

The Bahá'í Faith 1957-1988: A Survey of Contemporary Developments

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This paper gives a general account of the developments in the Bahá'í Faith over the last three decades. The period began with the Bahá'í Faith as a little-known religion with a hereditary leadership of predominantly Iranian membership but with some spread to the West. At the present time the religion has been transformed into a much better known religion led by an elected council. It has increased some 20-fold in numbers and is now world-wide in membership. The major structural changes involved as the previous hereditary leadership at the international level was converted into the leadership of an elected council are analysed. The growth and development of the religion over this period are described and some statistical information is given. The central concerns of the religion during this time are described in terms of a number of *motifs*: polar, legalism, millenarianism, social reformism, universalism, liberalism, and martyrdom and sacrifice. An attempt is made to analyse some of the present problems facing the Bahá'í community, both in terms of the persecutions that it suffers as well as the problems presented by its successful expansion, and to describe the ways in which it copes with these.

INTRODUCTION

The Baha'i Faith represents an interesting example of contemporary religious change.^[1] Originating as a sectarian movement within nineteenth century Iranian Shi'i Islam, the Bahá'í Faith has developed into a religion of considerable scope and dynamism. Whilst elements of its Shi'i origins are clearly discernible in its corpus of beliefs and practices, the religion has transcended its Islamic roots. It is now a distinctive and independent religious movement, whose leaders claim for it the status of a new world religion. Validation for this claim may perhaps be found in the religion's impressive record of

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expansion.^[2] No longer confined to the Middle East, the Baha'is have established groups or communities in almost all of the countries of the world. Drawn from a great variety of religious and ethnic backgrounds, there are now in excess of four million Baha'is in the world. Of these, fewer than one in ten represent the religion's original Iranian constituency.

Academic research on Baha'i has not kept track with these developments. In the West, initial scholarly interest in the movement flourished from the 1880s through to the 1910s. Thereafter there followed a lengthy period of scholarly neglect. This was brought to an end in the 1970s, the past 15 years or so witnessing a revival in Baha'i studies. This revival notwithstanding, few writers beyond the immediate circle of those involved in Baha'i studies seem to be aware of recent developments in the religion. The image of the Baha'i Faith which generally pertains is still that of an Iranian-based religion, although recognition of a significant American following is sometimes also made. This 'Iranian image' has been accentuated by the publicity accorded to the recent persecutions of Baha'is in Iran.

The purpose of the present article is to give a general account of developments in the Baha'i Faith over the past three decades, a period which has witnessed a number of major changes in the religion's leadership and organization; demographic base and distribution; and central concerns. We will also attempt to analyse the main problems and prospects that now confront it.

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION

The starting point for our survey is 1957, the year of the death of Shoghi Effendi Rabbani (b. 1897), the last of the hereditary Baha'i leaders regarded as divinely guided. In the 1860s, the Iranian notable, Mirza Husayn 'Ali Nuri (1817-1892) had made his claim to be a messenger or 'Manifestation' of God, taking the religious title Baha'u'llah (Glory of God). Before his death, he had appointed his eldest son, 'Abbas Effendi (1844-1921), who took the title 'Abdu'l-Baha (servant of Baha), to be the leader of his followers and the 'centre' of his covenant. 'Abdu'l-Baha in turn appointed his eldest grandson Shoghi Effendi as 'Guardian of the Cause of God' (*wali amru'llah*). He was to be the first of a projected line of hereditary 'Guardians'.

Each of these transitions in leadership had been fairly readily accepted by the majority of Baha'is. There had been factional opposition at each stage, but this had not been significant in numbers nor long-lasting, principally because in each case the succession

had been clearly designated in writing. The main effect of the opposition was probably to emphasize to the majority of Baha'is the importance of 'firmness in the Covenant', and hence to reinforce the role of the hereditary leadership.

The situation in 1957 was different. Shoghi Effendi died unexpectedly during a visit to London, leaving no will and having appointed no successor.

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It was potentially a major crisis. Shoghi Effendi had no children, and he himself had previously excommunicated his siblings and cousins for challenging his authority. There was no apparent way in which the line of succession could be continued. Those who assumed leadership of the movement at this time were the 'Hands of the Cause of God'. This group of 27 individuals had recently been appointed by Shoghi Effendi (between 1952 and 1957) and had been designated by him as 'Chief Stewards' of the Faith. In this capacity, the Hands instituted what was effectively a six-year interregnum, a period in which they oversaw the plans which had already been put in train by Shoghi Effendi. They announced that at the end of this period (1963), the Universal House of Justice would be established. Authorized in the writings of Baha'u'llah, this institution would again guarantee that 'the Cause' was in receipt of divine guidance.

At first these declarations were accepted throughout the Baha'i world, but in 1960 a significant movement of opposition emerged. Charles Mason Remey, a leading American Baha'i, who was both one of the Hands of the Cause and president of the International Baha'i Council,^[3] proclaimed himself to be the second Guardian. Rejected by his fellow Hands and the overwhelming majority of Baha'is, Remey was expelled from the Baha'i Faith. Nevertheless, his claim did gain significant minority support in some countries, notably France, the United States and Pakistan. However, Remey's followers soon became divided into a number of antagonistic factions, and by the time of his death (in 1974), the number of Baha'is who recognized his claims had greatly diminished. A few Remeyite splinter-groups continue to operate in the United States, albeit ignored by their erstwhile co-religionists.^[4]

For Baha'is, 1963 witnessed the reinstatement of direct divine guidance. In April, the members of the governing councils (National Spiritual Assemblies) of the then 56 national Baha'i communities gathered together in Haifa to elect the nine-man Universal House of Justice, henceforth the supreme governing institution of the Baha'i Faith. At their own request, the remaining Hands were not eligible for election. Whatever doubts may have been engendered during the period of the interregnum seem to have been readily dispelled. The belief in an authoritative centre to whom all could turn simply

assumed a new form. As the House of Justice soon made clear, there was no scripturally sanctioned way in which further Guardians could be appointed. On assuming office, the tasks that confronted the Universal House of Justice included several of an administrative nature. One task to which the House of Justice itself attached great importance was the definition of its own powers and responsibilities in a formal constitution which was adopted in 1972.^[5] In this document, the House established its authority over all other Baha'i institutions and confirmed the system by which the members of the

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House were to be elected every five years by all of the members of the National Spiritual Assemblies. The House of Justice has also greatly expanded the administrative apparatus of the 'Baha'i World Centre' (which has, since the exile of Baha'u'llah to Akka in Palestine by the Ottoman Turkish authorities in 1868, been located in the Haifa/Akka area). Various departments have been established to help the House of Justice in its work (secretariat, research, statistics, library and archives, etc.) and the number of office personnel based in Haifa has been expanded so that, from the handful of individuals so employed under Shoghi Effendi,^[6] there is now a body of over 370 staff and short-term volunteers, still a relatively small number considering the recent expansion of the movement. Since 1983, some of this activity has been transferred to a newly built administrative centre, a stately building constructed in quasi-classical style on the side of Mount Carmel .

Other administrative developments under the Universal House of Justice concern the 'institutions of the learned' and various specialist agencies. According to its scriptural base, the Baha'i system of administration should comprise two separate sets of institutions serving under the head of the Faith. These are the 'Rulers', that is the locally and nationally elected Spiritual Assemblies, and the 'Learned', who comprise various individuals charged with the responsibility of advising the Assemblies and encouraging the rank and-file Baha'is. At the time of Shoghi Effendi's death, the Spiritual Assemblies were well established and widely spread, but the Learned, that is the individual Hands of the Cause and the Auxiliary Board Members who assisted them, were only newly established. Accordingly, the House of Justice has sought to strengthen these institutions, greatly increasing the number of Auxiliary Board Members (from 72 in 1957 to 756 in 1988), and creating two major new institutions: the Continental Boards of Counsellors (from 1968) to perpetuate the functions of the Hands of the Cause^[7] and to review Baha'i activities in each continent; and the International Teaching Centre in Haifa

(from 1973) to supervise the activities of the Learned and to work on various projects allocated to it by the Universal House of Justice, particularly as related to the propagation of the Baha'i Faith. Auxiliary Board Members have also been authorized to appoint assistants (from 1973). The possibility that these various institutions of the learned might foster the growth of what would be effectively a clergy has been sharply curtailed by the introduction of fixed terms of office for all those appointed.^[8] Several specialized agencies have also been established or reinforced. Chief amongst these is the Baha'i International Community (BIC), the body by which the Baha'is are accredited to the United Nations as a non-governmental organization. First established in 1948, the activities of the BIC have been greatly expanded in recent years. In 1967, a permanent Baha'i repre-

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sentative was appointed. Baha'i involvement with the UN now includes consultative status with UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and Children's Fund (UNICEF), affiliation with the Environment Program (UNEP), Department of Public Information and various other bodies. Baha'i representatives have participated in many UN conferences on issues such as human rights, social development, the status of women, the environment, narcotic drugs, children, health, and disarmament. The BIC operates under the direct supervision of the Universal House of Justice. Other specialized Baha'i agencies include a Haifa-based Office of Social and Economic Development (from 1983), an International Audio-Visual Centre, and the Canadian-based Association of Baha'i Studies and its affiliates (from 1975). The general tendency appears to be to allow these agencies (and the International Teaching Centre) an increasing measure of autonomy. The present over-all structure of Baha'i administration is illustrated in Figure 1.

EXPANSION AND DISTRIBUTION

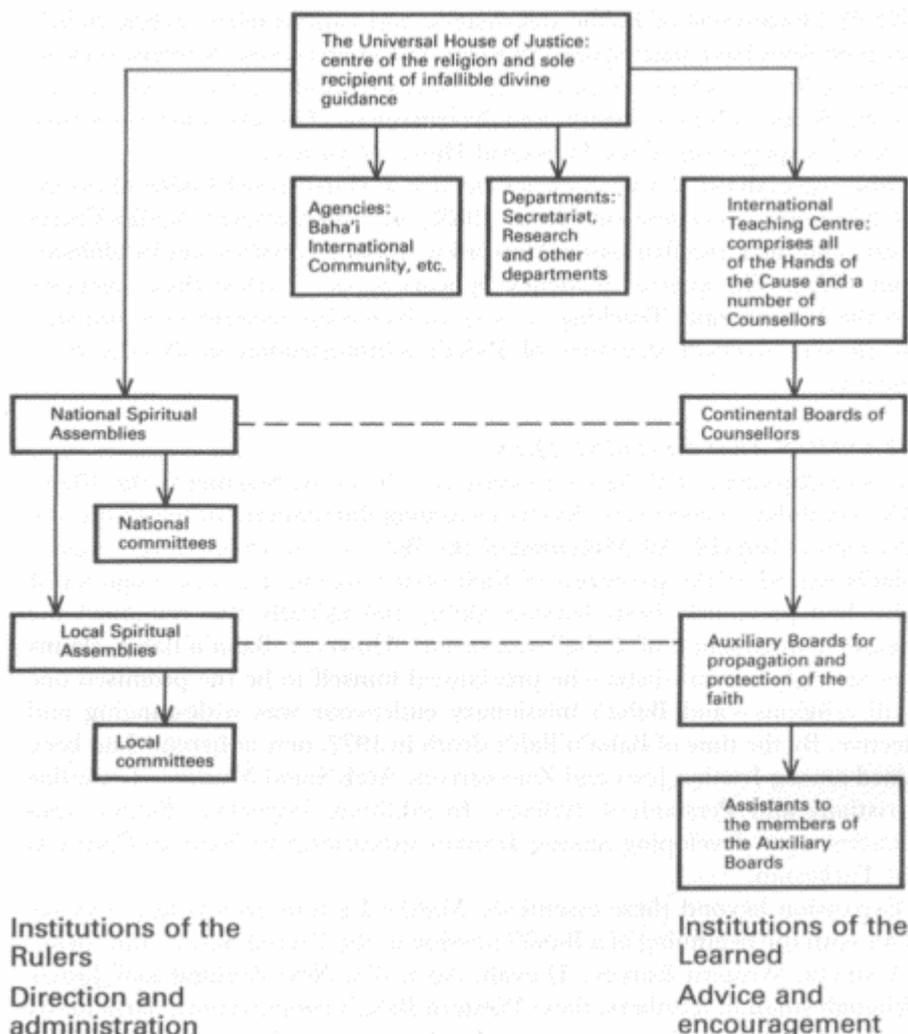
The overall pattern of Baha'i expansion is quite clear. Starting in the 1860s, a distinct Baha'i community developed among the remnant of the Babis, the adherents of Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad the Bab, the messianic leader whom Baha'is regard as the precursor of their own religion. The vast majority of Babis had previously been Iranian Shi'is, and initially this remained the primary constituency of Baha'i expansion. However Baha'u'llah's claims were strongly universalistic--he proclaimed himself to be the promised one of all religions--and Baha'i missionary endeavour was wide-ranging and effective. By the time of Baha'u'llah's death in 1892, new adherents had been gained

among Iranian Jews and Zoroastrians, Arab Sunni Muslims, Levantine Christians and Persianized Indians. In addition, important Baha'i communities were developing among Iranian expatriates in Russian Caucasia and Turkestan.

Expansion beyond these essentially Middle Eastern groups began in the 1890s with the beginning of a Baha'i mission in the United States, and thence to Canada, Western Europe, Hawaii, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. Although small in numbers, these Western Baha'i communities, particularly those of North America, soon exerted a significant influence on the further development of the Baha'i religion.

Effective transcendence of these two 'worlds' of Baha'i activity--the Islamic heartland and the West--only began in the 1950s, in the period covered by our survey. Missionary endeavour on the part of Middle Eastern and Western Baha'is had led to the establishment of Baha'i communities in several parts of the non-Muslim 'Third World', initially among the Western-oriented urban minority. Conversions of larger numbers began in a few isolated areas

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in the 1950s^[9] and spread during the 1960s to most parts of the 'Third World'. The results were dramatic. As Baha'i teachers learned to adapt their message and missionary techniques to the situation of the unschooled masses of Third World peasants and urban workers, they completely transformed their religion's social base. Now, the great majority of Baha'is in the world are drawn from the popular classes of the non-Islamic Third World. Even in the well-established Baha'i communities of North America, recent infusions of minority group members (Blacks and Amerindians) has led to a significant change in the social base of the membership.

QUANTITATIVE GROWTH

Quantification of these changes is not easy. With any religious movement there are invariable problems of quantification unless the movement's own enumeration techniques are exceptionally efficient, or government censuses incorporate questions on religion. Even here there are often considerable problems of definition. Are gradations of commitment to be taken into consideration so as to differentiate between active and nominal members? Are the children of members to be included as well as adults? Is allowance to be made for the pattern of multi-religious adherence which is common in many parts of the world? These are, of course, problems that affect the estimation of numbers for any religion and are not confined to Baha'i statistics.

There are also more specific problems in the case of Baha'i statistics. In the West at least, the conceptualization of membership has changed. Up to the 1950s, children were often not even considered as part of the Baha'i community, and subsequently enumerations of 'Baha'i children' were usually incomplete. Only in 1979 did the Universal House of Justice indicate that all children of Baha'i parents were to be regarded as Baha'is for statistical purposes. More specifically, early enumerations of Baha'is in India after the onset of 'mass conversion' appear to have included only men. Again, a separate categorization of Baha'is whose addresses are unknown (that is, who are effectively no longer members of the community) is only a comparatively recent innovation and is confined to a limited number of national Baha'i communities. More generally, the areas of greatest growth have often been the areas in which much of the population is at best semi-literate and in which the Baha'i institutions lack the experience or resources for efficient enumeration. Even the highly efficient American

Baha'i administration was unable to cope effectively with the mass influx of rural southern blacks which occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Until recently, there was also a problem due to the non-availability of Baha'i membership figures. Thus statistics were given by the Baha'i authorities in terms of numbers of localities and Baha'i institutions[10] rather

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than of individual Baha'is. This situation is now changing, particularly since a Department of Statistics was established at Haifa (1966). More accurate information, including better estimates of the number of Baha'is, is now becoming available. However, for the earlier period, the figures for the number of Baha'i institutions are themselves useful indicators of Baha'i expansion and distribution. Moreover, by a number of means,[11]it is possible to form reasonably accurate estimates for numbers over the past few decades.

Putting together the data that is available with our own estimates, the following picture emerges (see Tables 1 and 2). In the carry 1950s, there were probably in the region of 200,000 Baha'is world-wide. The vast majority of these (over 90%) lived in Iran. There were probably fewer than 10,000 Baha'is in the West and no more than 3,000 Baha'is in the Third World, mostly in India, these last two figures being exclusive of children. Institutionally, we may be more precise. In 1954, there were 708 Local Spiritual Assemblies. In addition, there were 2409 groups and isolated Baha'is, making a total of 3,117 localities in which Baha'is resided. There were 12 National or Regional Spiritual Assemblies (Iran; Iraq; Egypt and the Sudan; the Indian subcontinent and Burma; the British Isles; Germany and Austria; Italy and Switzerland; the U.S.A.; Canada; Central America; South America; and Australia and New Zealand). Of the Local Spiritual Assemblies, 46.3% were in the Middle East, 38.3% in the West; and 15.4% in the Third World (see Table 1).

Table 1: Geographical diffusion and institutional expansion of the Baha'i Faith

	1954	1963	1968	1973	1979	1988
National Spiritual Assemblies	12	56	81	113	125	149
Local Spiritual Assemblies	708	3379	5902	17 037	23 624	19 486
Localities where Baha'is reside	3117	11 092	31 883	69 541	102 704	112 137

SOURCES: For 1954; *Baha'i World, Vol. 12*, Wilmette, Ill., 1956, pp. 721-774. For 1963: *The Baha'i Faith 1944-63: Information, Statistical and Comparative*, compiled by the Hands of the Cause residing in the Holy Land, n.p., 1963. For 1968: *Baha'i World, Vol. 14*, Haifa, 1970, pp. 167, 560; *The Baha'i Faith: Statistical Information (1844-1968)*, Haifa, 1968. For 1973: *The Baha'i World, Vol. 15*, Haifa, 1976, p. 291. For 1979: *The Seven Year Plan (1979-1986): Statistical Report. Ridvan 1986*, Haifa, 1986. For 1988: personal communication: Department of Statistics, Haifa, dated 8 July 1988. The drop in the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies is mostly accounted for by a major re-organization of the Indian Baha'i community in 1987 whereby the area covered by each Local Assembly was increased to include several villages. As a result, the number of Local Assemblies in India dropped from 15 448 to 4497.

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By the late 1960s, a great increase in the number of Baha'is had occurred. Conversions of large numbers of tribal or peasant peoples in various parts of the Third World had begun, and even in the West, as the decade drew to a close, there were appreciable infusions of new believers among youth. World-wide, we 'guesstimate' that there may now have been about one million Baha'is. Of these, the largest single concentrations were in India and Iran, with perhaps a quarter of a million Baha'is in each. Elsewhere in the Third World there were probably over 300 000 Baha'is, mostly in Africa and Latin America. In the West there were about 30 000 Baha'is. Institutionally, by 1968, there were a total of 81 National Assemblies, almost 6000 Local Assemblies, and over 31 000 localities in which Baha'is resided. Of the Local Assemblies, 80% were in the Third World, 11% in the West, and 10% in the Middle East. The historically important areas of Iran and North America now together constituted only about 25% of the total Baha'i world community.

Such a rapid increase in Baha'i numbers engendered its own problems. Most of the flood of new Baha'is were poorly educated, and many lived in rural and tribal areas with which effective communication was difficult to sustain. Many national Baha'i communities--including even the United States--experienced considerable difficulty in 'consolidating' the faith of their mass of new adherents. Towards the end of the 1970s, the rate of expansion slowed somewhat as Baha'i communities began to tackle these difficulties. The onset of the major persecutions of the Baha'i community in Iran in 1979 added to these problems. Quite apart from the paralysis caused to one of the most important Baha'i communities, the new Government regulations in Iran prevented the sending of money out of the country. As the Iranian Baha'is had been a major source of

funds for both the upkeep of the World Centre and to support the Baha'i communities in poorer countries, a financial crisis also ensued.

The gradual resolution of these problems (see page 83) led to further periods of growth. The situation at present is that the Baha'i Faith is overwhelmingly a 'Third World' religion. Its major areas of expansion are at present India, South America (mostly among the native Amerindian population), the Pacific and some parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Some of the other areas that were witnessing rapid expansion in the late 1960s have been severely affected by political problems, including several countries in Africa (in particular Uganda) and South-east Asia (especially Vietnam and Indonesia). Nevertheless, as shown in Table 2, since 1968 there has been a large increase in numbers in all areas except the Middle East and North Africa. In the 'Third World', the increase in numbers has been more than five-fold with particularly marked increases in South Asia and Oceania.

By the late 1980s, there are, according to official Baha'i statistics, over

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Table 2. Estimated Baha'i populations

	1954	1968	1988
(1) Middle East and North Africa	200 000	250 000	300 000
(2) North America, Europe & Anglo-Pacific	10 000	30 000	200 000
(3) South Asia	1000	300 000	1 900 000
(4) South-east Asia	2000	200 000	300 000
(5) East Asia			
	10 000	20 000	
(6) Latin America & the Caribbean			
	100 000	700 000	
(7) Africa (sub-Saharan)			
	200 000	1 000 000	
(8) Oceania (excluding Anglo-			

Pacific			
	5000	70 000	
Total	213 000	1 095 000	4 490 000
Baha'is in Iran as percentage of total	94	22	6
Baha'is in India as percentage of total	<1	26	40

NOTE: The world has been divided into 'cultural areas' (following P. Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*, Cambridge, 1987, pp. 165-171). 'Anglo-Pacific' means Hawaii, New Zealand and Australia.

These figures have been derived through a combination of the following methods: calculation of approximate numbers from the number of Baha'i organizations (for sources see Table I); extrapolating back from the official figures for the number of individual Baha'is provided more recently; estimates provided by informed Baha'is; and when the first draft of this paper was completed, a copy was sent to the Department of Statistics in Haifa and the present table incorporates some of the statistical information given in the reply to this, dated 8 July 1988. With regard to calculations based on the number of Baha'i organizations, the survey by A. Hampson 'The growth and spread of the Baha'i Faith', Ph.D., University of Hawaii, 1980, (see pp. 448-458 in particular) is a useful starting point. Hampson has derived a regression formula for calculating the number of Baha'is from the number of LSAs and total localities where Baha'is reside. However, the regression formula that he uses is based primarily on and is biased towards the smaller Baha'i communities of between 50 and 200 LSAs. This constituted the majority of Baha'i communities at the time that he was doing his research but under-represents the larger Baha'i communities. For research on the present-day Baha'i community, we have found it more useful to derive two separate regression formulae: one for areas (1) and (2) above (excluding Iran) and countries with less than 200 LSAs: $Y = 1043 + 23.86X$ (if based on LSAs); $T = 1114 + 4.81X$ (if based on number of localities) and one for the countries of the Third World (areas (3)-(7) above): $Y = 1()129 + 44.26X$ (if based on LSAs); $Y = 15588 + 9.94X$ (if based on number of localities) . The figure for Iran has been estimated separately, see P. Smith 'A note on Babi and Baha'i Numbers in Iran' *Iranian Studies*, 17 1984, pp. 295-301. one factor that must be corrected for is the fact that these regression formulae and also most other statements regarding the number of Baha'is in a country (prior to 1979 when the Universal House of Justice clarified the basis for statistics by instructing that all children of Baha'i parents

also be included) relate only to adult Baha'is (over 21 years of age). Most census results and population estimates are given in terms of combined adults and children, and therefore, for comparative purposes, these estimates are also based on adults and children. Where the information available gives only the number of adults, the total has been increased by a factor derived from the demographic information in UNESCO, *Statistical Handbook 1985*, Paris, 1985 in order to arrive at the total figure. The numbers obtained in this way have been checked against some individual countries where the number of Baha'is at a particular time is known and they were found to be accurate to within 25% . The Department of Statistics at the Baha'i World Centre is at present compiling far more detailed country by country estimates.

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four million Baha'is world-wide. With the change in the definition of membership, this figure is now inclusive of men, women and children. The numerical dominance of the Third World is now even more striking, some 91% of the Baha'i population living in these areas. By contrast, Western Baha'is now comprise only 3% of the total, and Middle Easterners (mostly Iranians) about 6%. In terms of institutional expansion, by 1988 there were 149 National Spiritual Assemblies, almost 20,000 Local Spiritual Assemblies and over 112,000 localities in which Baha'is are resided. The distribution of these worldwide can be seen in Table 3.

EXPANSION AND DEVELOPMENT PLANS

This numerical growth has occurred within the context of formal plans with specific goals for the expansion of the Baha'i community. Initiated at a national level in the 1930s, the first international plan was instituted by Shoghi Effendi (Ten-Year Plan, 1953-1963), and since then the Universal House of Justice has set to date a succession of international plans: the Nine Year Plan (1964-1973), Five-Year Plan (1974-1979), Seven-Year Plan (1979- 1986) and Six-Year Plan (1986-1992). These plans have generally been highly successful and their various numerical goals have usually been surpassed.

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Table 3. Bahá'í statistics, July 1987

	World	Africa	America	Asia	Australasia	Europe
NSAs	148	43	41	26	17	21
LSAs	19 273	5984	5640	6257	686	706
Localities	116 707	37 021	26 712	39 321	2706	3087
Total Baha'is (in thousands)	4455	992	877	2474	87	24

Sub-divided by cultural areas:

	NSAs	LSAs	Localities
Middle East and North Africa	12	83	986
The West:			
North America	3	2110	8550
Europe (including Eastern Europe)	21	706	3087
The Anglo-Pacific	3	251	592
The Third World			
Africa (sub-Saharan)	40	5957	36 886
Latin America & Caribbean	38	3530	18 162
South Asia	7	4957	31 780
South-east Asia	6	1140	6002
East Asia	4	104	688
Oceania	14	435	2114
TOTAL	148	19 273	108 847

Source: *Statistical Summary Tables: for semi-annual reports of July 1987*, Haifa, February, 1988; personal communication: Department of Statistics, Haifa, dated 8 July 1988.

Besides detailing specific goals for the number and distribution of Assemblies and localities, these Plans have included other goals of both a quantitative and qualitative nature. These goals have included:

(1) The development of the Baha'i World Centre in the Haifa-Akka area through the acquisition of several properties connected with the lives of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, the construction of the seat of the Universal House of Justice (1983), and the extension and beautification of the lands surrounding the Baha'i shrines;

- (2) The collection and classification of the Baha'i sacred writings and of their authoritative interpretations (by Shoghi Effendi) has been continued so that there are now in excess of 60 000 original documents or copies held at Haifa;[\[12\]](#)
- (3) The translation and publication of literature. Baha'i literature had by

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1988 been translated into 802 languages, and published in 520 languages; some of this published material consists only of small pamphlets but at least one book of 60 pages or more is now available in 111 languages and there is quite a substantial literature in several European and Indian languages as well as languages such as Swahili and Samoan;[13](#)

(4) The construction of Baha'i Houses of Worship of which all but one of the seven presently built were constructed during the 1957-1988 period;[\[14\]](#)

(5) The establishment of Baha'i radio stations, seven to date: five in Latin America, one in the USA and one in Africa;

(6) The fostering of the spiritual, communal and intellectual aspects of Baha'i life;

(7) The proper functioning of Spiritual Assemblies;

(8) The enhancement of the role of women within Baha'i administration and community life;

(9) The strengthening of family life;

(10) The education of children;

(11) The initiation of socio-economic projects including those concerned with literacy, education, agriculture and health.

One of the areas in which there has been the greatest development in recent years is in the field of publishing. Up to the early 1970s, almost all of the books available on the subject of the Baha'i Faith in English and almost every other language[\[15\]](#) were either works by the central figures of the religion (i.e. sacred texts and authoritative interpretation)[\[16\]](#) or basic introductory books. Thus in January 1972, there were available for sale some 68 books in the English language of which 35 were either writings or compilations from the writings of the central figures and seven were children's books.[\[17\]](#) Only 16 of these were published by independent publishers, the rest being by various Baha'i Publishing Trusts, which are organs of the National Spiritual Assemblies. During 1971, only four new books, one reprint and one children's book had been published.[\[18\]](#)

By contrast, in October 1985, there were 214 books for sale in the English language, of which 50 were works or compilations of the writings of the central figures and 27 were children's books.[19] Of these 95 were from independent publishers. During 1984, 21 new books, five reprints and six children's books were published; 22 of these by independent publishers.[20]

CENTRAL CONCERNS

It seems clear that the past 30 years have witnessed a considerable change in the central concerns which have been important to the Baha'i community. Such changes have stemmed both from policy decisions by the Baha'i leadership, particularly the Universal House of Justice, and from changes in

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interest at the grass-roots. Given the centralized nature of the Baha'i community and the concern of the leadership to keep abreast of the situation at the grass-roots, these forces for change are necessarily interactive.

In mapping these changes, we will employ the concept of *motif* as describing the fundamental patterns of religious experience which characterize a particular religious movement.[21] Modern Baha'i may be described in terms of seven such motifs: polarity, legalism, millenarianism, social reformism, universalism, liberalism, and the interlinked themes of martyrdom and sacrifice. Given the great diversity of the present-day Baha'i community, the popular elements of these motifs will vary widely. In this regard, although both authors have knowledge of Middle Eastern and Third World Baha'i communities, we will concentrate on the concerns of western Baha'is, as being those which are still most pervasive in the Baha'i world as a whole.

The polar motif. The regard for authoritative and charismatic leadership-- what is here termed the polar motif--has been central throughout the entire course of Baha'i history. It is effectively enshrined in the doctrine of 'firmness in the Covenant'--that is, the belief that there is always a divinely appointed and validated centre of the Baha'i cause, and that it is an absolute duty of all Baha'is to be faithful and obedient to that centre. In turn, this doctrine is supported by the policy of excommunication of those 'covenant-breakers' who vehemently oppose the authority of the centre. A major change in this motif occurred with Shoghi Effendi's accession to the leadership. The personalistic charisma exercised by Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha was deliberately replaced by a more legalistic

charisma of office, and the Baha'is were increasingly encouraged to look at their religious institutions for authority and guidance.

By 1957, the polar motif was so firmly established, that both of the main responses to the crisis caused by Shoghi Effendi's death were structured by the desire for authoritative and charismatic leadership. The minority response involved Mason Remey's desire to continue the line of divinely guided Guardians. This may well have appealed to more Baha'is than it did, had it not been for the united and resolute opposition of the other Hands. As it was, for the majority of Baha'is, the promise of the restoration of scripturally sanctioned leadership through the election of the Universal House of Justice proved more attractive than the dubious claims of Mason Remey. The successful election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963 appears to have occasioned great relief, marking the end of a crisis of widely acknowledged severity . Clearly, however, the substitution of an institution, the Universal House of Justice, in place of an individual leader resulted in a further depersonalization of charismatic leadership. Charisma has become further legalized and routinized. The individual members of the Universal House of Justice are

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greatly respected, but they do not personally bear the divine afflatus. In contrast to the period of Shoghi Effendi's Guardianship, unofficially circulated 'pilgrim's notes' do not constitute a 'Baha'i apocrypha' and there is little personalistic devotion to the members of the House. Nevertheless, the institutional charisma of the House of Justice continues to exert a strong appeal. For Baha'is, the House of Justice provides a source of direct divine guidance and as such represents a beacon of hope in a distracted world.

The strength of this appeal can perhaps be judged by the fact that, since 1963, there has been no significant opposition to the authority of the House of Justice, the number of declared Covenant-breakers having remained negligible. Attempts to attract support by the remnant of an earlier group of anti-organizational schismatics (dating from the 1930s) have been unavailing, as has a similar attempt by a small American splinter group of charismatic libertarians.

Legalism. The concern with divine law as a pattern for personal, communal and social life has been a basic element in the Baha'i religion since the appearance of Baha'u'llah's book of laws, *al-Kitab al-Aqdas*, in c. 1873. However, up to now, the elaboration and implementation of such laws has been extremely limited. As yet, the Baha'i Faith does not possess an extensive framework of religious law such as is found in its parent

religion of Islam. Although the Universal House of Justice is specifically empowered to enact supplementary legislation to the laws of the *Aqdas*, it has not as yet embarked on any major programme of Legislation. As with Shoghi Effendi before it, the Universal House of Justice evidently prefers to state general moral principles and to emphasize the importance of individual conscience and decision-making, rather than to elaborate on the existing corpus of Baha'i law. It has, however, greatly increased the number of Baha'i legal texts which are readily available, and is at present preparing to publish for the first time an official English translation of the *Aqdas* and its supplementary texts together with extensive annotations.

The primary vehicle for the administration of Baha'i law is the system of local and national spiritual assemblies developed by Shoghi Effendi. When first established, many of these bodies displayed a distinct tendency towards over-administration, a trend which Shoghi Effendi sharply discouraged. Judging by the administration manuals put out by various National Spiritual Assemblies, we suspect that, at least in the West, the past 30 years have seen the development of a lighter approach to the administration of Baha'i law. There are doubtless still many Baha'is who would wish to emphasize and extend the prerogatives of the Baha'i administration, but such views appear to be less dominant than they once were.

Millenarianism. This may be defined as the expectation of an imminent parousia or overturning of the current state of affairs. Quite commonly, such

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millenarianism shades off into less urgent and more general hopes for the establishment of millennial bliss. As systematized by Shoghi Effendi, the millenarian and millennial aspects of the Baha'i teachings centre on three interrelated elements: the 'Most Great Peace' foretold by Baha'u'llah, representing a spiritualized humanity united by Baha'i teachings; the 'Lesser Peace', a pragmatic, politically based world peace established by treaty among the nations; and an apocalyptic world-wide catastrophe, the exact nature of which is not expressly defined.

Earlier generations of Baha'is often expected that the Most Great Peace would be soon established, but Shoghi Effendi defined it as a far distant millennial hope. The Lesser Peace and Catastrophe were regarded as more urgent eventualities however. When Shoghi Effendi died, there would seem to have been some welling up of apocalyptic expectation. This was most marked among the followers of C. M. Remey. Remey had long been inclined towards apocalypticism and, in the charged atmosphere of his

challenge for the leadership, this element became prominent in his interpretations of the Baha'i teachings. Indeed, according to his doctrine of the 'great global catastrophe', cataclysmic movements of the earth's crust would shortly lead to universal devastation. A specific date was set for this, 1963, this being changed later to 1995. Apocalyptic expectations remain strong among the various Remeyite splinter groups.^[22] Nothing as specific as this emerged among the mainstream Baha'is. There is an undercurrent of interest and speculation about the catastrophe among the mainstream Baha'is but this is discouraged by official Baha'i institutions and neither the date nor the nature of the catastrophe have ever been set (and are thus not subject to disconfirmation). The references to it by the Universal House of Justice take the form of a general critique of the present state of the world, and are used as a specific goad to sacrificial action on the part of the Baha'is in the work of constructing a 'new world order'. Optimism about the future peace seems to outweigh any apocalyptic pessimism, and overall, the balance towards optimism seems to be increasing.

At an official Level, Baha'is are primarily committed to working for the Most Great Peace, a commitment that has continued to the present. Baha'i attitudes towards the Lesser Peace have however altered with time. The Baha'is used to regard this as something that would become a political necessity and be brought into being by the political leaders of the world and which was therefore none of their concern. Recently, however, the Universal House of Justice has indicated that the Baha'is themselves should play a role in the achievement of the Lesser Peace. In this regard, the issuing of the Universal House of Justice's statement, *The Promise of World Peace* (October 1985) to the 'peoples of the world' is highly significant. In this statement, the Universal House of Justice emphasizes the importance of religion as a

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source of order; gives its assessment of the factors militating against peace in the world at the present time; calls for the convocation of an assembly of the leaders of the world to consult about the means of bringing about peace through binding and enforceable treaties; and offers the Baha'i world community as a model of what can be achieved through unity and cooperation. The presentation of this message to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and to Heads of State throughout the world was a prelude to an intensive world-wide campaign by the Baha'is to bring this message to the attention of all. This has led to a far greater Baha'i involvement in various social groupings such as the peace movement. This involvement is all the more remarkable in that such movements have previously been regarded by most Baha'is as being too

overtly political to permit their participation; this being because of the Baha'i insistence on the avoidance of involvement with party or partisan politics.

Social reformism. Since the time of Baha'u'llah, the Baha'i hope for the future establishment of a millennial Kingdom of God on earth has been linked to a programme advocating specific social reforms and universal social principles. Elaborated by successive Baha'i leaders, this programme of reform includes such measures as the abolition of the extremes of wealth and poverty, the emancipation of women, universal compulsory education, the adoption of an international auxiliary language, and the fostering of means to promote the unity, harmony and spiritual development of the human race.

Until recently, however, the Baha'is confined themselves merely to advocating these principles rather than to applying them. Historically, it had proved impossible for the Baha'i communities in Iran (because of the hostile environment) and North America (because of lack of numbers and resources) to engage in extensive practical activity to realize Baha'i social goals. Prior to the 1970s, Baha'i activity in this area in Iran had been cut short through the closure of the Baha'i schools and the general atmosphere of repression, while outside Iran it was confined to the establishment of a few schools and some collaborative endeavours with humanitarian reform groups such as the American National Association for the Advancement of Colored People or, in Europe, the Esperantists. Baha'i communities were also able to promote the principle of gender equality within their own institutions, a particularly significant development in countries such as Iran where women have traditionally been unable to assume positions of religious leadership.^[23]

This situation began to change as the Baha'i communities of the Third World began to become more firmly established. The influx of a large number of peasants and tribal peoples made the problems of extreme social disadvantage a very real part of Baha'i experience and consciousness. Accordingly, social development projects were initiated in an increasing number of communities. These consisted of educational projects such as the

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institution of tutorial schools, agricultural projects and, more recently, health projects. This new phase of Baha'i activity was emphasized by the message of the House of Justice to the Baha'i world dated 20 October 1983. In this the Baha'is were urged to seek out ways, compatible with the Baha'i teachings, in which they could become

involved in the social and economic development of the communities in which they lived. Baha'i communities in developing countries had already been extending the range of such activities for some time but the extent to which Baha'is should become involved in philanthropic activities not directly concerned with the propagation of their faith had always been a problematic area, particularly for Baha'is in the more developed countries. This message of the Universal House of Justice, together with the establishment in Haifa of an Office of Social and Economic Development, paved the way for a great increase in the planning and execution of projects both locally and internationally.

The results were impressive. Thus, in 1979, there were 129 officially recognized Baha'i projects concerned with aspects of social and economic development. Most (111) of these were 'tutorial schools'--rudimentary educational institutions concerned with fostering basic rural literacy, health, education and the like. There were also 10 academic schools (open to Baha'is and non-Baha'is alike). By 1987, the number of officially recognized development projects had increased to 1482. Nearly 770 of these were tutorial schools or literacy and vocational training programmes, but there were also a significant number of community development, health and agricultural projects. The total number of academic schools has also risen to 29 under direct Baha'i sponsorship and an additional 59 established as private ventures by individual Baha'is.^[24]

Although concentrated in the Third World, this surge of socio-economic development activity has also occurred in Baha'i communities in other parts of the world. In Europe and North America, it is likely that the Baha'is will work increasingly closely with various humanitarian and reformist group. Indeed it would seem likely that this whole area of social and economic development will assume increasing importance and become an established feature of Baha'i community life.

The Baha'i involvement with the United Nations has been referred to above. This involvement has served a number of purposes, including the provision of a platform for Baha'i reformist ideas, the gaining of international prestige and recognition, and the attainment of some means to seek inter national help in the protection of Baha'is suffering persecution in Iran and elsewhere.

Universalism. The Baha'i belief in the unique role and purpose of the Baha'i Faith in God's redemptive plan coexists with a belief in the universality

of His guidance and grace to mankind. This universality underlies Baha'i exhortations to all religionists to practise tolerance for those with other beliefs. It also supports the practice of collaboration with other religionists on matters of mutual concern. In this regard, Baha'i involvement in inter faith collaboration and dialogue has increased during the period under review both because the Baha'i Faith has become better known and because the growing general awareness of the religious plurality in modern society has led to increased opportunities.

In the early stages of Baha'i development, Baha'i universalism sometimes also embraced a very inclusivist conception of Baha'i membership. Many Baha'is then retained their existing religious memberships while thinking of their religion as a movement which was a 'spiritual leaven' among the religions rather than a distinct religion.[25] This early viewpoint was replaced by a far more exclusivist conception of membership during the leadership of Shoghi Effendi--membership of the Baha'i Faith became subject to formal registration and abandonment of other religious memberships was insisted on. In sociological terms, the religion became more sectarian.

There has been no return to the extreme inclusivism of the early Baha'i community, but the Baha'i membership principle has become more universalist in the past few years with the automatic inclusion of Baha'i children onto membership lists of the Baha'i community--a practice that was previously confined to Iran. Thus the former Western and Third World practice of Baha'i children 'contracting into' membership has been replaced by one of 'contracting out'. As the level of membership commitment is likely to vary considerably (as with any religion), this has the effect of making the Baha'i community considerably more inclusivist than has hitherto been the case outside the Middle East. Again, associated with the greater number of conversions in recent years, there has been a considerable relaxation in the standards of knowledge of the religion required of new believers before their declarations of faith are accepted. This also facilitates a greater inclusivism of membership.

Baha'i universalism also has missionary import. The belief that God's guidance has been received by all the peoples of the world has as a corollary the belief that Baha'i represents the fulfilment of all religions. The missiological implications of this belief as regards Islam, Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism were elaborated by Babi and Baha'i writers prior to 1921. There was always an implicit extension of this belief to religions of non Middle Eastern provenance, but it has only been in the past 25 years that this has assumed any substance. Thus, since the 1950s, Baha'i writers have

sought to prove that their religion fulfils such millenarian expectations as of Hinduism, Buddhism, Mormonism and the North American Indian religions.[26] Another aspect of Baha'i universalism is related to the influx of large

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numbers of new believers from the Third World. This has led to the emergence of new cultural styles within the Baha'i world. In this regard, the astonishing spread of the religion among lower-caste Hindus has been particularly significant. Growth has also led to an increased ethnic diversification of many national Baha'i communities. Whereas formerly the only foreign Baha'is commonly encountered in any given country were either Iranians or Americans, the increasing diversity in the Baha'i world community is beginning to make itself felt in the numbers of 'Third World' and other Baha'is travelling and residing outside their own countries leading to a strengthening of the feeling of universality.

Liberalism. Religious liberalism may be defined as the belief that religious knowledge should be compatible with the rationality of the modern world. This belief finds a considerable range of expression in contemporary religion, and is also associated with a characteristic tension with a tradition-oriented religious fundamentalism.

The Baha'i Faith has sometimes been presented as the epitome of religious liberalism, with emphasis being placed on its social and humanitarian principles and on its assertion of the essential harmony between religion and scientific rationality. The actual situation is more complicated than this, however. For alongside Baha'i liberalism, there has also existed a strong emphasis on the authority of the central figures of the Baha'i religion, and more generally on the authority of the Baha'i administrative system. This latter emphasis has limited the operation of Baha'i liberalism, and there has at times been a discernible tension between these two coexistent themes.[27] Given the now general acceptance of the authority of the Baha'i administration, this particular tension does not appear to have been much in evidence during the past 30 years.

However, there is some evidence for the development of the classical liberal-fundamentalist tension in some Western Baha'i communities. This is a complex topic which requires more than the passing reference which we can give it here. As in most religions, and Christianity in particular, this tension has manifested itself most acutely as a result of the probings of modern critical scholarship.[28] Whilst Baha'i has avoided the traditional religious tension between religion and the physical sciences, the situation with regard to history is somewhat different. Although scriptural texts exist that point to

an acceptance of critical scholarship, in practice there has tended to be a relatively uncritical acceptance of the authority of texts and an assumption of the uncomplicated purity of Baha'i history. This attitude has been challenged in the past 15 years or so by the development of modern academic studies of the religion by both Baha'i and non-Baha'i writers. The issues raised remain controversial and some of the responses have been distinctly 'fundamentalist' in tone. But with increasing exposure to these new

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viewpoints, modern historical scholarship is gaining for itself a respected position with Western Baha'i communities and this may point towards a liberal resolution to this tension.

Martyrdom and sacrifice. In the Babi movement, as in Shi'i Islam, the theme of martyrdom in the cause of truth was linked to the belief that the faithful should struggle against the ungodly, even to the point of taking up arms. One of the most significant features of Baha'u'llah's transformation of Babism was his forbidding of holy war and his insistence that his followers not engage in militant or subversive activity. In place of holy war, he bade the Baha'is to engage in spreading their religion by non-violent teaching (*tabligh*) and the 'acquisition of spiritual influence'. The high station of martyrdom was, however, still extolled although the Baha'is were bidden to avoid it if they could by the exercise of prudence and caution (the Shi'i practice of denying one's faith if in danger, *taqiyya*, was, however, forbidden to the Baha'is). Periodically, the Iranian Baha'is have suffered persecution for their beliefs and many had died as martyrs up to the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, the persecution of the Baha'is in Iran has intensified greatly (see page 72). Details of the persecutions suffered by the Iranian Baha'is are transmitted in a direct and relatively undiluted manner through the Iranian Baha'i diaspora to the rest of the Baha'i world. One expression of this, among both Iranian and non Iranian Baha'is, has been an emphasis on renewed dedication and service to their religion as an expression of support and identity with those who are denied the freedom to do other than to suffer and die for their religion. This has been a powerful theme, and one which is stressed by Baha'i institutions. It appears to have greatly increased the degree of commitment and solidarity of the Baha'i communities of the world.

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

During the past 30 years, the Baha'i Faith has undergone a series of considerable transformations. The line of hereditary leaders has come to an end. The overall leadership of the religion has devolved upon an elected council (although this is still regarded as divinely ordained and guided). Subordinate to the centre of the Faith, an extensive administrative structure has come into being, in part at least in response to the increasing scale and diversity of Baha'i activities. At the same time, massive expansion of the religion has occurred, so that Baha'i claims to the status of a world religion now begin to appear credible. This expansion has also completely transformed the religion's social basis: what was formerly a predominantly Iranian religion with a small but significant Western following has become a world-wide religious movement, with its major membership in the Third World and with

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an enormous diversity of followers in terms of religious and ethnic back grounds. Changes have also occurred in the religion's central concerns, particularly in terms of the growth of social activism.

The overall impression is of a religion which has obtained a considerable measure of stability, but still possesses an impressive dynamism and potential for growth. Yet withal, the world Baha'i community is confronted by a number of major problems, both in terms of external pressures and internal realities .

The most obvious problem which confronts the Baha'i world at the present time is persecution, particularly in Iran. Baha'is have been intermittently persecuted in Iran since the religion's beginnings, but the situation since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979 has been particularly severe.^[29] Regarded by many Iranian government leaders as evil and misguided heretics, and/or partisans of the Shah, agents of Zionist and Western imperialism, or whatever, the Baha'is have been systematically persecuted and pressured to convert to Islam. Action against the Baha'is have included the execution of over 200 of their leaders, the imprisonment of several thousand others, the use of torture so as to force recantations of faith, the sacking and fining of Baha'is formerly in government employ, the expulsion of Baha'is from schools and colleges, the seizure of property, the desecration of graveyards and corpses, and the prohibition of all Baha'i activities and organizations. The Baha'is have protested their innocence, but to no avail. Thousands have fled the country, but for most Baha'is this is not an option.

Internationally, the effects of the Iranian persecution have been various. One that has been particularly serious has been the loss of contributions to the Baha'i fund, the Iranian Baha'is having previously been the major funding source for international Baha'i activities. We are not yet able to quantify the impact of this, but it is clear that it led initially to a major financial crisis and to an appreciable curtailment of Baha'i activities in some areas. This crisis was overcome by appeals to the Baha'is in the rest of the world for greater financial contributions and self-sufficiency. The success of these appeals can be judged by the recent completion of three costly construction projects: the headquarters building for the Universal House of Justice in Haifa (1983; cost \$28 million); the House of Worship in Samoa (1984; \$6.5 million); and the House of Worship in India (1986; \$10 million).^[30]

Another direct effect on the Baha'i world as a whole has been the outflow of Iranian refugees. This has greatly increased the Iranian Baha'i diaspora, thus providing many Baha'i communities with a direct contact and line of communication with their suffering co-religionists in the 'cradle of the Faith'. The outflow of refugees has also caused the Baha'i administration to have to acquire expertise in refugee resettlement problems, and in some areas where there are large concentrations of refugees, to problems of community

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integration between local and Iranian Baha'is.

More tangibly, the persecutions and the resultant diaspora have had psychological consequences, appearing to lead to an increased sense of international Baha'i solidarity and cohesion and to greater levels of dedication in sympathy with the Iranians.

The Iranian persecutions have been well publicized, but Baha'is have also suffered persecutions in a number of other Muslim countries, in part as a consequence of the location of their world centre in what is now the state of Israel. Thus in Egypt, all Baha'i activities were banned by President Nasser in 1960, a ban that has never been revoked and which has resulted in sporadic persecutions ever since (the most recent beginning in 1984). In Morocco also there were episodes of persecution in 1962-1963 and 1984, whilst banning orders have been made against Baha'i activities in Algeria (1969), Iraq (1970) and Indonesia (1972).

During the late 1970s, the Baha'i Faith was also banned in a number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Burundi, 1974; Mali 1976; Uganda 1977; Congo, 1978; Niger, 1978).^[31] This was principally the result of a campaign by a number of Arab countries. Since these countries were also by this time providers of development aid, this overt

attack on the Baha'is was supported by covert moves such as linking the aid money to a particular country to the action that it took against the Baha'is. This was partially successful and a number of countries did ban the Baha'is for a time. However, the Baha'is were able to demonstrate to these governments that they were not agents of Zionism nor anti-Islamic and succeeded in having the ban reversed in all of these countries except Niger. Nevertheless, this caused a set-back in the expansion of the Baha'i Faith in many countries--particularly in Uganda which had had the largest Baha'i community in Africa but which suffered a complete ban under Idi Amin's regime followed by further difficulties due to the unsettled conditions after Amin's fall. The situation there has improved in recent years.

Besides direct persecution, the Baha'is have experienced difficulties in several countries in which there are or have been restrictions on the freedom of religion. Thus in almost all countries of the Soviet bloc, the Baha'i groups have been too small to secure permission to organize and conduct their activities, whilst particular historical circumstances have led to the collapse (in the 1920s-1930s) of the formerly large Baha'i communities of Soviet Turkestan and Caucasia^[32] and to the disbanding of the Baha'i organization

in the formerly flourishing Baha'i community of South Vietnam (1978). Until recently, the Baha'is in these countries have also remained fairly isolated, contact with their co-religionists abroad often being regarded with suspicion. Civil unrest has also taken its toll, as in Kampuchea and Suriname.

Apart from the external problems of persecution and government restric-

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tion, many national Baha'i communities have experienced problems related to their programmes of planned expansion. In this regard, there have been two contrasting situations. In some countries--notably most of Western Europe and Japan--there has been the problem of a very slow growth rate. This has made the accomplishment of expansion goals extremely difficult and, given the strong Baha'i emphasis on missionary expansion, is likely to have engendered various 'psychologies of frustration'. At the other extreme, many Third World Baha'i communities have experienced such a rapid increase in numbers that they have encountered considerable problems in consolidating the faith of their new adherents, especially when these are illiterate and geographically isolated. Local responses to this second situation have varied considerably. In South America, for example, Baha'i radio stations have been established in several countries. These have served not only to educate new Baha'is in the fundamentals of their

religion, but also to spread the Baha'i teachings, and to give information to the whole population on literacy, health and agriculture.^[33] Elsewhere, in India for example, the Baha'is have established a network of rural tutorial schools and teaching institutes. Our impression is that overall these various responses have been fairly successful, thus providing many or perhaps most of the communities concerned with an active core of local adherents, a solid basis for further expansion, and to varying degrees an increasing level of stability, maturity and self-reliance. Such success has not however been universal and, in some countries, contact with thousands of former 'new believers' has been lost and the rate of expansion slowed down.

Apart from problems related to numerical expansion, some Baha'i communities have experienced considerable frustration in their attempts to diversify their communities. In Western Europe, for example, the Baha'i communities remain predominantly white and middle class. Again in some Third World countries, the Baha'is have tended to draw a disproportionate number of their adherents from certain ethnic and tribal groups, thus limiting the desired universality of the religion.

A more general problem has been the development of distinctively Baha'i patterns of behaviour. Apart from Iranians, most Baha'is are first generation converts. Naturally levels of commitment vary widely and, in the absence of any communitarianism or of a paid priesthood, involvement in formal Baha'i activities is entirely voluntary and must compete with other 'spare' (non working) time activities. Thus Baha'i involvement often resembles that of other voluntary associations, and despite the existence of often high levels of commitment, the construction and maintenance of a shared Baha'i culture and consciousness remains problematic. Following Baha'i usage, we have consistently referred to Baha'i 'communities', but, in many areas, this term is a misnomer: the local Baha'is exist as a group of loosely associated individuals.

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Even where large-scale rural conversions have led to the existence of *de facto* local Baha'i communities (in the sense of a communal grouping with a high level of social interaction), the emergence of a distinctively Baha'i culture and consciousness remains difficult, and Baha'i norms regarding, say, the equality of the sexes, the abolition of caste prejudices or democratic consultation between community members, remain goals to be achieved rather than present realities.

The final problem that we would mention is intellectual. Despite the recent increase in the attention paid to Baha'i scholarship, there is a general paucity of systematic studies of Baha'i doctrine. Despite--perhaps because of--the great wealth of authoritative Baha'i

texts, there are few studies of Baha'i theology and philosophy. Again, there are very few attempts by Baha'i writers to engage in serious dialogue with other religious and philosophical traditions, or until very recently, to relate Baha'i social teaching to contemporary world realities. The one area of Baha'i scholarship in which a large amount of material has been produced is history and biography. Even here, much of the work is superficial and in some instances 'fundamentalist' in tone. Nevertheless, a solid body of serious work on Baha'i history has emerged, and together with recent work on Baha'i social teachings indicates the beginnings of a resolution to this problem. As in any religion, scholarly study remains of direct interest only to a minority, but has a wider influence throughout the religious tradition.

What then of the future? Prediction is always a perilous undertaking, but on the basis of our knowledge of the present-day Baha'i world, it seems reasonable to make a number of statements regarding the likely development of the Baha'i religion in the immediate future. Thus, it seems highly probable that the present predominance of the Third World as an area of Baha'i growth will continue and that as a corollary of this, Third World Baha'is will become an increasingly important element in the international leadership of the religion and in the patterning of Baha'i cultural styles. The present dominance of Iranian and Western leadership and cultural patterns will correspondingly decline, although both will remain important. Overall, we would expect that the present pattern of numerical expansion and gradual administrative consolidation would continue in most countries outside of the Middle East. Western Europe is likely to remain an area of relative weakness. New possibilities for limited expansion may open up in several communist countries. The situation in Iran is likely to remain black but, unless the level of persecution dramatically increases, we would expect the Iranian Baha'is to survive as a strong and viable religious community.

In terms of central Baha'i concerns, it seems probable that the present trend towards greater social involvement will continue and may well be accentuated. Baha'i involvement with the United Nations and cooperation

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with various other social, religious and humanitarian organizations is also likely to increase. Given these developments and the increasing size of some local Baha'i populations, it seems plausible to expect the gradual development of some Baha'i political role, although given the Baha'i prohibition on party political involvement, we are uncertain as to what form this might take. We would also expect some of the larger local Baha'i communities to begin to develop elements of a more distinctively Baha'i culture

and consciousness. Baha'i may also begin to make a more significant contribution to wider social change in some countries in such areas as the increase of literacy, the emancipation of women, and the facilitation of inter-religious and inter-racial understanding.

There are other aspects of the present Baha'i situation which we would not expect to change dramatically in the immediate future. Thus, we would not expect to see any major changes in the overall structure of Baha'i organizations and leadership nor in most of the central Baha'i concerns which we have identified.

CONCLUSION

We now live in a period in which religious change has become commonplace. New religious movements from a variety of religious traditions abound. Movements such as Christian and Islamic fundamentalism have emerged as powerful forces within the established religions. In this context, the Baha'i Faith is of particular interest in comparative religious scholarship. One of the first Western academics to study the Baha'i Faith, Professor E. G. Browne of Cambridge University, commented in 1889 on the fact that one of the interesting aspects of studying the Baha'i Faith was the fact that one could observe closely the earliest stages of the development of a religion, something that it was no longer possible to do with the great established religions such as Christianity and Islam.^[34] This remark is all the more valid at the present time. Unlike most of today's 'new religions', Baha'i now has a considerable depth of historical development. Again, it has survived the period of uncertainty and possible collapse that follows the death of the founder of any religious movement. Yet withal, Baha'i remains recent. Its origins are fairly readily open to historical enquiry and the crucial period of subsequent institutionalization, expansion and doctrinal development are a matter of contemporary record. These dual characteristics of historical depth and contemporaneity give Baha'i studies a far wider significance and interest than they at present enjoy. Moreover, as our article makes clear, its world wide expansion also places Baha'i beyond the circle of Islamic and Iranian studies in which it has generally been placed.

NOTES

1. There are several general introductions to the Baha'i religion written by Baha'is. Of these, the most comprehensive are: J E Esslemont, *Baha'u'llah and the New Era*, 4th edn, London, 1974; J. Ferraby, *All Things Made New*, revised edn, London, 1975; W. H. Hatcher and J. D. Martin, *The Baha'i Faith; the Emerging Global Religion*; San Francisco, 1984; J. Huddleston, *The Earth is But One Country*, London, 198(). A more critical and historical account is provided by P. Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions from Messianic Shi'ism to a World Religion*, Cambridge, 1987; while a short general outline may be found in P. Smith, *The Baha'i Faith: a short introduction to its history and teachings*, Oxford, 1988.
2. Support for this claim comes from a number of independent authorities. See for example the treatment of the Baha'i Faith in *World Christian Encyclopaedia* (ed. by D. Barrett), oxford, 1982.
3. The International Baha'i Council was a forerunner of the Universal House of Justice, at first appointed by Shoghi Effendi, and later elected.
4. For an account of these developments see V. E. Johnson, 'An historical analysis of critical transformations in the evolution of the Baha'i World Faith', Ph.D. Thesis, Baylor University, 1974, pp. 342-354, 362-380.
5. *The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice*, Haifa, 1972.
6. During the period of Shoghi Effendi's leadership, a number of the tasks now performed in Haifa were delegated to the American National Spiritual Assembly.
7. Since only the Guardian was empowered to appoint the Hands of the Cause, this institution will effectively end with the death of the present incumbents.
8. Five-year term for all except the Auxiliary Board Member's assistants (usually appointed annually) and the remaining Hands of the Cause who were appointed for life by Shoghi Effendi.
9. These were (with approximate dates of the start of a rapid expansion in these areas): Uganda (early 1950s), Mentawai Islands (Indonesia, 1957), Bolivia (late 1950s), India (1961) .
10. The basic unit of local organization is the Local Spiritual Assembly(LSA) for the election of which there have to be a minimum of nine adult Baha'is in the locality. When there are between two and eight Baha'is, they are called a 'group', while a single Baha'i in a locality is recorded as an 'isolated Baha'i'. When there are sufficient LSAs in a

country (usually a minimum of four), a National Spiritual Assembly (NSA) may be formal. Locality figures include Assemblies, groups and isolated Baha'is.

11. See note under Table 2.

12. *The Baha'i World*, vol. 18 (1979-1983), Haifa, 1986, p. 98.

13. *The Seven Year Plan (1979-1986); Statistical Report*, Ridvan 1986, Haifa, 1986, p. 116 and personal communication from Department of the Secretariat, Baha'i World Centre, Haifa, dated 10 July 1986.

14. A Baha'i House of Worship (*Mashriqu'l-Adhkar*) is a building dedicated to private prayer and devotional services only. At present there are seven in the world: Wilmette, Illinois, USA, 1953; Kampala, Uganda, 1961; Sydney, Australia, 1961; Frankfurt, Germany, 1964; Panama City, 1972; Apia, Western Samoa, 1984; New Delhi, India, 1986.

15. With the exception of Persian in which language there was a wider range of work available.

16. The writings of Baha'u'llah, the founder of the religion, of the Bab, who preceded

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him, and of 'Abdu'l-Baha, who was appointed as Baha'u'llah's successor are considered sacred text while the writings of Shoghi Effendi are considered authoritative interpretation.

17. These figures exclude a large number of booklets, pamphlets and leaflets.

18. Source: *Catalogue of Literature*, Baha'i Publishing Trust, British Isles, January, 1972.

19. In the field of children's literature it is difficult to separate what should be regarded as books from booklets. There are another 14 publications (booklets, colouring books, etc.) that might be regarded as children's books.

20. Source: *Price List*, Baha'i Publishing Trust, United Kingdom, October, 1984; *Publications in English Bulletin*, Nos. 1-3, 1984-1985.

21. Peter Smith, 'Motif Research: Peter Berger and the Baha'i faith'. *Religion* 8 (1978) 210-234; idem, *Babi and Baha'i Religions*, p. 3.

22. Balch, Robert W., G. Farnsworth and S. Wilkins, 'When the Bombs drop: Reactions to Disconfirmed Prophecy in a Millennial Sect' *Sociological Perspectives* 26 (1983) 137-158.

23 Approximately 26% of the national and international leadership of the religion is female at present. Personal communication from Department of Statistics, Haifa, letter dated 8 July 1988.

24. *Report on Baha'i Development Projects*, October 1987, Department of Statistics, Haifa, pp. I, 71-76.
25. See Philip Smith, 'What was a Baha'i? An examination of the concerns of British Baha'is during the years 1900 to 1920', in *Baha'i Studies in honour of the late H. M. Balyuzi* (ed. by M. Momen), Los Angeles, forthcoming, and P. Smith, *Babi and Baha'i Religions*, pp. 109-110.
26. See for example: Jamshed Fozdar, *Buddha Maitrya-Amitabha has appeared*, New Delhi, 1976; Kenneth D. Stephens, *So Great a Cause*, Healdsburg, Cal., 1973; William Willoya and Vinson Brown, *Warriors of the Rainbow*, Healdsburg, Cal., 1962.
27. P. Smith, *Babi and Baha'i Religions*, pp. 112-114, 124-125.
28. As mentioned in the Introduction, there was a decline in academic interest in Baha'i between 1920 and 1970. Since about 1970, however, there has been a resurgence of academic interest in Babi and Baha'i subjects. Thus only eight Ph.D. theses were produced on Babi or Baha'i subjects between 1920 and 1970 whereas 12 were completed between 1970 and 1982 (*Baha'i World, 1979-1983*, vol. 18, Haifa 1986, pp. 890-891). An increasing number of papers have also appeared in various academic journals since 1978. Within the Baha'i community itself there has also been an upsurge in interest in a more intensive study of the Baha'i Faith. The Canadian Association for Studies on the Baha'i Faith was established in 1974 and was renamed, in 1981, the Association for Baha'i Studies (ABS) to reflect its international membership. In many other parts of the world Baha'i Studies Associations have been set up, some under the umbrella of the ABS, and some independent of it.
29. R. Cooper, *The Baha'is of Iran*, Minorities Rights Group report no. 51, revised edn, London, 1985; G. Nash, *Iran's Secret Pogrom*, Sudbury, Suffolk, 1982; D. Martin, 'The Persecutions of the Baha'is of Iran', *Baha'i Studies*, no. 12-13 (1984), pp. 1-88; Baha'i International Community, *The Baha'is of Iran: a report on the persecutions of a religious minority*, revised edn, 1982. For a discussion of some of the factors contributing to anti-Baha'i sentiment, see P. Smith, *Babi and Baha'i Religions*, pp. 178- 180.

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30. *The Seven Year Plan 1979-1986; Statistical Report*, Haifa 1986, pp. 3, 96, 98.
31. *The Baha'i World*, vol. 17 (1976-1979), pp. 78-81, 147, and also personal communication from the late Dr. Aziz Navidi.
32. See M. Momen, 'The Baha'i community of Ashkabad', in *Central Asia: tradition and change* (ed. by Shirin Akiner), forthcoming.

33. One of the most important roles of these Baha'i radio stations has however proved to be the fostering of native Amerindian culture which is in danger of being swamped by the Hispanic culture of the cities. See K. J. Hein, *Radio Baha'i Ecuador: a Baha'i development project*, Oxford, 1987.

34. See letter of E. G. Browne dated 1 January 1889 quoted in H. M. Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne and the Baha'i Faith*, Oxford, 1970, pp. 49-50.

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