

THE RELIGIOUS HERITAGE OF AMERICA

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SAN DIEGO • NEW YORK
A. S. BARNES & COMPANY, INC.

IN LONDON:
THE TANTIVY PRESS

THE BAHAI FAITH

Origin

The philosophy of the Bahai movement can be traced to a thirteenth-century reform movement in Islam, but the modern version started in 1844, in Persia, with one called Mirza Muhammad ibn Radhik (1819-1850). At a time of fervent belief in the imminent coming of the divine Messiah, he was convinced that he was the promised messenger, since he was the descendant of the prophet Mohammed. Mirza took the name, "Bab" or "Ed-Din," the Gate of God (or Faith). His followers were called Bahais. He proclaimed that he would fulfill the prophesy and prepare the way for the appearance of the "Great Teacher and Revealer" of the word of God, who would usher in an age of peace for all mankind. In 1850 his life ended in martyrdom at the instigation of the orthodox Moslems.

His successor as Bab was Mirza Husayn Ali (1817-1892), son of a wealthy Persian, who, at the age of 27, had become his disciple. An attempted assassination of the Shah of Persia placed Bab in jeopardy and he and his followers were exiled to Baghdad. Years of repeated imprisonment and persecution, but the followers failed to eradicate the movement. In 1863, Bab announced that he was the One whose coming had been foretold, the promised one of all prophets to whom God had revealed the basic unity of all religions and the oneness of all races. He changed his name to "Bahauallah," Glory of God.

Relentless persecution only added to strengthening the Bahai movement. Bahauallah recorded his beliefs and teachings in what are now the sacred and revealed tablets, the main ones being *The Seven Villages* and *The Fourteen Tablets*. They speak of a universal religion and of moral precepts incumbent on all mankind. Before he died in prison, he spent a period of time on Mt. Carmel, Haifa, where today stands the first shrine symbolizing the Bahai faith. His will and testament designated his son (Abbas Effendi) Abdul Baha (1844-1922) as the Servant of Baha, as his successor.

In 1912 during the son's travels in the United States, the cornerstone was laid for the beautiful Bahai Temple on the shores of Lake Michigan, at Wilmette, Illinois. It is the first Bahai edifice patterned after the Haifa Temple in the occidental world. It was dedicated in 1953. Universal in concept, the temple is meant to embody the synagogue, the cathedral, the mosque and the church. It is the embodiment of the Bahai faith in tangible form.

The structure is nonagonal, since the number "nine" is considered to be a mystical number of perfection. In the temple there are nine concrete piers or columns, nine arches, nine sides, and nine entrances for adherents of the nine major religions of the world. In the park surrounding the temple are nine avenues or lanes, nine gateways, and nine fountains.

The movement is small, but growing. There are 925 spiritual assemblies in 5,400 localities. Assembly groups are small in number, with the majority consisting of from one to eight members. It is estimated that there are about 100 in Los Angeles, California.

Name

The word Bahai means a follower of the faith. It is derived from the Persian name of the founder of the movement, Bahauallah, which means "Glory of God."

Structure and Polity

Bahai is not an offshoot of Islam, as some claim, but is an independent movement, without any connection with any other religious body. There is one place of worship in each of five continents, but the ones in Illinois and Israel are called shrines, with the headquarters at the latter. Fellowship meetings, often called "Fireside Meetings," are held by small groups either in homes or rented rooms. There is no clergy or formal worship, nor are there professional missionaries, paid teachers, or collections. The meetings are characterized by study, lectures, meditations, and readings from Bahai sacred works and other sources such as the Koran and the Old and New Testaments. Teachers conduct weddings and funerals that are very simple, without theological references.

The last world leader was Shoghi Effendi, Rabbani, the last direct descendant of Bahauallah. Since then, the governing body is the Bahai Universal House of Justice, located in Haifa, consisting of nine resident members elected by national assemblies for five years. Next in authority is the "Hands of the Cause," assisted by auxiliary boards in overseeing worldwide activities. Each local assembly elects its own authorities annually. National Spiritual Assemblies, consisting of nine members, 21 years of age or over, give guidance to the local assemblies. The organization has a policy of not issuing membership figures.

Doctrine and Belief

Bahai holds to no sacraments or creedal beliefs. It is universal in scope and rejects all theological concepts in the hope of uniting all people in one encompassing religion. Its essence is monotheistic. God is transcendent, unknowable, and revealed through creation and prophesy. There is no ecclesiastical-directed religion. There is only one God, even though men have called him by dif-

ferent names. All religions are established on a divine foundation, but the most important to any religion is love, equality, and personal holiness.

Bahatism is dedicated to the unity of mankind and emphasizes harmony between science and religion; to justice as the ruling principle in human society; to the highest ethical standards with special regard to honesty, fidelity, and humility; to universal compulsory education for both sexes; to a universal language to enable all people to communicate with each other; to the elimination of all prejudices, particularly, national, racial, and religious; to universal peace and world government through a federation of nations; and to the synthesis of all religions. Draft-age men are urged to serve as conscientious objectors during wartime.

The Bahai do not use drugs or alcohol except when necessary to cure illness. Idleness is condemned and work is regarded as a form of worship because it is interpreted as a service to humanity.

BIOSOPHICAL INSTITUTE

Origin

Biosophy is a combination of religion, philosophy, ethics, politics, economics, and art. It was started in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1933 by Dr. Frederick Kettner, a humanist and mystic. It might be labeled the science of intelligent living. He believed that there was something worthwhile in every system of psychology, philosophy, and religion, and whatever contributes to the improvement of the human character should be taught.

Name

The word "Biosophy" was coined by Dr. Kettner from *Bios*, meaning life, and *Sophia*, meaning intelligence. The literature of the institute gives the following definition.

Biosophy is the science of the inner life which has its roots in the eternal nature of the universe and of man, teaching us how to come to the consciousness and practice of cosmic principles, laws and qualities, which are essential to individual well-being and freedom, and to the creation of an ethical-social fellowship.

Structure and Polity

Technically, this is not a religion, but its humanistic aims qualify it for consideration. There are local clubs in several cities which hold regular meetings. The *Biosophical Review*, to which many well known men and women of erudition contribute articles, is published by the Biosophical Institute in New York City.

Doctrine and Belief

Intelligent living is based upon spiritual values, ethical-social principles, and character qualities. This group seeks to enlist those who are seeking leadership and guidance in a world that lacks right thinking and harmony with universal law. In its pursuit of "self-culture," it adheres to the ancient motto: "Truth alone, although men call it by many names."

Among the objectives of this organization are: the education of the emotional and mental natures of man so that not only the wish for friendship but also the ideal can be made more adequate in his mind in order that he may reach the normal development of character, freedom, and brotherhood; the study of human nature, not only psychologically and biologically but also biosophically;