Baha'i Faith in Australia 1947-1963

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This paper outlines some of the salient episodes in the evolution of the Australian Bahá'í community during the years 1947-1963.[1] I commence with an observation about method and perspective. This is not the only history that might be written, merely a history from my perspective, reliant on the evidence I have been able to find. Religious history entails, no doubt, recounting the lives of significant individuals, and the growth of the institutions and ideals of religion in a particular social and historical context. One must make sure, however, to find the "history of religion" in the historical evidence, rather than impose a "religious" view of history on it. We seek to write a sympathetic history, in other words, which is true to the facts, the feelings, the emotions and motives, as they occurred at the time. In this way we can document a community and individuals undergoing gradual transformation, from stages of lesser to greater progress and spiritual perfection. In this way too, the Bahá'í community is encountered as a "model for study", and yields historically verifiable proof that peoples and communities can transform, under the spell of Bahá'u'lláh's Divine principles, and overcome their former limitations.

In God Passes By Shoghi Effendi documents the virtual eclipse of the Babi Faith in the tragic period following the martyrdom of the Bab. Why? Because this was the historical truth, and because his purpose was to give the historical

lesson to the effect that this cause can triumph over seemingly insurmountable obstacles. The world has always required heroes, and the Bahá'ís must acknowledge theirs. At one level Bahá'í history may be read as the working out of divine Providence, but for the historian, providential acts are conveyed by people, with both their innate weaknesses and strengths. A balanced account, therefore, must present all, and narrate a story to the extent that it is comprehendable. The historian cannot uncover all the actors, all the motives, all the causes, and can only offer a humble and partial account of what he or she sees.

The Study of Religion in Australia

In the 1960s, study of the history of religions in Australia focussed predominantly on relations between Catholics, Protestants, and the state. As is well known, much of the religious life of Anglo-Australia occurred within the contexts of Christian sectarianism, and the post-Enlightenment expansion of secular thought. The national census of 1966 indicated there were a mere 8,804 adherents of non-Christian religions other than Islam and Judaism in the Australian population.[2] Hence early studies such as Mol's Religion in Australia make passing reference to Judaism, but do not mention other great traditions such as Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism.[3]

Within two decades, however, partly as a result of Australia's restructured migration policies, under which many thousands of peoples of other races, nations and creeds came to settle here, Michael Hogan notes in The Sectarian Strand there is now "little question" that Australia has become a "much more pluralist society":

> Christian churches now compete for influence in society with many more sources of influences than previously. New styles of religious enthusiasm compete with the established churches. Oriental sects like the Hari Krishnas and ancient religions like Islam and Buddhism demand attention.[4]

Breward has similarly observed:

> Since the 1960s, there has been a marked increase in the variety of Australian religiosity, ranging from small migrant groups from historic

churches like the
Assyrians and the Copts to exotic sects from Asia and North America, of whom the Moonies
and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness are the most widely known. There
are a variety of groups related in different ways to the schools of Hinduism and Buddhism,
as well as the divisions of Islam and Judaism.[5]

Breward's footnote to this passage refers to Many Faiths; One Nation,
a work edited by Ian Gillman to mark Australia's bi-centennial year in 1988, in which the
stories of religious communities both small and large are told. Many Faiths includes a first account, however brief, of the historical origins of the Bahá'í Faith
in Australia.[6] There
are a number of manuscript histories, including Graeme Potter Rouhani's Dawn in the
West; and Ron Price's The Tinderbox is Lit. There is, too, Margaret Cockett's 1961 thesis presented at the University of Sydney, A Sociological Study of the Bahá'í
Faith in New South Wales. Although several additional papers have appeared since,[7] this community remains one of the
lesser known religious traditions in Australia and the South Pacific.[8]

Even within the discourse of Bahá'í studies, the histories of
Bahá'í communities in Western societies - such as Australia, but also including Great
Britain, European countries, and even North America - are less well known, and less
documented, than their third world and middle-eastern counterparts. Perhaps their
histories are regarded as somehow less colourful than the histories of the Bahá'í
community in Iran which has faced so much persecution; or its sister communities in other
Islamic countries which have been similarly persecuted.[9]

The Australian Bahá'í Community to 1947

Clara and Hyde Dunn, both of whom had met Abdu'l-Bahá in California in 1912, arrived in Australia in April 1920. At an advanced age Hyde Dunn worked his way
around the Australian continent as a travelling salesman, and gradually attracted a small
Bahá'í following, including Oswald Whitaker, of Sydney, and Effie Baker, of Melbourne.
With the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in November 1921, leadership of the Bahá'í community

transferred to his grandson, Shoghi Effendi, whose station as "Guardian" of the Bahá'í Faith, conferred on him in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament, was intended as the first stage in the evolution of the Bahá'í pattern of administration. In his work Advent of Divine Justice Shoghi Effendi referred to the "solid achievements, spiritual as well as administrative" of the Australian Bahá'ís.[10] A National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia and New Zealand had been established 1934, the first summer school at what was to become the Yerrinbool Bahá'í School took place in 1938. A national Haziratu'l-Quds (administrative headquarters) was established in Sydney in 1944. In 1947 the number of delegates to National Convention increased from 9 to 19.

The Six Year Plan, 1947-53

During the six years from 1947-1953 Bahá'í communities were expanding on every continent. By 1953 there were twelve National Spiritual Assemblies in the world, and this number was to rise by 1963 to a total of 56. When the Australian and New Zealand Bahá'ís commenced a six year plan of expansion and consolidation in 1947 they numbered five Local Assemblies, and five groups.[11] The task in the six year plan was to achieve an additional 31 groups and 7 more LSAs. To the Assemblies already existing in Sydney, Adelaide, Auckland, Caringbah and Yerrinbool were to be added others in Brisbane, Melbourne, Hobart, Perth, Woodville, Port Adelaide, and Wollongong. The five existing groups - Albert Park, Melbourne, Brisbane, Hobart and Perth - were each to become Assemblies, and a further 31 groups were to be formed: 8 in NSW; 5 in Victoria; 8 in South Australia; 5 in Tasmania; and 4 in New Zealand. The actual rates of growth in the numbers of Bahá'ís in the states of Australia and in New Zealand were quite low, as evident in this table calculated from reports in Bahá'í Quarterly.

State1947-481948-491949-501950-511951-521952-53

NSW8131941014

QLD--11643

SA99163158

TAS1331113

VIC31-33-

WA-61--1

NT------

NZ54121256

Totals263662293845

Table: New Bahá'ís in Australia and New Zealand by state

The redefinition of community boundaries

One of the major issues affecting the Bahá'ís at this time was a purely administrative matter. Prior to the establishment of any form of Bahá'í administration, the question as to where the boundaries of one community ended and those of its neighbour commenced was moot: the Bahá'ís in the major cities regarded themselves as members of one large, informal group. With the addition of additional members, however, some of whom resided further from the city centre than others, the matter of forming smaller Bahá'í groups in outer suburbs began to surface. As simple as this appears in hindsight, the process of multiplying the number of communities proved quite traumatic, and must be regarded as one of the most tense moments in the Australian Bahá'í community's brief history.

In June 1947 the National Spiritual Assembly decided to allow Adelaide's Communities to organise themselves according to the city's postal boundaries. Then, in November 1948, the National Spiritual Assembly decided that the area of jurisdiction of the major cities would be the "the city proper", and wrote to all assemblies seeking the names of all Bahá'ís and the civil areas in which they lived. The Melbourne Bahá'ís requested the National Spiritual Assembly to shed "a little more light" on its understanding of the term "areas of jurisdiction". Great efforts were being made at this time to boost the number of Local Assemblies around Australia: Yerrinbool Local Spiritual Assembly was established in December 1947, and the Local Spiritual Assemblies of Hobart, Perth, and Brisbane were formed at Ridvan (April 21) 1949.

These developments occurred at the same time that the National Assembly's legal committee was seeking a strategy for the incorporation of the various Local Spiritual Assemblies. On 7 June 1949 committee member and lawyer Jeff Dive outlined to the National Teaching Committee on behalf of the Legal Committee his plan for Local Assemblies to benefit from a "uniform type of incorporation - by virtue of a special act of parliament framed on the lines of the Churches of Christ act 1947". The success of the "Incorporation Plan, Dive suggested, would largely depend on the success of the teaching plan, as he felt there had to be more LSAs in the State of NSW to justify an approach to the State Parliament. The Legal Committee had thus asked the National Teaching Committee to recommend that the Sydney Assembly be asked to "take steps to arrange for groups to be formed from certain of its community members with the objective of encouraging such groups to attain Assembly status in the shortest possible time."

The Legal Committee had identified two areas in Sydney, and three in Adelaide, which he believed had sufficient numbers of Bahá'ís to establish Local Spiritual Assemblies separate to the original Sydney Assembly. Bahá'ís resident in North Sydney were Mr G. Bartell, Clara Dunn, Gladys Moody, W. Hancock, James and Antoinette Lovelady, and Jimmy Maxwell; those in Ku-ring-gai were Meg Degotardi, N. Nowland, and Noel and Bessie Walker. In South Australia the Committee had identified Burnside, Payneham and Unley groups (The Bahá'ís in Burnside were Mrs Almond, Mrs Frick, Mrs Patrick, Mrs Roper, Mrs Johnson, and Hilda and Ewart Thomas; in Payneham: W & G Allen, Miss J Clark, Bertha and Joe Dobbins, and Florence and Harold Fitzner; and those in Unley: Margaret and Jim Chittleborough, E Hawthorne, Bill Motteram, Grace Muffin, Ilma Scotland, and H. Tymons.[12] The National Spiritual Assembly decided at a special meeting in August 1949 to instruct the NTC to "put into operation a plan whereby groups will be formed from the Adelaide

Bahá'í Community.

Members of that Community, however, reacted in different ways. Two couples, the Dobbins and the Allens, resigned from Adelaide community in November 1949 to join the new Payneham community, and Bertha Dobbins and Will Allen resigned from the Assembly. The remainder of the community, who had also received resignation forms from the National Assembly, met at their centre at Eagle Chambers in Pirie Street on 8 December, and accepted Adelaide Local Spiritual Assembly's advice to not proceed individually in the matter, since they were "under the jurisdiction of their local assembly, which assembly is at present in consultation with the National Assembly and the Guardian on this question".[13]

Adelaide Assembly's view was that although the national body had written to it on 8 August indicating what they intended doing, this was not sufficient consultation on such an important matter.[14] This view was also expressed in the responses of individual Adelaide Bahá'ís. Eric Bowes, for instance, wrote that the National Teaching Committee's letter had caused him "much mental pain and embarrassment" and that he had acceded to its request to convene the Burnside group only under protest, and suggested that the National Assembly had not made clear whether it was acting under specific instructions of the Guardian.

"If the NSA were endeavouring to put into effect a move that they believed would be in the best interest of the Faith throughout Australia, then I feel they should have first written to the Adelaide LSA setting out the plans they envisaged, and requesting the LSA to call the Friends together for consultation on the proposals. If, after acting as set out above, no agreement could be reached, then the matter could have been referred to the Guardian."[15]

Bowes' letter was passed to the National Spiritual Assembly by the National Teaching Committee, which commented:

"The attitude of the Adelaide Spiritual Asssembly (as conveyed in its circular to community members) completely negatives this Committee's efforts to carry out the NSAs wishes the instructions to form new Groups there.

The NTC will await your further instructions as there is nothing more it can do meantime in this matter".[16]

On 21 December Adelaide Assembly informed the National Spiritual Assembly that it had appealed the matter to Shoghi Effendi. The National Assembly, in turn, did not accept a list of members provided by Adelaide Assembly, and sent its own appeal to the Guardian. Whereas Adelaide insisted it had 50 members, the National Assembly, adhering to the new local community boundaries, recognised only 18, having placed the remainder in new localities. Thirty-six members of the community were affected by the changes, including 8 members of the LSA (only Dorothy Dugdale continued on the Assembly after 1950). On 28 December 1949 Shoghi Effendi replied that Adelaide should comply with the National Spiritual Assembly's wishes, and Mrs Johnson, Hilda Thomas, Harold and Florence Fitzner, Silver Jackman, Leila Clark, and Bill Motteram subsequently resigned from the Adelaide Assembly. The National Spiritual Assembly appointed Collis Featherstone, Bertha Dobbins and Ethel Dawe to organise a by-election on 17 March 1950 to replace eight members of the Adelaide Assembly. Hilda Thomas and Leila Clark were among those elected. Four new groups were established, and Adelaide Assembly was allotted just two delegates to the 1950 convention.

Despite tensions such as occurred in Adelaide as a result of a change in policy at the national level, the Bahá'í community as a whole expanded at a steady rate. At the end of the six-year teaching plan the community comprised 14 Local Assemblies and 45 other localities, although membership still numbered less than 200.[17] However, apart from isolated instances of press and radio coverage and innumerable publicly advertised meetings and other events held in conjunction with a range of social and religious organisations, the vast majority of Australians still had no knowledge of the Bahá'í Teachings.

The Ten Year World Crusade, 1953-63

The decade 1953-1963 held great promise and produced remarkable results for the Australasian Bahá'ís. In June 1952 the Guardian had addressed them

as: "the members of the youthful yet vigorously functioning community, championing the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh in the Antipodes who, by reason of their close proximity, are expected to contribute a substantial share to the establishment of the institutions of the Faith in the numerous and widely scattered islands and archipelagoes of the South Pacific Ocean".[18] The significance of that year - 1963 - consisted in its being the centenary of the public "proclamation" of the mission of Bahá'u'lláh, and Shoghi Effendi had designed a masterful ten-year "Global Crusade" to be completed in the decade leading to it. This plan of action required the Bahá'ís of Australia and New Zealand to carry out one of 12 multi-faceted, trans-continental, decade-long programs designed to widen its base, strengthen its institutions, and assist in laying the foundations for the establishment of the Universal House of Justice.

The plan called for doubling the number of Local Assemblies in Australia and New Zealand; and obtaining legal incorporation for 19 of them; translation and publication of literature into 40 new languages in cooperation with the Indian Bahá'ís; purchase of land for a future Temple (Mashriqu'l-Adhkar); the formation and legal incorporation of a separate National Assembly in New Zealand; the purchase of land, and a national Headquarters (Haziratu'l-Quds) in Auckland; and the establishment of a legal branch of the Australian National Assembly in Israel.

The years of the Crusade were full of both crises and victories for Bahá'ís in different parts of the world. Persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran, in Morocco, unheralded expansion of Bahá'í communities in Asia and Africa, the untimely passing of Shoghi Effendi in 1957, the stewardship of the Hands of the Cause of God - the conducting of these soul-stirring events all in virtual obscurity, in a world engrossed in its own concerns. The decade 1953-63 coincided with considerable social and political turmoil in world affairs. Global combat had ceased following the allied victory in world war two, but militarism continued during the 'Cold War' (1947-1990) which pitted the

so-called
'superpowers' and their allies in geo-political struggle and ideological difference: the
Berlin blockade (1948-49); the Korean War (1950-53); construction of the Berlin wall
(1961); the Indo-China war (1945-75); and the Cuban missile crisis (1962) - were only the
more notable episodes in this tense period of history, which was also marked by the
aftermath of the Communist victory in China (1949); discovery of the excesses of Stalinist
rule in the USSR following that leader's death in 1953; atmospheric testing and
proliferation of thermo-nuclear weapons; the elaboration of apartheid in South Africa; and
the rise of anti-colonialist and nationalist movements throughout Africa and Asia. It was
in the context of such global convulsions that Bahá'í pioneers sought to transcend
cultural, religious and political boundaries, to plant the seeds of Bahá'u'lláh's World
Order. Although Australians probably considered themselves isolated from many of these
difficulties, Shoghi Effendi said Australia was "impotent to extricate herself" from world conditions.[19]

Propagation

For Bahá'ís, the process of propagation is couched in a series of
rules, which individual members observed to greater and lesser degrees, in accord with
their own measure of zeal, wisdom, and enthusiasm. They may offer their message, but
cannot press it, and they cannot engage in argumentation, since Bahá'u'lláh has
established that the purpose of religion is to establish peace, and that if two people
argue, both are wrong. Furthermore, Bahá'í discourse favours rational proofs and
persuasive arguments, but forbids the "sowing of seeds of doubt in faithful hearts". Such guidelines had practical implications for the Australian Bahá'ís.
They had to be open but not pushy, and allow responses to come from those who genuinely
wished to know more. The Bahá'í agenda brought a measure of success but also a number of
difficulties. Few could disagree with the majority of the principles, since they embody
the highest aspirations for many in society. But for exactly the same reason,

few could
view the Bahá'ís as anything but idealists, who advocated unobtainable objectives.
Furthermore, Bahá'í concerns were differed markedly to those which exercised the public
mind in Australia in the 1950s. A report of a meeting in Hobart in early 1961 exemplifies
the Bahá'í "public meeting", of which hundreds were held during the decade of the World Crusade:

Hobart: Public Meeting was attended by an audience of 50,
including about 36 non-Bahá'ís. Chairman of the meeting was Professor Townsley of the
University of Tasmania.

"World Unity" was the theme of the meeting. Mr. Harrison of
the United Nations Association spoke on "Should Race be a Barrier to World Unity"; Mr. Trott of the University spoke on "World Government" and
visiting Bahá'í Mr. Frank Khan spoke on "World Unity through World Faith". At the conclusion of the meeting, Professor Townsley suggested that the audience investigate
the Bahá'í teachings.

A number of posters were used to publicise the meeting, and some 200
invitations were sent out. A report of the meeting appeared in the Hobart "Mercury".[20]

The prospect of informing a secularised and mostly disinterested
Australian society about Bahá'í belief was no doubt one both daunting and challenging.
Methods of propagation included the placing of advertisements in local papers and on
radio, the holding of public meetings, placement of books in public libraries, the holding
of small group discussions in family homes. Frequently, Bahá'ís shared platforms with
branches of the United Nations Association, and at other times joined and other religious
communities in observance of World Religion Day. The 1961 observance in Sydney, according
to one report, attracted some 200 people.[21] Individual Bahá'ís continued their interest in Esperanto, although probably
with less intensity than had existed in the 1920s and 30s.

Prominent speakers such as Hilda Brooks, first secretary of the
Australian and New Zealand National Spiritual Assembly, travelled constantly to speak at
public meetings and in private homes. Other constant travel teachers included Frank Khan,

Eric Bowes, Collis Featherstone, Thelma Perks. Periodically, Bahá'ís from other countries arrived to conduct speaking tours: A.Q. Faizi and A.A. Furutan; Shirin Fozdar; Dr Rahmat Muhajir, and William Sears. Such international travellers attracted a certain measure of publicity. Shirin Fozdar, for example, Chairman of the National Assembly of Southeast Asia, and secretary of the Singapore Council of Women, toured Australia in 1952 and again in January 1960. In Perth she spoke at a series of lectures arranged by Mrs B.M. Rischbieth, of the Women's Service Guild (who had assisted Martha Root in 1939) and was featured in the Daily News (6 January) and the West Australian (7 January). Similar meetings and press coverage were obtained in the other Australian states.[22]

Homefront pioneering

The task of multiplying the geographic spread of Bahá'í communities within Australia constituted the most arduous of the Crusade's objectives. The community knew full well the prevailing attitudes toward religion in Australian society, let alone attitudes toward beliefs outside the Christian tradition, couched in unfamiliar terminology. Moreover, many members had experienced, at the time they chose to become Bahá'ís, the prejudices of family and friends, who in many cases rejected them without engaging in reasoned discussion of what it was that they had so enthusiastically embraced.

The Bahá'ís were fully aware of their limited resources and fewness of numbers, and the challenge was not made easier by the departure to the Pacific of a number of the community's most active and able members, including six of the nine members of the National Assembly elected for that year. In these limited circumstances several towns and cities were selected in each state to be the recipients of concerted publicity and related activities. In New South Wales Bahá'ís were visiting Tamworth, Bathurst, Gosford, Griffith, Glen Innes, Liverpool, Maitland, Nowra, Parramatta, Grafton, Bowral, Wagga, Albury, Newcastle, Wollongong, Canberra. In Victoria, efforts were focused on

Warrnambool, Geelong, Ballarat. In South Australia, regular visits were being made to the country towns of Clare, Kapunda, Port Pirie, Tarlee, Gawler, Tanunda, Nuriootpa and Lobethal. Additional towns were selected in Western Australia and Queensland.

As the years of the Crusade progressed, and the deadline for the settlement of towns approached, individuals and families made decisions to relocate, either for a short term, or permanently. For instance, physiotherapist Jim Chittleborough and his wife Margaret moved from the Adelaide suburb of Unley to Naracoorte; accountant Colin Duncan and his wife Allaine, a speech therapist, who moved from Sydney to Tamworth, N.S.W. By 1963 families in most states had relocated from the major centres to one or another country town.

International pioneering

Arguably the most eventful of the Crusade activities concerned expansion into the Pacific Islands. For several years, individual Bahá'ís including Mariette Bolton and Alvin Blum had visited New Caledonia and Fiji, where small communities had been established. From 1953, the Australian and New Zealand National Assembly, through its "Asian Teaching Committee", co-ordinated the settlement of "pioneers" in the Cocos Islands, New Hebrides (now Vanuatu), Portuguese Timor, Society Islands (French Polynesia); Bismarck Archipelago, New Guinea mainland and Admiralty Islands (Manus) in Papua New Guinea, Fiji, and New Caledonia. Having no missionary tradition, and very little knowledge of Pacific Islands cultures, the Bahá'ís held a "South Pacific School" in May 1953, to which they invited to address them noted experts of the day. It was conducted over two-days at 2 Lang Road. Audiences of 30-50 listened to lectures by such authorities as the anthropologist A.P. Elkin, the linguist Arthur Capell, and Pacific Islands Monthly editor R.W. Robson. A "Pacific Research Committee" produced a 60-page book of valuable information about the South Pacific, for those who were hoping to pioneer.

As noted above, six members of the 1953 National Assembly members were among the pioneers to these destinations. The Admiralty Islands (Manus) of Papua New

Guinea were opened by Violet Hoehnke in July 1954; Cocos Islands in the Indian Ocean by Frank Wyss in June 1955. The Loyalty Islands, which form part of New Caledonia, were settled briefly by Daniel Haumont in October 1955. The Mentawei Islands of the coast of Sumatra in Indonesia, although an Australian goal, were settled by Persian Bahá'ís Rahmatu'llah and Iran Muhajir in February 1954. Adelaide school-teacher Bertha Dobbins moved to Vila in the New Hebrides in October 1953 and remained until 1980. Adelaide Bahá'ís Harold and Florence Fitzner moved to Portuguese Timor in June 1954. Yet another Adelaide Bahá'í, Irene Jackson, moved to Fiji. Tasmanians Gretta Lamprill and Glad Parke travelled to the Society Islands (French Polynesia) in October 1954: as they were not French citizens they were not allowed to stay. Pacific Bahá'í communities grew more rapidly that those in Australia and New Zealand, and in 1992 account for the highest per capita Bahá'í populations in any part of the world.

Institutional development

During the years of the Crusade the administrative order of the Bahá'í community experienced considerable development both globally and nationally. As Guardian of the Faith, Shoghi Effendi guided the establishment of an order in which authority and responsibility are devolved from global to national and even local level; and which maximises global adherence to essentials while safeguarding regional diversity in all secondary matters. His directives to the Australian Assemblies, both National and Local, encouraged their strict observance of uniform procedure, and their freedom to exercise their own judgement. During the Crusade, the mechanism for electing the National Assembly underwent refinement. From 1954 the number of delegates to National Convention was rose from 19 to 38. In 1955 Shoghi Effendi called for the establishment of a separate National Spiritual Assembly for New Zealand. This was achieved in 1957. Bahá'í institutions gradually acquired legal recognition, which brought a protection

in law
already enjoyed by other religious communities in Australia, allowed Assemblies to hold
title to property, and facilitated recognition of Bahá'í marriage ceremonies and burial
procedures.

Approval was also gained from various state authorities for Bahá'ís
to absent themselves from work on the occasion of Bahá'í holy days. Australia's federal
legal structure and specific laws relating to recognition of religious bodies required
meant that the various forms of recognition were received at different times in different
states. By April 1950 the Department of Education in the State of Victoria recognized
Bahá'í Holy Days. An Israel Branch of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís
of Australia and New Zealand was formed by April 1954. Early in 1954 land was purchased on
Mt Carmel "to the west of the Bab's resting place" registered in the name of the
Israel branch of the NSA of Australia and New Zealand.[23] A plot of land valued at $5,000 was being registered in
its name by Ridvan 1955.[24] Holy days recognised in Victoria and South Australia by 1957. The Australian
National Spiritual Assembly was incorporated in 1961.

Accompanying gradual recognition under civil law was the steady
adoption of Bahá'í law. Most laws concerning personal status had been effective since
formation of the National Assembly in 1934. When Shoghi Effendi ruled in 1954-55 that
Bahá'ís could not concurrently be members of secret societies, several Australian
members were requested to withdraw from Freemasonry: those who did not had their voting
rights removed.

The Administrative Order

Shoghi Effendi appointed people of mature experience, between 1951 and
1957, as "Hands of the Cause", to assist and advise him in each continent. In
1952 he appointed Clara Dunn, a "Hand", responsible for advising and protecting
the growth of the administrative institutions in Australasia. Two years later, when he
instructed the Hands on each continent to appoint members to an "Auxiliary
Board", Clara Dunn appointed Collis Featherstone and Thelma Perks. Their subsequent

activities consolidated the "appointed" arm, which was empowered to advise and consult the "elected" arm, the Local Assemblies, just as the Hands were empowered to advise National Assemblies. Thelma Perks later served as a Counsellor on the
Australasian Board. Collis Featherstone was himself appointed a Hand of the Cause in 1957.
He travelled extensively in Australia, often visiting parliamentarians, religious leaders,
and other public officials. In 1958 he appointed as additional Auxiliary Board Members for
the Pacific region, Hugh Blundell, in New Zealand, and Margaret Rowling, in Fiji.

The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár

A fresh outbreak of persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran in 1955 had halted plans to construct a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár (House of Worship) in Tehran, the capital of Iran, leading Shoghi Effendi to decide to build two: in Kampala, Uganda,
and Sydney, Australia. A seven-acre site was acquired in February 1956. Plans to build the
Temple were officially announced at the 1957 convention. Funds were raised within
Australia and from the Bahá'ís from around the world, and the nine-sided, domed Mashriqu'l-Adhkár
of simple concrete and marble construction was dedicated in September 1961. The building
of this Temple, more than any other activity of the Bahá'ís, aroused public curiosity.
The Brisbane Telegraph, reported on 17 January 1958 "The Bahá'ís build a church":

The followers of a nineteenth century Persian nobleman will build a £150,000 nine-sided House of Worship 22 miles from Sydney within the next 13 months. The
House of Worship will be the centre of a hospital, school for orphaned children, and a
college for higher education, making the temple a spiritual centre for all forms of
culture, education and welfare work.

The Sydney House of Worship will be the third built by the Faith, which has 8 million followers in 3,700 localities in the world.

Americans were largely responsible for the spread of the Faith, and two brought it to Australia in 1920. It first came to Brisbane in 1923. The followers were
given assembly status in 1949 and it was recognised by the state government under the

Religious Institutions Act in January this year.

A Brisbane follower said there were nearly 500 Bahá'ís in Australia - 22 of them in Brisbane.

The Lord Major of Sydney held a reception for international dignitaries present for the dedication, and the Daily Telegraph for 18 September reported 100 visitors from 20 countries among a total of 1,800 at the opening. Press coverage at the time was considerable, and resulted in several articles appearing in church newspapers. In addition to domestic press, brief articles about the Bahá'í Faith appeared at during this period in such international news magazines as Time, and the Economist.[25] The persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran which resulted in the building of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in Sydney also hastened the migration of Persian Bahá'ís to Australia and New Zealand - although not in the substantial numbers following the later, 1979 Islamic revolution.

Increasing public awareness

In May 1958 Sydney hosted one of four intercontinental conferences called by the Guardian to mark the mid-way point of the Crusade. Mason Remey was directed to attend the Sydney conference, and to bring a portion of earth from the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, a lock of His hair, and a reproduction of his portrait. The earth was to be placed in the foundations of the Sydney temple. The conference was one of the first opportunities for the Australian Bahá'ís to meet fellow believers from the countries of Southeast Asia, and the Pacific. The unremitting efforts of the Bahá'í gradually attracted a greater measure of media coverage, although this was more often in provincial and suburban papers than in the city dailies. The Northern Argus in Clare, South Australia, (circulation 12,000) frequently reprinted articles submitted by Hilda Brooks and Rose Hawthorne to the editor, who had become quite sympathetic. The Advocate, in Devonport, Tasmania, carried an exchange of letters to the editor about the Bahá'í Faith between March and June 1961 from which neither correspondent departed victor. Articles and news items appeared in such diverse publications as the Northern

Territory
News, Parade, People, and Sydney's Daily Mirror.

Scholarship

The imperative for Bahá'ís to "teach" their Faith was accompanied by another to "deepen" their knowledge of it. One could argue that the anti-intellectual strand in the Australian social fabric inevitably influenced those Australians who became Bahá'ís, and the apparent distance between Bahá'í writings which uphold and extol the validity of intellectual inquiry and freedom of speech on the one hand, and the measured anti-intellectualism of many in the Australian community on the other, constituted one of its major challenges. This is not to say that there were no intellectuals nor scholars in the community at this time. The desire to articulate Bahá'í viewpoints had prompted New Zealand Bahá'í Bertram Dewing to establish the magazine Herald of the South in 1925. Although intended as an instrument for outreach, the magazine was always in financial difficulty and never high in circulation. Its articles were popularly written, concise, and invariably focused on one or other of what were called the "12 principles".

The establishment of a Bahá'í Society at the University of Sydney in the 1950s, and the University of Queensland in 1961 suggests that a more educated generation of Bahá'ís was emerging. Notable among this group were Peter Khan, a University Medallist in Engineering who rose to become reader in engineering at the University of Queensland, and who is now a member of the Universal House of Justice. Other members included Pam Ringwood, now a senior legal academic in New Zealand, and David Podger, who studied anthropology and later computer science.

Additionally, an older generation of private scholars, such as Jim Heggie, a chiropractor who became absorbed in Quranic studies; Eric Bowes; and Frank Khan, a merchant of Urdu speaking Islamic background who became a Bahá'í in 1949, and who mastered Farsi (and some Arabic) in order to read Bahá'u'lláh's original Writings, were among those frequently engaged in study programs at the Yerrinbool School.

Response: the churches

Bahá'í activities gradually attracted responses from church leaders. Some wrote letters to the editors of regional newspapers, others editorialised in their church newspapers: The Anglican in Sydney, (4 April 1958); The Beacon, of Melbourne's Unitarian Church (March 1961); Fingerpost, an Anglican paper from Caringbah (October 1961 "The Truth about the Bahá'í Faith"); the Catholic Weekly (14 September 1961); Compass, an Anglican publication from Bathurst in New South Wales (April 1961); the South Australian Methodist (March and April 1961) and the Southern Cross, a Catholic publication from South Australia, in about April 1958.

Bahá'í beliefs were also noted in the works of clerics, such as Ernest H. Vines, and the Methodist Arnold Hunt. Vines, a past moderator of the Presbyterian Church in New South Wales, wrote in Gems of the East: A Brief Introduction to Non-Christian Religions:[26]

The Bahá'í Faith seems to be a religion of law; the religion of Jesus Christ is a religion of the Spirit. Bahá'u'lláh prays, "O God, destroy the Covenant-Breakers."[27] Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."
From the Christian point of view, the claims made by, and on behalf of, Bahá'u'lláh, seem extravagant and unacceptable; nevertheless much of the Bahá'í teaching is far-reaching and beautiful and fully in accord with the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Before we can say adequately what Bahá'ís can teach Christians and what Christians can teach Bahá'ís, perhaps we need a deeper study of Jesus' teaching and the Bahá'í faith. Also Christians need greater knowledge of Bahá'ís. (p.88)

Given this even-handed assessment, Vines' book was evidently well received in the Bahá'í community. Arnold Hunt, Vice-Principal of the Methodist Wesley College in Wayville, South Australia, produced a booklet Who Are the Bahá'ís? in 1963 purporting to be "a Christian assessment" of the religion. Beginning with a reasonably accurate account of the Faith's history and teachings (apart from stating erroneously that Bahá'u'lláh died in 1912), Hunt offered several criticisms: it was "simply not true", wrote Vines, " that the great religions teach the same basic truths", citing different conceptions of God, and of "man's predicament

and the way by which he may be saved from it." Furthermore, Hunt rejected the possibility of God's revelation other than through Christ:

> We must grow "in" Christ but we do not grow "beyond" Christ in the sense of seeing in some later historical figure that which surpasses or completes the revelation given in Him".

As with Vines' work, Hunt's seems to have been appreciated by the Bahá'ís as being within the bounds of reasonable dialogue. Not all clerical attention was so kind. A Church of England newsletter from Semaphore in South Australia in June 1958 commenced (with little need, I feel, for serious reply):

> We sometimes see in the "Local Messenger" an advertisement concerning what is called the "Bahá'í World Faith". According to the advertisement the secretary lives within our parish, and interested persons are invited to make enquires concerning the "Faith" to him. I feel it might be of some interest to you to have me tell you something about the "Bahá'í World Faith", for I am sure many have read the advertisement, and are curious to know just what it is all about.
> So here goes!
>
> The answer, briefly, is that Bahaism is just another heretical sect--and not even a Christian one--which started in Persia and has been taken up in that land of queer religions--America.

The Bahá'ís wrote and spoke of global issues; they spoke less often about local conditions and ideas. Quite possibly, this broader vision was not the most amenable to the public mind in Australia, and may have contributed to the difficulty the Bahá'ís had in obtaining the attention of the press. Bahá'í meetings remained, furthermore, strictly non-political, and this stance too may have affected the level of public interest. But Bahá'í discourse, it must be remembered, promoted values of religious and racial unity, at a time and amidst a culture characterised at the time by a pungent racism, religious bigotry, and cultural isolation and indifference.

Aboriginal Bahá'ís

Although most expansion during the Crusade occurred among Anglo-Australians, efforts were made to acquaint Aboriginals with the Bahá'í message.

Efforts began in NSW (through Greta Lake), South Australia (Kath Harcus) and the Northern Territory (Frank Saunders) in the 1950s. In 1956 an "Aborigine Committee" was formed in Australia and a "Maori Committee" in New Zealand, to find means to take Bahá'í teachings to these communities. By 1963 some 25 Aboriginals had become Bahá'ís, and although there were several Aboriginal Bahá'ís by the 1990s, more investigation is required into the circumstances in which they joined the community, and into their experiences within it. By 1963 there were Bahá'ís among the Bunanditj and Narrogin peoples of South Australia, and the Jirkla, Minning and Minen of Western Australia. A number of Aboriginals had also become Bahá'ís in the Northern Territory.

At the completion of the World Crusade there were thirty Local Spiritual Assemblies (ninteen incorporated and eleven non-incorporated) in addition to 38 groups having less than nine members and 43 single-person centres. The Australian Bahá'ís had thus increased the number of communities in ten years from 60 to some 110,[28] although the absolute number of adherents remained quite small. Despite the fewness of their members, the Bahá'ís of Australia had taken their Faith to a number of islands in the Pacific. In Sydney, they had built one of the few Temples (Mashriqu'l-Adhkár's) anywhere in the world. Further, they had established a pattern of community, and the basis of a religious culture, which shared similarities with Bahá'í communities in other countries, but which bore the influences of their own country and society.

The passing of Shoghi Effendi in November 1957, at the mid-point of the Crusade, brought a period of crisis to the global Bahá'í community. He had no heirs, and the Universal House of Justice had not yet been established. In this circumstance, and not wishing to subvert the constitutional processes already set in motion, the 27 remaining "Hands of the Cause" appointed by Shoghi Effendi exercised six years of "stewardship" until the election of the Universal House of Justice by members of 56 National Spiritual Assemblies in 1963. Thus, despite this set-back half way through

this remarkable decade, its completion was crowned with a sense of accomplishment at global level, and no less so for the Australian Bahá'ís. The foundations had been secured for their subsequent challenges and evolution.

Notes

1. This paper draws on materials held in the Australian National Bahá'í Archives. Box & bundloe numbers are indicated in footnotes.

2. Official Yearbook of the Commonwealth of Australia, No 58, 1972, Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, Canberra, p1057.

3. Hans Mol, Religion in Australia, Thomas Nelson, 1971.

4. Michael Hogan, The Sectarian Strand: Religion in Australian History, Penguin, 1987, 256.

5. Ian Breward, The Most Godless Place Under Heaven?, Beacon Hill Books, Melbourne, 1988, 79.

6. Graham Hassall, "The Bahá'í Faith in Australia", in Ian Gillman (ed) Many Faiths, One Nation, William Collins, Melbourne, 1988.

7. Graham Hassall, "Persian Bahá'ís in Australia", in Abe Ata (ed), Religion and Ethnic Identity: an Australian Study, vol.II, Victoria College & Spectrum, Melbourne, 1989; and "Outpost of a World Religion: the Bahá'í Faith in Australia 1920-1947", Journal of Religious History, 16:3, June 1991.

8. Concerning Bahá'í communities in the Pacific Islands, see Graham Hassall, "Pacific Bahá'í Communities 1953-1964", Donald H. Rubinstein (ed), Pacific History: Papers from the 8th Pacific History Association Conference, University of Guam Press & Micronesian Area Research Center, Guam, pp.73-95.

9. For an adequate introduction to the origins, history, and beliefs, of the Bahá'í Faith, not possible here, see Peter Smith, The Babi and Bahá'í Religions: From Messianic Shi'ism to a World Religion, Cambridge University Press, Great Britain, 1987.

10. Shoghi Effendi, Advent of Divine Justice, 68.

11. Legal Committee to National Teaching Committee, 0127/0034 NTC Corresp 1944-1952.

12. Circular signed by H
Fitzner, secretary of Adelaide Assembly.

13. Eric Bowes, 12 December
1949, [0127/0034 NTC Corresp 1944-1952] .

14. Eric Bowes, [0127/0034
NTC Correspondence 1944-1952] .

15. Jeff Dive, 16 December
1949.

16. Shoghi Effendi refers
to there being some 60 Bahá'í centres in Australia, New Zealand and Tasmania: Shoghi
Effendi, Messages to the Bahá'í World, 148.

17. Messages of the
Guardian, 36.

18. Shoghi Effendi, World
Order of Bahá'u'lláh,31.

19. Bahá'í Bulletin
80, March 1961, 8.

20. Sydney Morning
Herald, 16 January 1961: "World Religion Day, an annual event, brings together people of different religions to promote greater tolerance and understanding". The Daily
Telegraph of the same date, noted the speakers who included Rev. R. Lubofsky (Judaism), Miss M.B. Byles (Buddhism), and Rev. E.H. Vines (Christianity). The meeting was
chaired by P.J. Khan.

21. Devonport Advocate,
"Leading Asian Feminist in Devonport" [S. Fozdar] , 22 January 1960.

22. Messages to the
Bahá'í World, 70.

23. Messages to the
Bahá'í World, 79.

24. Time 81:69, 26
April 1963, "We love all religions".

25. West Publishing
Corporation, Sydney, 1958; third edition with introduction by A.P. Elkin 1970.

26. These words do not
appear in Bahá'u'lláh's writings, so must be a construction by Vines.

27. Although one should not

presume that all 30 Local Assemblies were functioning properly: Bahá'í
Bulletin
129 May 65, p.11 suggests the Crusade ended with 32 LSAs, and that only 26 of
these were
functioning by April 1964.

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