insignificant members of the Bahai family, expose their motives, set forth their plans, justify their actions, revise if necessary their verdict, foster the sense of interdependence and co-partnership, of understanding and mutual confidence between them on one hand and all local Assemblies and individual believers on the other.<sup>9</sup>

The National Spiritual Assembly here in the United States has long been a model for all other National Assemblies. It adopted a constitution in 1926 which became the archetype for all other National Assemblies.

Abdu'l-Baha also left instructions to provide for the organization of the International Spiritual Assembly, just as he did for the Spiritual Assemblies on the local and national levels. This body is to be elected by the members of the various National Spiritual Assemblies. After the death of the Guardian (Shoghi Effendi) in 1957, the faith was temporarily turned over to a committee whose twenty-seven members

are called the Hands of the Cause.<sup>10</sup> They came to handle all of the international affairs of the Bahais which were formerly handled by the Guardian. All hereditary authority in the Administrative Order ended with the Guardian's death. While he was alive, he had the sole power of the interpretation of Holy Writ. But after his death there was no offspring who could be appointed as his successor. "Abdu'l-Baha was mistaken in the supposition that there would be Guardians in his family generation after generation."<sup>11</sup> The plan which these Hands drew up was that the time had come to establish the Universal House of Justice which had been provided for in the will of Abdu'l-Baha. After several years of altercation, arrangements were made to hold a world conference for Bahais in London in 1963, the centennial anniversary of Baha'u'llah's declaration in Baghdad. National Spiritual Assemblies from 81 lands sent approximately 7,000 delegates.<sup>12</sup> At that convention nine people were elected and the Universal House of Justice came into existence.

The Universal House of Justice was ordained by Baha'u'llah. Provisions were made for it in the will of Abdu'l-Baha. Its purpose is to guide and direct and coordinate the activities of all of the National Assemblies in the world. This body was assured of divine guidance in Baha'u'llah's writings. It is "the sole legislative organ in the world-wide

Bahai community."<sup>13</sup> The House of Justice makes plans and sets goals for all Bahais which the different National Assemblies put into practice through the many Local Assemblies. The biggest difference between the House of Justice and the National and Local Assemblies is that Baha'u'llah has given the House of Justice the privilege and the authority to make any necessary laws which were not provided by Baha'u'llah himself.<sup>14</sup> But it cannot alter any of the laws which were given by Baha'u'llah. The decision of the House of Justice is final for every Bahai.

These three levels (Local Spiritual Assemblies; National Spiritual Assemblies; Universal House of Justice) of the Bahai community are all part of the Administrative Order which Baha'u'llah revealed in his writings before his death. The Bahais revere this as the beginning of the New World Order. It was organized in order to promote the Bahai faith and yet prevent schism and the internal disputes which have marked all of the earlier world religions.<sup>15</sup> The purpose of the Administrative Order is:

. . . to make possible a true and lasting unity among peoples of different races, classes, interests, characters, and inherited creeds . . . . In character, the principles of Bahai administration represent the science of cooperation; in application, they provide for a new and higher type of morality worldwide in scope . . . .<sup>16</sup>

The Bahais believe that some day their faith will

encompass the whole of humanity.<sup>17</sup>

The international headquarters of the Bahai faith is in Haifa, Israel. A number of buildings have already been constructed there, one of which contains the Universal House of Justice. The Bahais believe that Haifa will someday be the geographical center from which the entire world will be ruled.. When that day comes, the Universal House of Justice will function as a federated world government uniting all of the people of the world under the divine guidance of Baha'u'llah's teachings. All of the Bahai teachings are geared to this ultimate end.<sup>18</sup>

The financial demands of this growing world community come from voluntary contributions by members of the Bahai faith. " . . . Bahai's are unique by initiating and holding to a standard of maturity in their emphasis upon voluntary financial support accepted only from declared believers."<sup>19</sup> The Bahais consider it a privilege which is restricted to themselves. They will not accept contributions from those outside of their faith. "When non-Bahais plead to contribute financially to the Bahai funds, they are advised first that such money is used only for special charitable purposes."<sup>20</sup> Collections are never taken at Bahai meetings. Each community of Bahais establishes its own fund. The Bahais of that community also contribute to the national and international funds through

an elected treasurer. Contributions are confidential and are usually known only to the treasurer of the specific Bahai fund to which the contribution was made. Bahais are free to give whatever they can afford. No individual is to be ridiculed for failing to support his faith financially. Yet Shoghi Effendi has said:

We must be like the fountain or spring that is continually emptying itself of all that it has and is continually being refilled from an invisible source. To be continually giving out for the good of our fellows undeterred by the fear of poverty and reliant on the unfailing bounty of the Source of all wealth and all good—this is the secret of right living.<sup>21</sup>

Financial appeals for special projects are often quite successful, for Bahais feel that prayers and contributions share the same obligations and dignity. Both spring from their devotion to the Bahai faith.

Ultimately the Bahais hope to have places of worship in all localities. At present membership and resources are relatively small. In many small towns and cities meetings are held in private homes and rented halls. Some of the larger cities in this country already boast more than one Local Spiritual Assembly, and some have enough members in their area that they have been able to establish local centers. There are only a few local center, but more are being built all of the time. (St. Louis is one metropolitan center with a Bahai Community Center.) Whatever the case may be in a specific locality, the Bahais gather

together every nineteen days in order to worship, to discuss their community affairs, and, most important of all, to abide in fellowship. Whatever property they hold is held in trust.

The Bahai World Faith is still in its infancy. "The unity of this infant Faith has been put to the test more than once in the past, and each time it has emerged from the trial stronger than before."<sup>22</sup> It is not only a religion, but a society, a way of life. Its major objective, that of unifying the entire world into a spiritual oneness, as well as creating a federated world government, is as yet unaccomplished. In order to achieve this, the Bahais feel that a universal language should be learned by all in addition to one's native tongue. A universal approach to economic problems should be established in order to create a free world trade. Wars should be abolished. Poverty, as well as wealth, should be eliminated. All forms of prejudice and superstition should be ended. This can be accomplished since religion and science are not contradictory, but actually complement each other. Education is important for every Bahai because they encourage independent investigation of the truth. Everyone should face the fundamental questions of life, but no coercion should be used in order to force them to do so. This is as important for women as for men because they are completely equal. The Bahais consider



the above statements as the basis of a world society of the future, but they are all dependent upon the spiritual regeneration which must occur before mankind will be ideologically ready to apply them successfully. Humanity as a whole is still unaware of its magnificent destiny and clings to the ideals of an age which is past.

When the people of the world accept the truth of God's message and consciously work towards building a new society founded on the spiritual and social laws He has given for this day, "The Most Great Peace" will come, and that Golden Age of peace and justice foretold by the Messengers of the past will be ushered in.

Before that time, however, Baha'u'llah foretold that the means of warfare would reach such terrible proportions that the governments of the world would be forced to come to some agreement regarding the abolition of war. When this stage is reached, He said, "The Lesser Peace" will be established—a peace which will serve as an introduction to the time when God's Plan for mankind will be accepted in its entirety and His rule on earth will be universally recognized.<sup>23</sup>

Bahais believe that some day their faith will include all humanity. All history focuses upon that ultimate goal.

<sup>1</sup> Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Baha'u'llah (New York: Bahai Publishing Committee, 1938), p. 144.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>3</sup> John E. Esslemont, Baha'u'llah and the New Era (New York: Bahai Publishing Committee, 1938), pp. 217-218; Gloria Faizi, The Bahai Faith (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahai Publishing Trust, 1972), pp. 98-99; For a list of the Bahai months with their names and first days, see appendix 1.

<sup>4</sup>Esslemont, Baha'u'llah and the New Era, pp. 221-223; Faizi, The Bahai Faith, pp. 110-112; For a list of the Bahai Feast Days with their names and dates, see appendix 2.

<sup>5</sup>Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahai Publishing Company, 1944), p. 332; for a list of the duties of the Spiritual Assembly, see appendix 3.

<sup>6</sup>Glenn A. Shook, Mysticism, Science, and Revelation, (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahai Publishing Trust, 1964), p. 143.

<sup>7</sup>Faizi, The Bahai Faith, p. 100.

<sup>8</sup>Shoghi Effendi, Principles of Bahai Administration (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahai Publishing Trust, 1963), p. 63.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 79-80.

<sup>10</sup>The story of the problem of succession and its consequences following the death of Shoghi Effendi provides a bit of comic relief in the history of the Bahais. For a documented account of those happenings, see Chapter 14, "The Rule of the People", in Miller's The Bahai Faith: Its History and Teachings.

<sup>11</sup>Miller, The Bahai Faith, p. 309.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 327.

<sup>13</sup>Effendi, God Passes By, p. 326.

<sup>14</sup>Faizi, The Bahai Faith, p. 102.

<sup>15</sup>Unfortunately, a close inspection of the leadership of the faith will show that this has not been the case. There were disputes during the incumbency of Abdu'l-Baha as well as Shoghi Effendi. Some of the problems have never been resolved.

<sup>16</sup>Esslemont, Baha'u'llah and the New Era, pp. 317-318.

<sup>17</sup>What the Bahais seem to be striving for, although they never come out and say it, is a utopian society—a sort of a paradise on earth. This should not be surprising since they do not believe in the existence of evil. Bahais think that they will ultimately attain perfection.

<sup>18</sup>The Bahais sincerely believe that all people will finally come to the realization that the Bahai faith is the only true faith, given enough time.

<sup>19</sup>Jessyca R. Gaver, The Bahai Faith: Dawn of a New Day (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1967), p. 39.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 39-40.

<sup>22</sup>Faizi, The Bahai Faith, p. 108.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

#### IV. A DOCTRINAL ANALYSIS

After delving into the history and organization of the Bahai religion, we have attained a fundamental knowledge of this relatively new world religion. But we must not stop here. In order to comprehend the essence of this religion we must now probe into the doctrine of the Bahais. We have seen how this religion began in the midst of severe persecution. We have seen how it progressed, in its short history, into the organization which exists throughout the world today.

In every world religion there lies an intrinsic value which somehow captures the heart and soul of man, an inherent quality which man is willing to believe and have faith in. Man grapples with this overwhelming notion, including these values and qualities, by incorporating them and arranging them into an understandable whole around his concept of God. He also includes in this whole his understanding of his relationship to other men. The Bahais have a rather unique understanding of the God-to-man and man-to-man relationships. There can be no doubt as to the sincerity of their beliefs. The bitter trials

and persecutions which they so zealously endured in the early days of their religion quickly remove any shadow of doubt. They were willing to fight and die for their faith in the teachings of the Bab and Baha-'u'llah. What is there in the teachings of the Bahais which motivated them to suffer such persecution? We must examine their doctrine in order to grasp and understanding of the essence of the Bahai World Faith.

One thing must be noted about the doctrinal stance of the Bahais. They have no set doctrines or written corpus of beliefs which their members must adhere to in order to maintain their membership in the religion. They are diametrically opposed to any mandatory affirmation of accepted doctrine such as we have in The Book of Concord.

No man should follow blindly his ancestors and forefathers. Nay, each must see with his own eyes, hear with his own ears, and investigate Truth in order that he may find the Truth; whereas the religion of forefathers and ancestors is based upon blind imitation, . . . man should investigate the Truth.<sup>1</sup>

They also shy away from things such as creeds because they regard them as being too severely limited by a historical context. "Intellectual assent to a creed does not make a man a Bahai, nor does outward rectitude of conduct."<sup>2</sup> It is precisely because of this outlook that they are enjoying such success among the youth of our country, especially those of college age.

Unfortunately this openness restricts any attempt at an organized study of their beliefs. To put it bluntly, the Bahais have no use for formal doctrine. This has been a constant hindrance to my study of the subject. The Bahais are only concerned with studying their sacred writings so that they may gain a more thorough understanding of God.<sup>3</sup> Through the application of these teachings (which they have gleaned from all of the sacred writings) to their daily lives, the Bahais hope to progress spiritually.<sup>4</sup>

In order to understand Bahai beliefs one must delimit the formal principle, the source of doctrine, of the Bahai faith. The Bahais maintain that the sacred writings of each one of the Prophets have the same underlying principle, providing that they are interpreted correctly. The Bahais have managed to synthesize the teachings of nine different world religions into one vast, all-inclusive, unified system. How have they done this? What are their principles of interpretation, if any? Do they believe in any type of hermeneutics whatsoever? To answer these questions one must first examine the Bahai concept of revelation.

The Bahai notion of revelation is very fluid. (When the Lutheran doctrine of Holy Scripture is compared to it, our doctrine seems static in nature.) The Bahais profess a progressive concept of revelation.

Each and every one of the nine messengers was inspired by God. There is a unity in their writings which draws them together.

From the earliest times God has, through His prophets, revealed His Truth to the world. Although the persons of these teachers have been different, yet the truth which they all taught has been the same. Each revealed God in the measure that the people of his time were able to receive, yet it was the One Light of God which shone through them all.<sup>5</sup>

Each one brought about a spiritual regeneration within the lives of his converts. This could have been accomplished only if each Prophet was divinely inspired. Therefore, the revelation of each one of the Prophets has brought results among men.

Divine Revelation has its individual and general effect upon man. Through it individual souls are quickened with divine life, while its general effect—the outcome of the former—is seen in the unity and brotherhood which faith in God creates between men.<sup>6</sup>

Thus the prophecy of every one of the messengers is truly a divine revelation. Yet none of these prophecies is absolute; all are relative to the others. There is a progression in these revelations given by God through his messengers. Shoghi Effendi writes:

The Revelation proclaimed by Baha'u'llah, His followers believe, is divine in origin, all embracing in scope, broad in its outlook, scientific in its method, humanitarian in its principles, and dynamic in the influence it exerts on the hearts and minds of men. The mission of the Founder of their Faith, they conceive it to be to proclaim that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that divine Revelation is continuous and progressive, that the Founders of all past religions,

though different in the non-essential aspects of their teachings, "abide in the same Tabernacle, soar in the same heaven, are seated upon the same throne, utter the same speech, and proclaim the same Faith."<sup>7</sup>

It has been shown that the prophecy of every one of the messengers is truly a divine revelation. Why were they given? Who do they all point to?

Together with the prophecies of the different religions relating to the establishment of a divine dispensation amongst men, are prophecies relative to the coming of a great teacher and prophet, who would establish unity between the peoples of divers religions. These prophecies have all been fulfilled in the coming of Baha'u'llah, and the Bahai Movement, which sprang therefrom, is that nucleus of Divine unity which will grow and expand until this earth shall indeed become the vineyard of the Lord, and its people the good husbandmen thereof.<sup>8</sup>

If this is the case, how then are all of these co-equal prophecies interpreted?

The Bahais are the first to admit that the interpretation of prophecy is a very difficult task. This is the point at which their concept of progressive revelation fits into their scheme of reality. They believe that

according to the revealed writings themselves, many of the prophecies were given in such a form that they could not be fully understood until the fulfillment came, and even then, only by those who were pure in heart and free from prejudice. (Daniel 12:4-10)<sup>9</sup>

God did not fully reveal the interpretation of the prophecies in the language of men, in terms that man could comprehend, and they themselves were not fully



aware of the entire meaning of their own prophecies. None but the appointed Messenger was capable of the complete revelation and disclosure of the prophetic parables. Who was the appointed Messenger? Who is the embodiment of all of the divine prophecies? The Bahai answer is the last and most recent of all of the Prophets.

The life and utterances of Baha'u'llah testify that he is the Promised One of all the Holy Books, who has power to break the seals of the prophecies and to pour forth the "Sealed choice wine" of the divine mysteries.<sup>10</sup>

Baha'u'llah has revealed all of this in his writings. He has also laid the foundations for the New World Order by revealing the divine plan behind his Administrative Order as revealed to the members of the Bahai World Faith. All of the sacred writings of the Prophets, and virtually all of reality, must be interpreted through the writings of Baha'u'llah. He is the keystone for their entire system. Baha'u'llah is the elemental factor behind the prospect of the unification of all mankind.

The writings of Baha'u'llah are of prime importance. The most important of them all is the Kitab-i-Aqdas. How did it come into being?

In Akka he worked out a system of doctrine which was radically different from that of the followers of the Koran, and that was also not restricted to the beliefs of those who accepted the Beyan. The principal one of his written works was called the Kitab-i-Aqdas or

"The Most Holy Book," and for this book he claimed divine origin.<sup>11</sup>

This book was not printed for quite some time after it was written because Baha'u'llah was a prisoner and it was impossible for him to publish a book. He could not even make known his claims for fear of reprisal. After a period of several years his son and a friend revised the Aqdas and took it and some of Baha'u'llah's other writings to Bombay to be printed. Thus in 1890. The Kitab-i-Aqdas, the Kitab-i-Iqan, the Kitab-i-Mubin, the Kitab-i-Iqtidar, and several other books were published for the first time. Despite the importance of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, it was not translated into English in its entirety until 1961! Even the headquarters of the Bahai Faith in America has stated that they have never had a copy of the book!<sup>12</sup> The Kitab-i-Iqan was first translated into English by Ali Kuli Khan, but his work carries no date. It was translated into English by Shoghi Effendi in 1960 and titled The Book of Certitude. "The chief purpose of the Iqan was to prove that the Bab was a Major Manifestation of God."<sup>13</sup> The chief purpose of the Aqdas, Baha'u'llah's most important book, is to give all of the laws upon which the new society is built. It also includes many exhortations to believe and obey these laws. The Aqdas is small, being about the size of the Gospel of Mark. In view of the importance of the Kitab-i-Aqdas and its

unique place as the cornerstone of the New World Order, it is astounding that it is referred to so little in all of the Bahai Literature! Many of the writings of Abdu'l-Baha and even of Shoghi Effendi receive much more space in Bahai publications than the Aqdas! There has never even been an authorized translation.<sup>14</sup>

Baha'u'llah states in his works that science and religion agree. In fact, Baha'u'llah praised science because it provides a firm basis for religious understanding. Religion and science complement one another; an understanding of this is necessary for the unification of mankind.

Perfect harmony between religion and science is the sine qua non of the higher life for humanity. When that is achieved, and every child is trained not only in the study of the sciences and arts, but equally in love to all mankind and in radiant acquiescence to the Will of God as revealed in the progress of evolution and the teachings of the prophets, then, and not till then, shall the Kingdom of God come and His Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven; then, and not till then, shall the Most Great Peace shed its blessings on the world.<sup>15</sup>

The Bahais do not recognize the dichotomy between religious and secular knowledge as it is often enunciated in the Western world.

After studying all of the available primary and secondary sources about the Bahai faith, it is easy to see that there is one current which runs throughout all Bahai literature, namely, unity. The

essential message of the Bahai faith is the unity of humanity: the combination of all religions, classes, peoples, races, and nations in a spirit of ~~understand-~~ing and unity of purpose under the guidance of God. "Baha'u'llah's mission in the world is to bring about Unity—Unity of all mankind in and through God."<sup>16</sup> "Unity—unity of mankind, and of all created beings in God—is the main theme of his teaching."<sup>17</sup> The entire Bahai religion revolves around this one point. This goal is reflected in the organization of the religion. The ultimate goal of the Bahais is to unite the whole world into a spiritual, philosophical, psychological, political, governmental, economic, ideological, and scientific oneness. Thus, the Bahai faith is universalistic to the farthest extremes. The essential message of the Bahai faith is the unity of mankind. The Bahais are also syncretistic, enveloping almost all of the world religions.

A Bahai community differs from other voluntary gatherings in that its foundation is so deeply laid and broadly extended that it can include any sincere soul. Whereas other associations are exclusive, in effect if not in intention, and from method if not from ideal, Bahai association is inclusive, shutting the gates of fellowship to no sincere soul.<sup>18</sup>

Yet the Bahais recognize the fact that they are growing very slowly because people are accustomed to exclusiveness and division.

It was mentioned earlier that the Bahai conceptions of the God-to-man and the man-to-man relationships are completely different from our own. They believe in three different levels of existence. These levels are called stations. They are, in descending order: 1) God, 2) messenger, and 3) man. The station of the messenger should not be confused with our own concept of angels; messengers are very much different, combining the aspects of both man and God. The Bahais often refer to them as the Prophets, which is just another name for the station of the messenger. They will be discussed more fully below. We must first explore the Bahai concept of God.

God is supreme; he is the highest station. He is not trinitarian in nature, but rather a spiritual oneness (unitarian).

The Bahai teaching is at one with science and philosophy in declaring the essential nature of God to be entirely beyond human comprehension . . . . God comprehends all; he cannot be comprehended.<sup>19</sup>

He is a divine essence who is unknowable. The knowledge of God comes to us through the Prophets. All of man's attempts at understanding God and enumerating his attributes are fruitless.<sup>20</sup> Man is incapable of truly knowing God.. "The qualities we attribute to God have their origin in our own limited understanding."<sup>21</sup> Man thinks that he understands God, but this knowledge is very much inferior to God's actual being.

Just as a mirror reflects the light of the sun, so do the Prophets reflect the attributes and perfections of God, or we may say that the Prophets manifest the attributes and perfections of God.<sup>22</sup>

Baha'u'llah reestablished and reaffirmed the covenant between God and man, that glorious promise as recorded in the various world religions of the past (including Christianity). Under this covenant God agrees to guide man in his spiritual progress. Man loves God and follows his laws as given by the messengers.

The messengers, or Prophets, are on the second level of existence. They have a unique station, somewhere between God and man. However, no matter how far man may advance, he can never reach the station of a Prophet. Perhaps the best explanation of this station has been given by Baha'u'llah:

And since there can be no tie of direct intercourse to bind the one true God with His creation, and no resemblance whatever can exist between the transient and the Eternal, the contingent and the Absolute, He [God] hath ordained that in every age and dispensation a pure and stainless Soul [a Prophet] be made manifest in the kingdoms of earth and heaven. Unto this subtle, this mysterious and ethereal Being He hath assigned a twofold nature; the physical, pertaining to the world of matter, and the spiritual, which is born of the substance of God himself.<sup>23</sup>

The Prophets are the divine link between God and man. God has separated himself from man, but not completely and eternally. The messengers have a human and a divine side; they combine the aspects of God and man.

Each time a new Prophet came into the world he revived man's spiritual life. He does this in a new revelation of God. The Prophets reflect God as a mirror reflects the sun. The Bahais believe that God sent the various messengers into the world at certain periods within time whenever mankind was in need of increased guidance. These Prophets came to man in different periods within history. Yet all came with the same, unifying, basic truths. But each Prophet came with different social laws fit only for his time in order to bring about a spiritual regeneration. By doing this, each and every messenger has created not only a new spiritual order, but also a new social order.<sup>24</sup> The Bahais maintain that the sacred books of each Prophet have the same underlying principle, providing that they are interpreted correctly.

How many messengers have there been in the history of the world? Who were they? The Bahais believe that God has given nine different Prophets to mankind. They are listed below in chronological order along with the world religion which each founded:

<u>Messenger</u>	<u>Religion</u>
1. UNKNOWN	Sabaeen
2. Krishna	Hinduism
3. Moses	Judaism
4. Zoroaster	Zoroastrianism
5. Buddha	Buddhism
6. Jesus Christ	Christianity
7. Muhammad	Islam
8. Bab	Babism
9. Baha'u'llah	Bahaism

The Bahais deeply revere all of these Prophets, the founders of the revealed world religions, as part of God's great plan of progressive revelation. These two points are repeatedly emphasized in the Bahai literature: 1) The day of revelation has not ceased. 2) No Prophet is superior to the others.<sup>25</sup> Each messenger has been the inspiration and cause of the civilization which followed his revelation. However, the Bahais deny the authenticity of the numerous sects and denominations which have grown out of the religions founded by these messengers. These sects are a perversion of the teachings of the prophets. Since Baha'u'llah is the most recent of the divine revelations, the Bahais will not join any of the religions stemming from the Prophets who preceded Baha'u'llah. They accept Baha'u'llah as the only messenger of God who fulfilled all of the ancient promises found in the sacred books of the other messengers.<sup>26</sup> He alone was sent to unify all of mankind spiritually. However, the writings of all of the Prophets are on an equal level with one another; they are all inspired by God.

Man is on the third and lowest level of existence.

Man has always existed somewhere in the universe. This earth evolved, and in its early stages man did not exist upon it, but the species known as man did exist somewhere in the universe. Man evolved from a lower form,



but from the beginning he was potentially man. He is a distinct species.<sup>27</sup>

Man has both a soul and a body. His soul or human spirit is a creation of God. It "emanates from God."<sup>28</sup> Man's purpose on earth is to love and worship God, to try to gain knowledge of him by studying the writings of the messengers, and, through the application of these teachings to daily life, to progress spiritually. At death this progress will be continued by the soul in the after-life.<sup>29</sup> The application of these teachings to one's daily life is the way in which one's spiritual achievement is measured. This is much different than the placement of the soul in either heaven or hell for eternity.

The Bahais realize that there will be a life after death. In this after-life the soul of a man retains its identity and is immortal. After his life on earth has come to an end, a man progresses through a series of spiritual worlds, each one being closer to the creator. Finally, man's soul will attain the presence of God. Baha'u'llah regards

the descriptions of Heaven and Hell given in some of the older religious writings as symbolic, like the Biblical story of the Creation, and not literally true, . . . . . Heaven is the condition of spiritual life, and Hell that of spiritual death. A man may be either in Heaven or in Hell while still in the body.<sup>30</sup>

The rewards of the next world are the perfections and the peace attained only when one comes into the presence of God.

The Bahai concept of sin is very different from ours. Sin is conceived of as an omission—not acting in love toward your fellow man. It receives very little space in Bahai literature, and rightfully so. It is a relatively unimportant doctrine. That is because the Bahais believe that man's nature is not sinful. Man is not sinful because there is no evil within him.

According to Bahai philosophy it follows from the doctrine of the unity of God that there can be no such thing as positive evil. There can be only one Infinite. If there were any other power in the universe outside of or opposed to the One, then the One would not be infinite.<sup>31</sup>

Evil is always lack of life. If the lower side of man's nature is disproportionately developed, the remedy is not less life for that side, but more life for the higher side, so that the balance may be restored.<sup>32</sup>

Therefore, since man is not basically evil or sinful, his human nature can change for the better. Sin and evil are not inherent in the nature of mankind. They are more like a condition which man is able to overcome by himself. He is able to change his human nature for the better. Once a man understands the divine revelation of Baha'u'llah properly, he will refrain from his sinful ways and strive to do good toward his fellow man. The purpose of life is not to earn some kind of a salvation; man's purpose is to progress spiritually by studying the teachings of Baha'u'llah. Then sometime in the afterlife he will

finally attain the presence of God.

With this type of understanding about sin and the afterlife, what do the Bahais do with the concept of resurrection? They have no need for it. Baha'u'llah interprets Christ's teaching about the resurrection from the dead in a symbolical manner. The resurrection has nothing to do with the gross physical body. Once a body is dead it decomposes and its atoms will never come together again into the same body.<sup>33</sup> The resurrection is a spiritual renewal in man in which he awakens from a dormant spiritual condition and enters into a new era.

The Day of Resurrection is not a day of twenty-four hours, but an era which has now begun and will last as long as the present world-cycle continues. It will continue when all traces of the present civilization will have been wiped off the surface of the globe.<sup>34</sup>

The Bahais are totally unconcerned with a literal interpretation of resurrection. Their one and only concern is the unity of all of mankind. Given enough time, that will occur here on earth. Unification is the focal point of their very being. All other doctrines are ~~second-rate~~.

The Bahai faith contains standards of individual conduct which are included by Baha'u'llah in his writings. The Bahai ethical precepts uphold the cooperation and loyalty of each nation, race, sect, and individual to all mankind. They are based upon

the presupposition that all people, without exception, are equal. Some of these tenets are: love of God, love of humanity, love of all individuals, courtesy, justice, humility, honesty, and trustworthiness. Unclean habits which are detrimental to a pure life and healthy body are expressly forbidden; this includes smoking, drinking alcoholic beverages, and the use of harmful drugs like heroin. Gossip, backbiting, and all kinds of prejudice, especially racial prejudice, are strictly prohibited. Instead, Bahais are encouraged to involve themselves in a useful profession, trade, or art.

The Bahai teachings concerning marriage are designed to suit the cultures of both the East and the West. Monogamy is the only form of marriage which is recognized. Before a couple is married, they must have the permission of all of the living parents involved whether the parents themselves are Bahais or not. Divorce is frowned upon. It is tolerated only if the individuals involved are in disagreement after a year of trial separation. Professional celibacy is not an option for a Bahai since there is no clergy. It is favorable for married couples to have children. Since universal education is favored by the Bahais, all children must be given an education by their parents. Most Bahais in the United States believe that this must include a college

education. It is the duty of the parents to pay for their child's education.

There are some new teachings in the Bahai faith which have never been included in any previous world religion as a basis of doctrine. Here is a list of beliefs given by Baha'u'llah which conform with the present age and the breaking through of the New World Order:

1. Oneness of mankind
2. Independent investigation of the truth
3. Common foundation of all religion
4. Harmony of science and religion
5. Equality of the sexes
6. Elimination of all prejudice
7. Universal compulsory education
8. Spiritual solution of economic problems
9. Universal auxiliary language
10. One world government
11. Universal peace
12. Religion: cause of unity and harmony
13. Universal religion
14. Guidelines to prevent schism<sup>35</sup>

This is what the Bahais are working toward. They believe that all of the above statements will be achieved eventually in the new era which Baha'u'llah has brought about. When they are all achieved, mankind will be completely unified into the spiritual oneness which Baha'u'llah has foretold.

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<sup>1</sup>Charles M. Remy, Bahai Teaching (Washington, D.C.: J. D. Milans & Sons, 1917), pp. 2-3.

<sup>2</sup>J. E. Esslemont, Baha'u'llah and The New Era (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahai Publishing Committee, 1937), p. 92.

<sup>3</sup>Gloria Faizi, The Bahai Faith: An Introduction. (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahai Publishing Trust, 1972), p. 47.

- <sup>4</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>5</sup>Remey, Bahai Teaching, p. 8.
- <sup>6</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup>Bahai Teachings for a World Faith (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahai Publishing Trust, 1972), p. 21.
- <sup>8</sup>Remey, Bahai Teaching, pp. 9-10.
- <sup>9</sup>Esslemont, The New Era, p. 257
- <sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 258.
- <sup>11</sup>Dwight M. Donaldson, The Shi'ite Religion: A History of Islam in Persia and Irak (London: Luzac & Company, 1933), p. 366.
- <sup>12</sup>William M. Miller, The Bahai Faith: Its History and Teachings (South Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1974), p. 143. Miller discusses these works at some length in his book.
- <sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 84.
- <sup>14</sup>For a summary of the Kitab-i-Aqdas see Miller, The Bahai Faith, chapter 8, pp. 144-159. A complete translation of the Aqdas appears as Appendix 1 in his book.
- <sup>15</sup>Esslemont, The New Era, p. 256
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 57.
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 254.
- <sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 318.
- <sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 245. Here the Bahais seem to have borrowed their concept of God from Islam.
- <sup>20</sup>Yet the Bab—a messenger, not a man—was able to do so. He named the nineteen months of the Babi year after the attributes of God. See Appendix 1 for that list.
- <sup>21</sup>Glenn A. Shook, Mysticism, Science, and Revelation (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahai Publishing Trust, 1964), p. 11.
- <sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 13. Here again this concept seems to have some connection with the finer nuances related to the concept of God in Islam.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Remey, Bahai Teaching, p. 9.

<sup>27</sup>Shook, Mysticism, Science, and Revelation, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 9. This concept seems to parallel Gnostic belief.

<sup>29</sup>A more extensive explanation can be found in "Life after Death," in Gloria Faizi's The Bahai Faith, pp. 54-57.

<sup>30</sup>Esslemont, The New Era, pp. 231-232.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 238.

<sup>33</sup>Faizi, The Bahai Faith, p. 55.

<sup>34</sup>Esslemont, The New Era, p. 272.

<sup>35</sup>Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahai Publishing Trust, 1944), p. ix.

## V. AN EVALUATION

The Bahai World Faith boasts a following of loyal believers in over 333 sovereign states, territories, and islands. Its literature has already been translated into over 501 languages.<sup>1</sup> That is quite an achievement for a religion which is little more than a century old. It is truly a religion of the world in this modern age. One cannot help but marvel at the wide range of beliefs which the Bahais espouse. It is obvious to all that the Bahais are concerned with the welfare of the total man, of each and every individual soul. This concern for others is evident within their ethical system. Bahaism is a religion which truly realizes the equality of all individuals, regardless of sex, race, caste, social standing, or talent, and actually practices what it preaches.

Yet I cannot help but question the viability of this faith. Despite the fact that the Bahais are organized throughout the world, the total number of Bahais is relatively small. This is evidenced in our own country by the fact that most people have never heard of the Bahai faith, or, if they have, they have never met a Bahai believer. How many Bahais are there?



Bahai sources report that as of April 21, 1970, there are 23,879 members of the Faith in the U.S.A., excluding Alaska and Hawaii, of whom 5,000 are missing. There was a net increase of 3,219 members in the preceding year.<sup>2</sup>

Bahaism has apparently grown to a certain level and stopped. It seems to have reached its peak; a stagnation has set in.

In my own mind there are three reasons for this leveling off. First, the faith in its present-day form seems to exalt the intellectual aspects and suppress the emotional. As a result, Bahaism tends to elicit its members from among those who might be labeled as intellectuals. The rapid growth of this faith among college students gives credence to this supposition. Secondly, the Bahai faith originated in the East. Thus, it has been heavily influenced by Oriental thought and philosophy. This factor seems to have brought Bahaism into disfavor with Westerners. The average person knows little or nothing concerning Eastern thought and consequently distrusts it. This has cast a stigma of wariness over Bahaism. Thirdly, and most devastating of all, is the fact that Bahais do not engage in any proselytizing. This is a direct outgrowth of their belief in the independent investigation of the truth. Since each man must learn for himself, Bahais do not actively seek out new members.

As much as I admire the sincerity of the Bahais and their ethic of universality, I abhor their theology, if you can call it that. Bahaism is excessively universalistic and syncretistic. As logical as the Bahais claim to be, their concept of hermeneutics, which they must necessarily apply unevenly to all of the sacred books of the world religions, is the most haphazard and illogical mess I have ever encountered. Whenever there are any problems with the text, they label the passage as allegorical or symbolical and overlook it. Consequently, they have cut the heart out of the Bible, let alone any of the canonical books of the other world religions. The Bahais must necessarily interpret these texts for their own advantage. The formal principle of theology, as we Lutherans know it, is totally void in the Bahai system.

The material principle, the Gospel, is missing in this faith. The Bahais have no need for any kind of Gospel. In the end, that is what separates the Christian faith from Bahaism or any other faith—the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Bahaism needs no saving Gospel because it, like every other religion save Christianity, is a religion of the Law.

By trying to envelop all of mankind the Bahais have lost the essence of faith. Believing in everything is believing in nothing. In everything there is nothing.

<sup>1</sup>Bahai Answers. (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahai Publishing Trust, 1972), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>William M. Miller, The Bahai Faith: Its History and Teachings (South Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1974), p. 347, Note 38.

## Appendix 1

### THE BAHAI CALENDAR

The Bahai year consists of 19 months of 19 days each. To that total of 361 days are added four Intercalary Days (five in a Leap Year) between the eighteenth and nineteenth months in order to adjust the calendar to the solar year. The Bab named the months after the attributes of God. The Bahai New Year is astronomically fixed and begins at the March equinox (March 21). Nineteen Day Feasts are held on the first day of each of the months.

MONTH	NAME	FIRST DAY
1st	Splendor	March 21
2nd	Glory	April 9
3rd	Beauty	April 28
4th	Grandeur	May 17
5th	Light	June 5
6th	Mercy	June 24
7th	Words	July 13
8th	Perfection	August 1
9th	Names	August 20
10th	Might	September 8
11th	Will	September 27
12th	Knowledge	October 16
13th	Power	November 4
14th	Speech	November 23
15th	Questions	December 12
16th	Honor	December 31
17th	Sovereignty	January 19
18th	Dominion	February 7
	Intercalary Days	Feb. 26 to March 1
19th	Loftiness	March 2

The Bab emphasized the importance of the new dispensation which he heralded by establishing a new calendar. The Bahais think that a new era began when the Bab made his declaration in 1844.

(This chart is taken from John E. Esslemont's Baha'u'llah and The New Era, p. 218.)

Appendix 2

BAHAI HOLY DAYS

There are nine special days in each year on which the Bahais refrain from any kind of work.

March 21	New Year's Day. This is also a day when a period of fasting ends.
April 21, April 29, May 2	These are the most important festival days for Bahais. During a twelve day period in 1863 Baha'u'llah openly declared his mission. It is called the Declaration of Baha'u'llah.
May 23	The Declaration of the Bab. In 1844 he revealed his mission to his first disciple.
May 29	The Passing of Baha'u'llah. He died in 1892 in the Holy Land.
July 9	The Martyrdom of the Bab. He was killed by a firing squad in 1850.
October 20	The Birth of the Bab. He was born in 1819
November 12	The Birth of Baha'u'llah. He was born in 1817.

(This chart is taken from Gloria Faizi's The Bahai Faith: An Introduction, pp. 110-112.)

## Appendix 3

### DUTIES OF THE SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

One should always bear in mind that Bahai Administration is a means through which the spiritual aims and principles of Baha'u'llah find expression in the world. Bahais in every locality thus have a sacred obligation toward humanity as a whole. Among their duties are:

1. To provide ways and means for bringing the Message of Baha'u'llah to the attention of those who have not heard it.
2. To safeguard the faith against people who may wish to misrepresent or misinterpret its teachings.
3. To promote love and unity among the members of their community.
4. To extend their help to the poor, the sick, the disabled, the orphan, the widow, with no regard to color, caste, and creed.
5. To promote the material and spiritual enlightenment of young people.
6. To provide the means for the education of children.
7. To maintain regular correspondence with other Bahai centers throughout the world, exchange with them news of their activities, and share the glad tidings they receive with all their fellowworkers.
8. To encourage and stimulate the development of various Bahai publications.
9. To arrange regular meetings of Bahais, and organize gatherings for the purpose of promoting the social, intellectual, and spiritual interests of their fellowmen.

These are the important obligations of every Spiritual Assembly, whether Local or National.

(These duties are taken from Gloria Faizi's The Bahai Faith: An Introduction, pp. 92-93.)

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